



Communique Committee of Expert

Committee of Experts calls on the Guatemalan State to investigate immediately and effectively allegations of human rights violations against women in the context of a peaceful protest

Washington, D.C., December 23, 2020. The Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women “Belém do Pará Convention” (MESECVI) expresses its concern about the alleged acts of violence against women, in the context of a peaceful protest on November 21, perpetrated by members of the National Police in Guatemala. The Committee has received complaints that, during the demonstrations, at least ten women were beaten and dragged by the National Civil Police, a situation that had also been reported by various media outlets. Among those affected were human rights defenders, journalists, students and at least one social worker.

This Committee has consistently raised the importance for state and security agents and security forces to improve mechanisms for preventing violence against women and girls during demonstrations ensuring the highest standards of protection of their human rights. In the face of such violations, there is also an obligation to follow a process of enhanced due diligence in responding to such incidents.

For this reason, this Committee reiterates that these situations must be investigated and if proven, those responsible must be punished, and reparations offered to victims and survivors of excessive and indiscriminate use of force to control demonstrations. The absence of such a response, would imply serious violations of the dignity and human rights of women and would weaken the rule of law and the free exercise of the right of women to demonstrate and to associate freely to exercise their political rights. It would also send a message to society that repression, intimidation, humiliation and punishment are acceptable means of denying women and girls the right to peaceful demonstrations. This right is established in the protection framework of the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women, better known as the Convention of Belém do Pará.

These investigations must be based on the principles established in various resolutions of the inter-American system, among which the following stand out: i) investigating using gender perspective by trained officials; ii) undertaking specific lines of investigation for gender-based violence; iii) recovering and preserving evidentiary material; iv) identifying possible witnesses and obtaining their statements; v) informing and considering the rights of victims throughout the procedure; v) taking victims' statements in a comfortable and safe environment, thereby avoiding their revictimization; vi) providing medical and psychological care to the victims; and vii) avoiding victim blaming, as well as the existence of gender stereotypes and prejudices.

The Committee of Experts is the technical body of the MESECVI responsible for the analysis and evaluation of the process of implementation of the Belém do Pará Convention. It is composed of independent experts, appointed by each of the States Parties among their nationals, who exercise their functions in their personal capacity.