



DISABILITY RIGHTS  
INTERNATIONAL

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AUGUST 9

## Victory in Guatemala – right to live in the community

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**Guatemala City – August 9, 2017** – After years of abuse, violence, and exploitation in orphanages and psychiatric institutions, Guatemala must take urgent action to return children to their families and psychiatric detainees to the community, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights stated in a press statement released this weekend during a visit in Guatemala ([available here](#) (<http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2017/114A.asp>) in Spanish).

“This is an historic achievement,” says DRI Executive Director Eric Rosenthal, “For the first time a mainstream human rights body, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, has recognized that community integration is not just good social policy – it is legal obligation. And the Commission calls for urgent action by Guatemala to protect hundreds of children and adults detained in [dangerous facilities](#) (<https://www.driadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/DRI-Guatemala-Precautionary-Measures-FINAL.pdf>).”

“For children who have been separated from their families, this could be a life-saver,” says Priscila Rodriguez, lead attorney in DRI’s litigation before the Inter-American Commission. “The Commission recognizes that the rights of children and adults with disabilities cannot be protected with cleaner and better institutions. To end the dangerous practice of segregating children and adults with disabilities, Guatemala must make funding available to create community programs and care in a family setting.”

The Inter-American Commission’s statement results from legal action taken by Disability Rights International. Together with the Guatemalan Procuraduría de Derechos Humanos (PDH), DRI is representing hundreds of children who survived a fire at the Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción that killed 41 girls in March 2017 (see DRI’s report [After the Fire](#) (<https://www.driadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/After-the-Fire-March-15.pdf>) and [Washington Post op-ed](#) ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/03/22/the-guatemala-fire-tragedy-shows-why-its-time-to-get-rid-of-orphanages/?utm\\_term=.7d8176e8f4f7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/03/22/the-guatemala-fire-tragedy-shows-why-its-time-to-get-rid-of-orphanages/?utm_term=.7d8176e8f4f7))). The girls who were killed had been protesting sexual abuse and forced prostitution in the orphanage. Instead of spending money on fixing up orphanages, DRI and the PDH are demanding that all children – including children with disabilities – be returned to their families and communities.

In collaboration with Guatemala’s lead disability rights group, the [Collectivo de Vida Independiente](#), DRI has also filed a collective complaint to represent the hundreds of people with disabilities detained at the [Federico Mora psychiatric facility](#) (<https://www.driadvocacy.org/bbc-shines-spotlight-on-abusive-institution-in-guatemala-and-dris-fight-to-protect-detainees/>). That psychiatric facility has been called one of the most dangerous in the world, according to a BBC documentary done with DRI.

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- [Victory in Guatemala – right to live in the community](#) (<https://www.driadvocacy.org/victory-guatemala-right-live-community/>)
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- [Eric Rosenthal op-ed in the Washington Post](#) (<https://www.driadvocacy.org/eric-rosenthal-op-ed-washington-post/>)
- [DRI’s new report on Guatemala featured in the New York Times](#) (<https://www.driadvocacy.org/report-guatemala-nyt/>)

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**Carmen Valle**

@MH\_CarmenValle

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“These orphanages and psychiatric facilities are so dangerous, they are a threat to the mental health of any child or adult placed within them,” said Dr. Matt Mason, a DRI volunteer and Clinical Director of the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. “But experience tells us that no amount of money can make these places safe or humane. It is gratifying to see the Inter-American Commission recognize what mental health professionals have known for years: that all children need to grow up with the love of a family; that all people with disabilities need social connections in the community to thrive. People with disabilities have the same feelings as everyone else – they should not be locked up because of their psychiatric label or other needs.”

The UN [Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fGTM%2fCO%2f1&Lang=en) ([http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fGTM%2fCO%2f1&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fGTM%2fCO%2f1&Lang=en)) has also responded to DRI’s investigation by stating the orphanage placement in Guatemala should be brought to an end. DRI has asked the CRPD Committee to recognize this same principle for all children, when it adopts a [general comment](https://www.driadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/DRI-comments-CRPD-GC5-2017.pdf) (<https://www.driadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/DRI-comments-CRPD-GC5-2017.pdf>) on the right to community integration later this year.

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