

Interview One – Luis from Guatemala

It is very important I am here in Geneva to give witness to the real situation in Guatemala. I came to report on the progress Guatemala and other Central American countries are making in upholding the Resolution on juvenile justice, and importantly also on extra-judicial killings.

I came to work on this issue because I believe we cannot continue with the same situation in Guatemala. We have to change the situation now.

The youth in my country are almost completely neglected. We come at the very bottom of our government's priorities, we are their last concern. The real problem across South America is the issue of impunity, people can kill and escape punishment.

The governments must firstly address the education system and youth participation. The current education system in Guatemala is the basis for the situation of violence, poverty and impunity. The system must be restructured. Governments must also create channels for the youth in the country to be heard and their views to be taken into account. It is our generation that will build the way for the next generation.

My main achievement has been receiving an acknowledgement from the Ambassadors of Guatemala and Nicaragua of the serious problems on the ground. I was impressed they were better informed than the government officials and both had a different impression of the realities on the ground than their respective governments. The Guatemala Ambassador admitted extra-judicial killings took place and acknowledged the situation in the country is bad. This has given me great hope for the future, The Ambassador didn't defend the government position and didn't pretend the situation was good. This is a good start.

The UN Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial killings outlined clear ways to ensure justice for my friends who were killed. Maybe this will be the start of proper process to find those responsible and hold them to account. It was also pleasing to hear that the Rapporteur was keen to know what us young people are doing in our countries to bring about justice.

It is very important for us to be here. This is one of the forums and ways for our voices to be heard globally, and at home. What we say here will reach our own governments at home. This forum is a chance to tell the world what is really happening in our countries.

When I arrived in Geneva, I quickly realised the importance of being myself, a young person, and to speak from the heart.

I have many important things to do when I return home. Firstly, I will work with the Youth Justice in Action campaign and think of actions to support Resolution (10/2). We will work on a new report about the killing of my friends, which we will present to the Rapporteur I met in Geneva and also to the Universal Periodic Review when Guatemala are examined next year. Secondly, I also want to work within the framework of the Resolution and support a new pilot programme in Guatemala, called “libertad asistida”. The programme provides an alternative option to detention for children and young people, providing them with the option of supervised work and guidance for two years.