News

Former Guatemalan Vice President Roxana Baldetti attends a court hearing along with former

Former Guatemalan Vice President Roxana Baldetti attends a court hearing along with former President Otto Pérez Molina (not pictured) in a case implicating them in a corruption scandal known as "La Linea," in Guatemala City Jan. 17, 2022. (CNS photo/Luis Echeverria, Reuters)



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Ahead of Guatemala's upcoming election season, the country's bishops said religious gatherings in the coming months should "not fall into the temptation of mixing political propaganda with apparent prayer."

Archbishop Gonzalo de Villa Vásquez of Guatemala City, flanked by brother bishops in a July 20 news conference, said that in "the world of campaigns in Guatemala ... there's a distortion" of ideas and objectives that get mixed during political campaign

seasons.

"We call on people to take this seriously and reflect," and not be carried away by others, said Villa, responding to a question.

Guatemala has general elections next June.

Along with the rest of the Guatemalan bishops' conference, he addressed the deteriorating situation of the country, citing malnutrition, corruption, the dismantling of democracy and violence as reasons for the increasing exodus of the country's people.

"Our countries are not generating the type of conditions for a dignified life," Guatemalan Bishop Domingo Buezo Leiva of Sololá-Chimaltenango said in the news conference, transmitted via YouTube.

He said the deteriorating conditions led to the deaths of Guatemalans in Texas, who were among the 53 migrants who died, abandoned by smugglers in a sweltering trailer near San Antonio in June.

While the bishops were addressing problems in Guatemala, they also said it was not a condition limited to the country, citing similar goings-on in neighboring El Salvador and Nicaragua. In Guatemala, political "corruption, irresponsibility, interests and political short-sightedness of officials" at various levels of government "have corrupted the system, they have abused it and created a dysfunctional state incapable of fulfilling its function of producing the common good," the bishops said in a statement.

That's why so many Guatemalans are opting to leave, seeking better conditions, said Buezo.

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They are witnesses, the bishops said, of a world in which "hegemonies prevail in geopolitics that do not favor the common good or the minimum well-being of the people and their human dignity."

The day after the document's publication, Kevin López, secretary of social communications for the Guatemalan president's office, said the government took

issue with what was said, adding that the document was "full of lucubrations," a pedantic piece of writing.

The country's outgoing president, Alejandro Giammattei, has been under investigation for allegations that he took bribes from Russians. Prosecutors looking into the allegations have had to go into exile.

With their statement, the bishops seemed to be calling to Guatemalans to fight for peace and justice in the country.

Guatemala, they said, ranks last in Latin America in terms of human development, but the country ranks high in levels of malnutrition in children, as well as violence.

"Real and effective policies have not been promoted in favor of the Indigenous population, but neither in favor of the transparent application of justice," the bishops said, adding that past governments have made short-term plans to solve them and only "for electoral purposes."

Via listening sessions in preparation for the 2023 Synod of Bishops on Synodality, the bishops said they have been able to hear of the sufferings, the life experiences and dreams of Guatemalans. They said that while Guatemala is in a perilous position and one that continues to deteriorate, citizens working for the government, whether they be believers in a higher power or not, should exercise moral and ethical actions in their work for the public.

Guatemalans in turn should not lose hope of building peace in the country, they said.

"God calls us to procure justice, defend human life ... especially the most vulnerable," the statement said.