

Notice: Undefined index: et_header_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1214

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Protecting Ecuador's students from sexual violence

Government should fully implement Inter-American Court ruling.

By Elin Martínez

HRW (20.08.2020) – <https://bit.ly/3aTt1rg> – The Inter-American Court of Human Rights last week ruled against Ecuador in its first ever case on school-related sexual violence in the Americas.

In 2001, a public school vice principal in the city of Guayaquil began raping a 14-year-old pupil, Paola Guzmán Albarracín. The abuses continued for over a year, with the knowledge and complicity of school officials. Yet the school did nothing to protect her, and in December 2002, Paola took her life. After her death, Paola's mother, Pepita Albarracín, filed complaints with the school and the local prosecutor's office. The judicial proceedings suffered serious delays.

Paola's case is unfortunately not unique: since then, many children and teenagers have suffered sexual violence in Ecuador's schools, and few receive justice.

Eighteen years after Albarracín first sought justice locally, the Inter-American Court has found Ecuador responsible for violating Paola's rights to life, to study free from sexual violence, and to sexual and reproductive health and bodily autonomy, as well as her family's right to a fair trial and respect for their moral and psychological integrity. It ruled Ecuador did not comply with its obligations to protect children from sexual violence and prevent and respond to any acts of violence – especially those perpetrated by government officials in state institutions.

Human Rights Watch filed an amicus brief before the court, explaining the close relationship between sexual violence against girls and the lack of comprehensive sexuality education. The court recognized that Paola lacked necessary information about her sexual and reproductive health, concluding that the right to adequate sexuality education is an integral part of the right to education. It gave the government one year to guarantee that children are safe from sexual violence in its schools.

In a welcome departure from previous governments' longstanding failure even to recognize this problem, in 2017, President Lenín Moreno committed to zero tolerance for school-related sexual violence. This week, he reaffirmed his government's commitment and its plan to comply with the court's ruling.

The government should now publish a clear timeline for implementing measures ordered by the court, including by consulting young survivors of sexual violence. Ecuador should also back up this commitment by deploying resources to prevent sexual violence in schools and ensure that all child survivors have the access to justice that Paola's family was denied.

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Notice: Undefined index: et_footer_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1267

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Notice: Undefined index: et_template in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1268