



What happened in **Bataán** last Wednesday helps to understand why communities like **Matina** voted for security and continuity, but also why the response must be accompanied by prevention and opportunities.

Last Wednesday I was a few meters away from the armed attack against two officers of the **Public Force** in Bataán. One of them, **Gerson Rosales Cascante**, died hours later. I was attending meetings from the headquarters of ***Dale Una Mano in Costa Rica***, very close to the place where the attack occurred. I've been around that corner countless times.

What I experienced was outrageous and terrifying. I had never witnessed an act of violence of that magnitude. It could have been any of us: a young man from our organization, a mother running an errand, someone buying bread, or a family on their way home.

At *Give a Hand to Costa Rica* we work with young people in Bataán and collaborate with preventive programs of the Public Force; We know many of the officers who work in the area. For this reason, this attack does not feel like distant news, but like a wound in the community.

For more than a decade I have worked alongside young people in the canton. I've seen how finishing school doesn't always mean starting a career or getting your first job, but facing uncertainty. An organization like the one I lead can open safe spaces and form leadership, but it cannot replace the State when organized crime limits the peace of a community.

A few weeks ago, former President **Rodrigo Chaves** arrived in Bataán to inaugurate a new police station. A new delegation, by itself, is not enough. But it does matter, because it recognizes that Bataán and many rural communities deserve state presence, decent infrastructure, and police officers with minimal tools to do their jobs.

What happened this week also showed that lack. In the middle of the emergency, I saw how one of the police vehicles would not start. How can the security forces be asked to confront organized criminal structures if they do not always have the necessary tools?

That is why, when some analysts from the **GAM** ask why cantons like **Matina** voted overwhelmingly for **Laura Fernández** and for the continuity of the government, I believe that **the answer is not only in ideology**. It is in the lived experience. It is in the fatigue of feeling abandoned, in the frustration of seeing governments pass without concrete changes and in the hope that this time the State will arrive with more strength.

For many in the GAM, talking about suspending individual guarantees in high-risk neighborhoods sounds like an immediate threat to freedom. That concern is legitimate. But in Bataan, freedom already feels limited when you think twice about buying bread, when a mother won't let her child out, or when a youth organization wonders if it's safe to open its doors. It is not a question of justifying measures without limits, but it is a matter of recognizing that **the State needs sufficient tools to regain control and protect families**.

The vote of the people of Matinenses was not ignorance, lack of education or misinformation. It was a vow crossed by lived experience: insecurity, abandonment, fatigue and hope. Many people do not want less democracy; they want a state that works, to walk without fear, children away from gangs, patrols that respond and communities with opportunities to prevent.

Bataan is not only the place where a murder occurred. It is a community of hard-working people, talented young people, mothers who support homes and families who get ahead despite abandonment. It is also a community where children have been waiting for years for a decent school and where there is a lack of safe spaces, recreation and opportunities to study, work or belong to something positive.

What communities like Bataán are asking for are not privileges. They ask for the basics: safety to walk without fear, decent education, opportunities for young people, spaces for coexistence and state presence before a tragedy occurs.

Last Thursday I was at the graduation of the *Alliances for Success* program, promoted by **EARTH**, where more than 150 women completed training in life skills, leadership, entrepreneurship and sustainable gardens. That is also Matina: **women, young people and families who want to learn, undertake and build a different future.** At *Give a Hand to Costa Rica* we have seen the same thing: when young people have safe spaces, accompaniment and opportunities, **they can become leaders.**

Yes, communities like Bataán need the State to firmly confront organized crime. Patrols, raids and prisons are necessary tools to do so. Security is also built with decent schools, prevention programs, recreational spaces, training for young people and employment opportunities.

A strong hand can take criminals out of circulation. Prevention prevents other young people from being recruited. If Costa Rica wants to understand Bataan, it first has to listen to what Bataan is experiencing.



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