

## **UN Special Representative Pramila Patten Welcomes Landmark Sexual Violence Verdict in Guatemala**

*Press Release: For Immediate Release*

**New York, 26 January 2022:** United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten welcomed Monday's decision by a high-risk court in Guatemala against five former members of the paramilitary Civil Self-Defense Patrols for the sexual violence committed against indigenous Maya Achi women in the early 1980s during the internal armed conflict.

“The Court’s decision sentencing the accused parties to thirty years imprisonment for domestic slavery, rape and other forms of sexual violence represents a milestone for the Guatemalan Maya Achi survivors, for the victims of sexual violence of the Guatemalan internal conflict, and especially for indigenous women and girls,” said Special Representative Patten.

Special Representative Patten praised the courage of the Maya Achi survivors who began the quest for justice before Guatemalan courts eleven years ago. “I wish to honor the determination and resilience of survivors who, for over a decade, had to overcome numerous obstacles, including stigma and discrimination, to finally see those responsible brought to account in a court of law. Their courage and determination are truly an inspiration, and show us that, despite many challenges, accountability efforts for sexual violence can succeed, are transformative, and must be pursued.”

The Special Representative recalled that this is the second trial for sexual violence against indigenous women committed during the internal conflict before Guatemalan courts, following the historic Sepur Zarco conviction for sexual slavery of Q’eqchi women in 2016. She also praised the innovative strategies put in place in the context of these trials to support successful survivor-centered prosecutions, with the support of civil society organizations, which included extensive use of national and international expert testimony that helped the Court understand victims’ experiences and contributed to changing the narrative in terms of victims’ blame and the healing process from stigma.

“I call upon the Government of Guatemala to continue to pursue justice for survivors of sexual violence of the internal armed conflict. My Office stands ready to support these survivors in their quest for justice and reparations, and to ensure that the horrors of the past never happen again”, concluded Special Representative Patten.

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