

UN raises alarm on attempts to annul Guatemala's general election results

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United Nations, December 9 (RHC)-- The United Nations high commissioner for human rights deplored "persistent and systematic" attempts to undermine the outcome of Guatemala's elections and called for the will of voters to be upheld, after public prosecutors moved to overturn President-elect Bernardo Arevalo's victory.

On Saturday, Volker Turk, The UN's human rights chief, noted that "Friday's announcements, aimed at nullifying the outcome of the general elections and questioning the constitution and existence of the Movimiento Semilla party are extremely disturbing."

"Judicial harassment and intimidation against electoral officers and elected officials is unacceptable," Turk said.

On Friday, prosecutors threatened to annul the victory of Arevalo, who is set to take office on January 14. Prosecutor Leonor Morales said investigations concluded that the election of anti-graft political outsider Arevalo, his vice president and parliamentarians was "null and void" due to counting "anomalies" in the first round in June.

In an attempt to stop him from taking over as president, Arevalo has repeatedly faced an onslaught of legal challenges, including moves to suspend his party.

Guatemala has long struggled to rein in official corruption. The International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), a UN-backed body, found itself abruptly shuttered in 2021, after then-President Jimmy Morales accused it of illegal acts.

Arevalo's surprise triumph after the general elections in June and his pledge to fight corruption are widely seen in Guatemala as alarming to the establishment's political elite.

In a news briefing on Friday, the prosecutors reiterated their request that Arevalo be stripped of his political immunity, a step that could open him up to prosecution. They accused him of improperly gathering signatures for his presidential campaign, as well as mishandling political funds.

But after the prosecutor's office sought to annul the election results amid accusations of an "attempted coup", Guatemala's electoral court on Friday insisted the results were "unchangeable."

Blanca Alfaro, the head of the Supreme Election Tribunal, affirmed that Arevalo and his vice president, Karin Herrera, would take office as planned. "At this moment, there is no way that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal is going to repeat the elections."

Protests have also broken out across the country to uphold the results.

"It is encouraging that, despite the long list of judicial and political actions taken by some authorities, which clearly undermine the integrity of the electoral process and breach the rule of law and democracy, people have been standing up for their rights and have been opposing what they perceive as a theft of their political will," Turk said. "It is critical to safeguard democracy and respect for human rights."

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