



Breaking the Silence (BTS)
Rompiendo el Silencio (RES)

One Year Later: No Justice for 41 girls killed in Guatemala's “Hogar Seguro” Fire

This March 8th, International Women's Day, marks the 1 year anniversary of a fire at the state-run centre for children and youth *Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción* in Guatemala, in which 41 girls and young women (aged 13-17) were killed and another 15 were seriously injured. The case devastated the country and prompted massive demonstrations calling for justice, as well as international solidarity.

Estafani Sotoj, a survivor of the fire, spent 30 days in a coma and lost 9 of her fingers. She states, “We [the survivors] aren't well. We have changed. No one cares about us. It isn't only this home - instead of helping us they made us worse. The state failed, and it is the state's fault.”

Context

While it should have been a place where vulnerable children and youth were protected, the *Hogar* was far from that. Minors at the *Hogar* were subjected to sexual violence, physical abuse, forced abortion, human trafficking and forced prostitution, often by staff. They also endured poor conditions such as overcrowding and rotting food.

Reports of abuse and poor conditions have been public since 2013 and known by Guatemalan authorities. For instance, Guatemala's Human Rights Ombudsperson's Office (PDH) received 45 reports of abuses at the home from 2012 to 2016, and passed them on to the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP), which had not responded. UNICEF also called for the *Hogar* to be closed down.

Events leading to the death of the 41 girls

On March 7, the day before the fire, minors at the *Hogar* began to protest the abuse and poor conditions they faced. That afternoon, workers at the *Hogar* opened the doors, telling the minors to leave. 108 youth left in protest.

Police who were sent after the minors beat and intimidated them, before bringing them back and detaining them in front of the *Hogar*. At 6pm, an on-site meeting took place between officials from the Secretariat of Social Welfare (SBS), representatives of the Solicitor General of the Nation (PGN), the PDH and the National Civil Police (PNC). At the request of these officials and with approval from President Jimmy Morales, 100 police were sent to the *Hogar*.

Between midnight and 2am, the minors were escorted back into the *Hogar*, after having been held in handcuffs for over 6 hours without food, water or adequate clothing. While the boys were placed in a spacious area, the 56 girls were put under lock and key in a 6.8 metre by 7 metre room. After delegating responsibility for the minors to the PNC and seeing the girls placed in the room, officials from the SBS left.

The girls, in severely crowded conditions, had no access to a bathroom or water. They were forced to sleep in the tiny room without sufficient mattresses. In order to use the washroom, they created a makeshift toilet using some of the mattresses for cover.

The following morning, after enduring 6 hours in the enclosed space, one of the girls reportedly set fire to one of the mattresses in order to be let out. Police reportedly stood by, ignoring the girls' calls for help. The fire lasted approximately 9.5 minutes.

State responsibility

Responsibility for the deaths of these girls lies with the Guatemalan state, at multiple levels. Since these girls were in state care, it was the responsibility of the state to protect them. However, several state institutions failed these girls, from inaction on reports of abuse, to their response to the situation on March 7-8, 2017. The order to bring in police only intensified the already tense situation at the *Hogar*, which eventually led to the massacre of the young girls.

No justice to date

There are currently 8 people - the former director of the centre, ex- government officials and police - facing charges for the incidents. These include: Carlos Rodas, former head of the Secretariat of Social Welfare (SBS); Anahy Keller, subsecretary of the SBS; and Santos Torres Ramírez, former director of the *Hogar*. However, there has been no ruling to date.

Given the president's role, there have been calls to strip him of his immunity, so that he can be investigated. However, the Supreme Court of Justice has ruled against that process.

Survivors are not currently receiving any support from the government and it is imperative that the state provide resources for healing.

Key Asks of the Canadian Government

We call on the Canadian government, which has adopted a Feminist International Assistance Policy, to:

- denounce the Guatemalan state's role in the death of these girls;
- use its diplomatic channels to urge the Public Prosecutor (MP) to investigate and prosecute all those responsible in an effective timely manner, so that they don't remain in impunity; and
- undertake advocacy efforts aimed at urging the Guatemalan state to protect girls and women throughout the country.

For more info and suggested actions, visit us at: www.breakingthesilenceblog.com

Names of the 41 girls and young women killed:

1. Rosa Julia Espino Tobar, 16
2. Indira Jarisa Pelicó Orellana, 17
3. Daria Dalila López Meda, 16
4. Achley Gabriela Méndez Ramírez, 15
5. Yemmi Aracely Ramírez Siquín, 15
6. Jaqueline Paola Catinac López, 15
7. Siona Hernández García, 17
8. Josselyn Marisela García Flores, 16
9. Mayra Haydeé Chután Urías, 16
10. Skarlet Yajaira Pérez Jiménez, 15
11. Yohana Desiré Cuy Urízar, 15
12. Rosalinda Victoria Ramírez Pérez, 15
13. Madelyn Patricia Hernández Hernández, 14
14. Sarvía Isel Barrientos Reyes, 14
15. Ana Nohemí Morales Galindo, 16
16. Ana Rubidia Chocooj Chutá, 16
17. Jilma Sucely Carías López, 14
18. Yoselín Beatriz Ventura Pérez, 15
19. Grindy Jazmín Carías López, 16
20. Mari Carmen Ramírez Melgar, 14
21. Keila Rebeca López Salguero, 17
22. Kimberly Mishel Palencia Ortíz, 17
23. Nancy Paola Vela García, 15
24. Estefany Sucely Véliz Pablo, 16
25. Lilian Andrea Gómez Arceno, 13
26. Mirza Rosmery López Tojil, 16
27. Ana Roselia Pérez Junay, 14
28. Grisna Yamileth Cu Ulán, 15
29. Melani Yanira De León Palencia, 15
30. Luisa Fernanda Joj González, 16
31. Daily Analí Domingo Martínez, 15
32. Iris Yodenis León Pérez, 14
33. Candelaria Melendrez Hernández, 17
34. Milenie Eloisa Rac Hernández, 17
35. Celia María López Aranda, 15
36. Hashly Angelie Rodríguez Hernández, 14
37. Sara Nohemi Lima Ascón, 17
38. Yusbeli Yubitza Merari Maquín Gómez, 14
39. Silvia Milexi Rivera Sánchez, 17
40. Yosselin Yamileth Barahona Beltrán, 15
41. Wendy Anahí Vividor Ramírez, 16