

Mesoamerica, March 2017

**PUBLIC LETTER TO THE GOVERNMENT OF GUATEMALA
WE DEMAND JUSTICE FOR THE ADOLESCENT WOMEN DIED IN THE
VIRGIN OF THE ASSUMPTION SAFE HOME**

Mr. / Mrs. AMBASSADOR OF GUATEMALA

We are writing to you as women human rights defenders who are appalled, outraged and extremely concerned about the terrible incidents that took place on the morning of March 8th at the Virgin of the Assumption Safe Home in San José Pinula, Guatemala, where at least 40 adolescent women were burned to death. These occurrences, as you must know, have sparked a wave of solidarity and alarm all over the world, placing Guatemala in the global media spotlight.

According to the information available to us, there is ample reason to believe that the events lie on the threshold between an unjustifiable and reprehensible negligence on the part of government institutions, and what could directly constitute a crime of State.

Given that the tragedy occurred the day after at least 60 young interns fled from the center in protest over the conditions to which they had been subjected; that the Human Rights Ombudsman had requested precautionary measures from the IACHR due to alleged cases of mistreatment and sexual exploitation of the young girls, and that the request was denied; and that testimonies of family members and neighbors continue to reveal abuses, the events cannot be considered as isolated or coincidental.

Let us not forget that the disturbing signs of the possible existence of an organized network of sex trafficking and exploitation of the interns in an institution operating under the Department of Social Welfare of the Presidency, requires an investigation of the case from a much broader perspective than a simple inquiry into the circumstances of the events that took place on a single day.

The mere possibility that the fire in the Virgin of the Assumption Safe Home could have been an extrajudicial execution to silence and permit impunity for the extremely serious crimes of sex trafficking and exploitation in the interstices of the State, places the government of Guatemala in a vulnerable situation, in which it must make a solid commitment to clarify the facts and determine all responsibilities. Otherwise the legitimacy of the State will be held in abeyance, given that such an omission indicates the tacit assumption of direct responsibility in the events and proof of a crime of State.

For these reasons, we urge you to deliver this letter to the top government officials of Guatemala, which you represent, along with a demand for a thorough and rigorous investigation that guarantees the determination of legal, civil and criminal responsibilities for the events of March 8th and all events that may have preceded them in time or cause.

As organizations and individuals who defend the human rights of women in Latin America and the world, our eyes, full of tears of suffering and indignation, are fixed on Guatemala. We will stand in solidarity with the families and the Guatemalan people until all of the facts are clarified surrounding the barbarity that took place on the 8th of March, and until all those responsible are punished.

Best regards,

Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras)

