

Judge Iris Yassmin Barrios Aguilar presides over one of Guatemala's High Risk Tribunals and has spent her career confronting high-profile corruption, organized crime and drug trafficking, and human rights abuses occurring during Guatemala's 36-year civil war. In 2013, she was the presiding judge in the genocide trial of former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, who was convicted in May 2013. The trial represented the first time a former head of state was tried for genocide in his home country by the national judiciary. Although this conviction was controversially overturned on procedural grounds, Barrios has been widely praised by many in Guatemala and the international community for her integrity in providing an important legal precedent for genocide cases worldwide, demonstrating the importance of an independent judiciary, and giving a voice to thousands of Ixil-Mayan victims in her courtroom.

As a result of her work, Barrios has faced threats and intimidation, attacks on her and her home, an intensive campaign to discredit her in the media, and a politically-motivated year-long suspension of her judicial authority. In 2014 she received the State Department's International Woman of Courage award.

Dr. Claudia Paz y Paz Bailey became Guatemala's first female Attorney General in 2010. In the less than three years after coming to office, Paz y Paz became globally renowned for standing up against impunity and for achieving significant improvements in investigation and successful prosecution of complex and serious crimes, setting an example for the Guatemalan justice system, which has been notorious for its corruption. By providing strong support to honest and brave prosecutors on her staff and incorporating the use of DNA testing, wiretaps and other technology, she achieved unprecedented results in sentences for homicide, rape, violence against women, extortion and kidnapping.

For over 20 years, Paz y Paz has been dedicated to improving Guatemala's justice system and human rights policies. She was a national consultant to the UN mission in Guatemala and served as a legal advisor to the Human Rights Office of the Archbishop. In 1994, she founded the Institute for Comparative Criminal Studies of Guatemala, a justice reform and human rights organization that works to strengthen the capacity and independence of the justice system and protect the rights of victims during criminal proceedings.

Paz y Paz was removed from office 6 months before her term ended in retaliation for prosecuting Ríos Montt. She is currently at Georgetown University for one year as a Distinguished Scholar in Residence.