

Club committee visits Guatemalan ambassador's residence

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Club President Eileen O'Reilly (in red jacket) and Ambassador of Guatemala, Alfonso José Quiñónez (to her right) join Club members and embassy staff.

The Ambassador of Guatemala, Alfonso José Quiñónez, and his wife Gabriella, hosted members of the International Correspondents Committee at their Washington, D.C. home on Tuesday, February 28, 2023. More than two dozen journalists, as well as Guatemalan Embassy staff members and diplomats, enjoyed the hospitality of a country the Ambassador described as being "full of color."

As if to illustrate his observation, the reception rooms included displays of brightly-hued Guatemalan clothing, called traje. Ambassador Quiñónez explained that colors are traditionally used to distinguish the 22 Mayan ethno-linguistic groups in his country.

In his prepared remarks, the Ambassador acknowledged that Guatemala's relationship with the US is "intense," and listed three key topics of discussion when he meets with US government officials: migration issues, organized crime largely centering on the drug trade, and his embassy's efforts to promote more trade and investment in his homeland.

Investment makes sense, he said, because a stronger in-country economy will have a positive impact on the problems of migration and crime. He is optimistic because he believes that Guatemala's objectives and US objectives as fundamentally aligned: "By creating more prosperity in my country, we will see less migration." Guatemala has the most stable currency in Latin America and a slow rate of inflation," he noted, citing Bloomberg.

The US is Guatemala's largest trading partner, with agricultural products, apparel and textiles, and gold and silver the latter's primary exports to the US. Coffee and rum are the top two agricultural exports, "and I am the third," joked the Ambassador.

"We would say you are number one," corrected NPC president Eileen O'Reilly when she thanked him for his hospitality on behalf of the Club and presented him with an official NPC mug. She also thanked ICC committee chair Elizabeth Hagedorn for her work in organizing the evening.

The Ambassador showed a film about Guatemala that portrayed this country of 17 million, with a median age of 22 (the youngest population in Latin America), as "amazing and unstoppable." It has eight different regions, each with unique natural and cultural attractions, including three UNESCO World Heritage sites. Ambassador Quiñónez concluded his formal presentation with the hope that his guests would want to visit Guatemala.

The proffered buffet, with an inviting (and quickly disappearing) display of local dishes featuring corn, beans, meats, shrimp, passion fruit mousse, and exquisite rum balls made by the Ambassador's wife, sealed the deal.