

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2020

**Remarks in a Meeting With the Family of Slain United States Army Specialist
Vanessa Guillén and an Exchange With Reporters**

July 30, 2020

[Gloria Guillén, mother of Spc. Guillén, spoke in Spanish, and her remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

Gloria Guillén. Thank you for having us. Thank you for receiving us.

The President. Thank you very much.

Gloria Guillén. It's an honor to be here.

[At this point, Gloria Guillén continued to speak in Spanish, and the interpreter then spoke on her behalf as follows.]

Interpreter. She wants your help to bring justice for what happened to her daughter and—*[inaudible]*—for her daughter. She wants to know who's really responsible and who was responsible for what happened to her daughter and why didn't people act on it.

The President. Right.

Interpreter. And her daughter died. Her daughter died in service of the country from the hand of people who are in the military. She just wants your help to get at the truth, to get at justice, the truth. And this is from her heart, and she knows it's of your heart.

The President. Well, I saw this on one of the shows recently, and I was just looking, and it hit me very hard. I saw what happened to your daughter, Vanessa, who was a spectacular person, and respected and loved by everybody, including in the military. And I invited you to the White House.

As you know, the FBI and the DOJ are now involved. We got them involved. And the people at Ford Hood, where it took place, are very much involved. We didn't want to have this swept under the rug, which could happen.

And so I'd like you maybe, just if you'd like for the media, to explain exactly what happened as we all understand it, but they don't perhaps.

Khawam Law Firm President and Founder Natalie Khawam. So, President Trump, first of all, thank you very much for hosting this family. It's a beautiful family that I represent. I'm Attorney Natalie Khawam. I'm doing this case pro bono because I believe in it and I believe in our military and I believe in justice.

The President. Good.

Ms. Khawam. And like you, you love the military, you love our veterans, and you have proven that today by just bringing us into your home to begin with.

Secondly, we have formed together to figure out what happened and how it happened. And just to give background, Vanessa was having issues internally with some of the sergeants and such hitting on her, sexually harassing her. We don't know how far it went, because a lot of women don't always speak up. They just are afraid.

The President. Other people other than the one in question, right?

Ms. Khawam. Correct. And it's a systemic problem there. You know, you have young kids—boys, girls—18, 20, 21. But there isn't enough protections in place, because they get nervous about retaliation.

And I learned—I knew about the problem, but I didn't know how severe it was. Like I said, I thought I was picking a scab, and here I saw it is septic. It's terrible. The hashtag #IAmVanessaGuillen, if you go to that, you will read all these stories of these young women that serve our country, how broken they are; like, when they report it, what happens in the chain of command. And then, they get retaliated against, and they've got to clean toilets and stuff like that.

So I understand why Vanessa wouldn't want to go report it—formally report it. So she did tell her family. She told her friends. She told some of the soldiers with her how they were—this guy—especially guy Aaron.

The President. In particular him, right? In particular.

Ms. Khawam. Aaron Robinson. Yes, that's correct.

The President. Others also?

Ms. Khawam. That's correct. So I understand that she was in a locker room, the girls' locker room, taking a shower, and he walked in and sat there and stared at her showering, like, just creepy.

And unfortunately, we believe that she was going to report him because he was with her in the room that day. Her day off, they asked her to come in. It makes no sense, right? We're not getting all the answers, by the way.

The President. Right.

Ms. Khawam. And he supposedly took a hammer and killed her in the room, bludgeoned her to death. He'd go into this room—the room is probably, like, a quarter of the size of this room. And it's open, so people can hear and see things. So how no one heard her screaming, how no one saw the blood, those are, like, questions we still have.

But when he did that to her, he carried her body out, and he buried it in the river nearby. He used a machete.

The President. And nobody saw this? Nobody saw it?

Ms. Khawam. Right. Nobody saw this. Right.

And he used a machete to cut her up with his girlfriend, and he tried to burn her body, went and burned—I mean, this—the horribleness. I said it reminded me of, like, ISIS, what they do to our soldiers.

The President. Yes. That's right.

Ms. Khawam. And we—when I heard about this story, you know, they contacted me and said, "Can you help us?" And I said, "Absolutely, can I help you." You know, these are immigrants. You know, my family is immigrants. You know, you come to this country, you want to serve it, you want to do the best you can. And I didn't want them getting railroaded.

I know that the—it's hard to navigate through the military. I know it's hard to navigate through Congress. And I knew that we needed to do something. We needed a congressional investigation, because there's so many "how does that happen?", "how did this happen?" A lot of coverups.

