

Guatemala's Eroding Freedoms

March 6, [El País published a report](#) on corruption, environmental degradation, and media repression in Guatemala. March 8, [the Guatemalan government passed a law](#) criminalizing abortion, limiting sex ed, and banning marriage equality. Instead of protecting Guatemalans from the harm caused by nickel mines, Congress decided to crack down on personal freedoms.

The Law for the Protection of Life and the Family (Ley para la Protección de la Vida y la Familia) defines several norms and penalties. It delineates a family as a man, a woman, and their children, increases the penalties for all abortions, bans gay marriage, and prohibits public and private educators from teaching sexual diversity, “gender ideology,” or anything other than heterosexual sex as normal.

[Organizations have condemned the new law](#), claiming it will foster discrimination, violence, and intolerance.

Falling on International Women's Day, the legislation comes just after [Forbidden Stories](#) revealed the destruction caused by Russian-Swiss mining company Solway. Operating in Guatemala's Izabal Nature Reserve, Solway has extracted thousands of tonnes of nickel for processing in Ukraine.

More the [60 journalists worldwide examined Solway's internal communications](#). They uncovered plans to hide the mine's environmental damage, skirt the courts, influence indigenous opinion, payoff police, and spread rumors of AIDS in uncooperative communities.

Instead of investigating the corruption and abuse within its borders, the Guatemalan government has gone after Carlos Choc, a Mayan reporter from El Estor. He's been threatened, had his house broken into and his dog killed; legal charges were brought against him, followed by threats to take him from his children. Choc's crime? He photographed Carlos Maaz's corpse lying in the street. Maaz was killed after protesting a mine that turned the waters he fished red, shrinking the catches he and others relied on. The police claimed that they did not kill anyone while breaking up the protest—Choc proved they lied.

Connections to the mine penetrate all levels of the Guatemalan government, from local officials to President Alejandro Giamettei. [El País reported](#) a message from the mine's director to Giamettei requesting action to end protests in El Estor. Two weeks later, 500 soldiers plus anti-riot police arrived to end the resistance.

Instead of standing up for its people, the Guatemalan government has decided to stand up for mining. The effects on the environment are hitting indigenous peoples hardest. The state has

demonstrated a consistent apathy towards the very people it is supposed to represent, and now they are further constricting individual freedoms in the name of protecting “the family.”