

Latin News

GUATEMALA: *Growing pressure on health minister to step down*

On 27 May, deputy health minister, **Irma Elizabeth Quiroa**, admitted that just 2.18% of the budget assigned to tackle the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in Guatemala had been spent.

Analysis:

Quiroa was appearing before congress with her boss, Health Minister **Hugo Monroy**, to answer questions regarding the government's response to the pandemic, which has caused 63 deaths in Guatemala. The admission adds to growing pressure on Monroy to resign. With the human rights ombudsman (PDDH) **Jordán Rodas** calling for his departure on 23 May (having also done so [on previous occasions](#)), yesterday the head of the congressional human rights committee **Orlando Blanco**, as well as civil society group Acción Ciudadana (AC), the local branch of international NGO Transparency International, both published open letters to President **Alejandro Giammattei** demanding Monroy's resignation.

- Appearing before congress, Monroy blamed the poor budget execution on excessive bureaucracy, and the failure of deputy ministers to sign off on the relevant acquisitions.
- In his letter, Blanco cited "*big deficiencies*" in the health ministry's response to the pandemic, as well as a "*non-existent strategy*". AC said that it had carried out an audit which found that "*poor management and planning of acquisitions*" resulted in just 1.91% execution of the budget assigned, and the cancellation of over 2,000 bidding processes for medical supplies and equipment. AC cited alleged irregularities surrounding acquisitions, and complained that its requests for official information have been denied.
- With Giammattei having previously [faced complaints](#) from the medical sector regarding the lack of supplies, on 27 May the PDDH warned that the Roosevelt Hospital, one of the main public hospitals in Guatemala City, had reached its capacity, with 75 Covid-19 patients, of which just 11 were in intensive care, 20 in tents outside the hospital, and the rest in other parts of the hospital. The previous day, authorities at San Juan de Dios, another major hospital in the capital, warned that it was facing "*total collapse*", with 84 patients, of which over 40 had tested positive for Covid-19, far exceeding the hospital's capacity to treat just 15.

Looking Ahead: *So far Monroy is refusing to step down, but as the crisis escalates, his situation may become untenable.*