When I tried to work with CID, I said: "What subpoenas have you issued? Because I'll issue some subpoenas with you, like, to help you out," like—so, you know. They wouldn't tell me what subpoenas they issued. They wouldn't tell me anything.

The President. Right.

Ms. Khawam. So I found that it was very difficult to communicate. There was no transparency.

So what we can do collectively is—to get justice for Vanessa is, we need reform. We need a bill. And you know, I drafted a bill that—#IAmVanessaGuillen. Markwayne Mullin from Oklahoma——

The President. Right. Good guy.

Ms. Khawam. Great guy. Love him. He—well, he—it's right now leg counsel. But what it does is it says, the way we have the EEOC, which is the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, how someone can report something—you go to the EEOC—we're looking for something that's going to allow our military, our soldiers to have the same rights and protections so, that way, they're not going to their chain of command or internally.

The President. Right.

Ms. Khawam. What they're doing is, they're going outside the command and reporting something. So suppose this kind of situation would have been in place, if we had this kind of bill in place, Vanessa could have reported this, and they would have said: "Wait a second, this guy, Aaron Robinson, has a few of these problems. Like, look at this guy's"——

The President. So did she report anything at all?

Ms. Khawam. She reported it to her family and friends and some of the soldiers. She didn't do a formal report.

The President. Not to the fort, not to the people.

Ms. Khawam. Right. Not to the command, her bosses, who are also above her, who she's saying that were sexually harassing her. So it's hard to go to the boss that's giving you problems, to report him. You know, it's like the fox over the henhouse.

The President. Yes. Well, I want to thank you. It's a great explanation.

Would you like to say something? Please.

Guadalupe Guillén, sister of Spc. Guillén. I believe—I respect our military—that not all people are bad. But the way they treat Vanessa, they treated us. No transparency, no respect. They did not respect our pleading. They did not respect our pleading of my mother. And they did not respect my sister. Because I believe that the hashtag #IAmVanessaGuillen—and we have a whole Nation behind us—that the hashtag #IAmVanessaGuillen would help our men and women in the armed forces, because they are ones putting their life at risk.

They say, "Protect our protectors." They deserve to be respected, to be heard, and to be honored, just like Vanessa. Because it's a disgrace that when you get sexually harassed, you have to report it on to your line of command, but 80 percent of the time, the line of command is actually sexually harassing you, so you wouldn't have the confidence nor the trust to report it. That's why Vanessa did not report it, because she was afraid of retaliation or afraid of judgment because she was ashamed of herself, even though the shame was the aggressor.

And we need a change, and we need a positive change, because our troops need to feel safe and need to feel respected because they're the ones putting their life at risk. But yet my sister was

truly, deeply in love. She said: "If I have to go—station in Iraq, if I have to go to combat, I'll die proudly, because I'm a patriot and I'm serving the country. I am protecting my own family"——

The President. She was in love with the country is what you're saying.

Guadalupe Guillén. ——"I was serving my family. I was protecting my family." But yet she died on base.

The President. Yes.

Guadalupe Guillén. How can this happen on a military base, where you think everything is safe, but yet the soldiers are not safe?

So we need a congressional investigation because it's impossible that no one saw, no one heard anything. Yet there are people—my sister was not supposed to go to work, yet someone sent her to work. So if it was a day off, where were all the soldiers? It's a humongous base.

Someone had to hear, someone had to see what was going on in that arms room, and we want to find the truth, because the truth will come out. And——

The President. And now, as you know, the DOJ and the FBI are there, and they're doing a very strong investigation, as is the Army. So they're doing a very strong investigation, as you know. We just started that. It's an incredible story. It's a terrible story.

Would you like to say something?

Mayra Guillén, sister of Spc. Guillén. Sure. First, I want to thank you for taking the time, taking us in. It's an honor to be able to meet you, and I know you're going to help us. And you know, honoring our sister, passing the bill. And of course, I want to point out, how is it that her chain of command failed drastically?

It's—you know, the first day I arrived, I was received by Robinson himself and a couple of other males. And I felt that they were trying——

The President. Oh, really? Wow.

Mayra Guillén. ——to intimidate me, but they didn't get it, and that's why we're here today.

The President. So he took his life when? When after this horrible event? When did he take his life? When was it?

Ms. Khawam. Probably 17 days——

Mayra Guillén. Right before they were about to arrest him.

The President. Oh, I see. So that was—oh, I see. So they found out, et cetera.

Guadalupe Guillén. Right. He was under watch, and he just went off, and they——

The President. Did they know right away? Did you know right away? Did everybody know it was him?

Mayra Guillén. I felt it.

Ms. Khawam. She knew right away.

Guadalupe Guillén. She felt——

Mayra Guillén. The day I went, I felt it.

Guadalupe Guillén. But, I mean, he was a truly coward if he killed himself. He couldn't attempt the consequences. I mean, think over your actions before you do something. But he was a true coward. But I want her leadership to be questioned.

The President. So we're going to look into it very powerfully, and we already have started, as you know. And we'll get to the bottom of it, and maybe things can come out that will help other people in a situation like Vanessa. We'll be in touch with you constantly. We'll be in touch with you too.

Guadalupe Guillén. Thank you

The President. Natalie, thank you very much. That was great.

[*Gloria Guillén began to speak in Spanish, and no translation was provide.*]

The President. Yes, please.

[*Gloria Guillén continued to speak in Spanish, and the interpreter then spoke on her behalf as follows.*]

Interpreter. Her daughter's story is the story of the whole Nation. It's for everyone.

[*Gloria Guillén spoke in Spanish, and Guadalupe Guillén then spoke on her behalf as follows.*]

Guadalupe Guillén. She just said that my sister Vanessa Guillén, she's making history, whole Nation, almost international, and she wants you to be a part of it, because we hope to have your support. And she said my sister, she had her whole life ahead of her, and her life was taken away in the most disgusting way anyone could take a human's life. She wanted to be a mother.

The President. That's true.

Guadalupe Guillén. And everyone has a family, so everyone could feel the small pain. And she's just dreams of her and how she wants to save children. But everyone has heart, so we expect people's compassion, we expect people to help us, and we hope to have your support in this bill.

[*Gloria Guillén spoke in Spanish, and Guadalupe Guillén then spoke on her behalf as follows.*]

Guadalupe Guillén. You will be making history within Vanessa, because we need a change, and the change is now. And we need something positive so the soldiers feel safe to be recruited, feel safe while serving their nation, feel honored to serve their nation, but to feel respected and safe, and that's how the bill will help them. Because not only women—it's also men. I have heard many stories. And hopefully, we have your support.

[*Gloria Guillén spoke in Spanish, and Guadalupe Guillén then spoke on her behalf as follows.*]

Guadalupe Guillén. Because this bill will mark a whole lifetime, and that you will be in it, and you will be making history within Vanessa, and people will be so thankful and blessed for having your support.

The President. Well, you have our support, and we're working on it already, as you know, and we won't stop. And hopefully, something very positive will come out in honor of your sister. Okay? And your daughter.

Rogelio "Roger" Guillén, father of Spc. Guillén. Thank you.

The President. We will—yes. Absolutely.

Ms. Khawam. And you know, President Trump, the saddest part of this all is, her funeral is around the corner. And she won't—they won't have her body in the casket. Sometimes, people need closure when they see someone's face or body in a casket, and there's no body. You know, that's what's—it's horrific.

The President. When you say "around the corner," you mean there is—there has not been a funeral yet?

Ms. Khawam. No, not yet.

The President. How come?

Guadalupe Guillén. We're planning on it. We're planning to have——

Ms. Khawam. Did you get any of the—[inaudible]?

Mayra Guillén. I was in touch with the Texas Rangers and FBI, and they told me that because the investigation was still open, they would call me as soon as I would be able to receive.

The President. Well, they have to do that. I mean, it's——

Mayra Guillén. Right. And I feel like we should be able to——

The President. That's no good. We've got to take care of that.

Mayra Guillén. Right. If you could—thank you

The President. You mean, you—you haven't had a funeral? Because this is quite a while now.

Ms. Khawam. Yes.

Mayra Guillén. Right.

The President. Because I even saw it quite a while ago.

Ms. Khawam. Correct.

The President. And—because you don't have the body yet?

Ms. Khawam. No remains.

Mayra Guillén. No. That's all we're——

The President. But they have the body.

Mayra Guillén. Yes.

Ms. Khawam. The remains.

The President. Okay.

Guadalupe Guillén. It's just a disgrace. And how can someone be capable of doing that? It's just——

The President. No, it's a terrible thing. When would you like to have the funeral? When?

Mayra Guillén. As soon as possible.

The President. As soon as possible. I agree. As soon as possible with the funeral. We'll make sure—we'll make sure that happens. Okay, please?

Where will you have the funeral? Do you know?

Mayra Guillén. Houston.

The President. In Houston?

Mayra Guillén. Yes.

The President. And if I can help you out with the funeral, I'll help you with that.

Guadalupe Guillén. Thank you.

The President. I'll help you out. Financially, I'll help you.

Ms. Khawam. I think the military will be paying, taking care of it.

The President. Good. They'll do a military. That's good. If you need help, I'll help you out.

Ms. Khawam. Thank you, President.

The President. Okay? If they need something, I'll—we'll take care—we'll make sure she is very respected.

Mayra Guillén. Thank you.

The President. Because I've seen statements about her from other people, as you know, and you don't get better statements about a person. I see many statements about many people; I don't see statements like that. So she was very extraordinary. And thank you, Natalie. Very good job. You're doing good. So we'll coordinate.

John [John Roberts, Fox News], do you have any questions of the family, please? We're going to keep this to Vanessa, right now, if we could.

Federal Government Response to the Death of Specialist Guillén

Q. I'm just wondering: Mr. President, you've got the FBI, the DOJ, the DOD involved. The family is asking for legislation in the military, similar to the EEOC in civilian life. What can you, as President, do to try to push that process forward?

The President. Well, we're doing that right now, and we're working, and actually, we've been working on it since I heard about it originally. And we're going to see if we can do something, representing the family, but also helping other people that are in the same position, because they're—this is not—you know, probably, sadly, it's probably not that unique. There are other people in trouble too.

Ms. Khawam. Yes. That's right.

The President. So we're going to look into that very strongly, John.

Federal Government Response to the Death of Specialist Guillén

Q. Is there a culture in the military that you're worried about? Or what needs to happen here?

The President. Well, it would seem to me—what would you think about that? Is there a culture? Is this a culture in the military?

Guadalupe Guillén. Sexually harassing a person shouldn't be daily. It—murdering a person on a military base shouldn't be monthly. Like, all those bodies found in Fort Hood. It needs to change, and the change is now. There needs to be transparency, and for the truth to come out—what is happening on Fort Hood—and to have an investigation because, I mean, it's impossible that no one saw, no one heard Vanessa, that saw Vanessa. It's impossible.

The President. Certainly unusual. This was, Steve [Steve A. Holland, Reuters], a very horrific situation. Well, I don't know if you—if you read about it or saw it, but it impacted me. I saw it, and it was terrible. And so we're going to get to the bottom of it. And how could it have happened where nobody knew about it at all?

Ms. Khawam. Right.

The President. They must have known.

Ms. Khawam. I think there was a lot of coverups. Like, for example, that guy, Aaron Robinson—I don't really want to call him a "guy"—an animal. I think that what happened, what transpired, with so many eyes and ears there, I really feel like they don't want to think it was him. It was like confirmatory bias. They wanted to keep looking the other way. And it just—not sure why they were protecting him.

The President. But they—remember, they ultimately got him, and that's when he committed suicide, I guess. But they ultimately got him, so that was—frankly, somebody did that. Who did that? Who was in charge? They didn't let him get away with it, is what I'm saying. And they probably wouldn't have.

Ms. Khawam. So they issued a BOLO, which is "be on the lookout" for him, and he escaped somehow, on foot. And I'm not sure if they gave him the hint, because how did they let the one guard who was watching him, how did he miss him? And then, a second guard was watching him, then guards out front watching him. Did they tell him? Did they let him in?

Because when they tried to issue—you know, to detain him, the—for some reason, the senior attorney at the base would not allow for them to do a—for them to—a subpoena. They basically couldn't detain him because they say there was not enough facts and evidence, even though they had him—believe it or not, they pinged his phone or something, and they knew he was at that river from 1 to 4 in the morning. Who goes fishing at 1 in the morning?

So there was a lot of, like, why would they keep on turning a blind eye?

The President. Well, look, the good thing is that he's gone——

Ms. Khawam. Right. He's a goner. Right.

The President. ——okay? As far as I'm concerned. The good thing: He's gone. Now we're going to go in to see what happened. Also, can we have this go on to other people to help other people——

Ms. Khawam. Yes.

The President. ——like your sister. Right?

Servicemember Deaths at Fort Hood, Texas

Q. Last year, a soldier named Gregory Wedel-Morales disappeared from Fort Hood. It was believed by the military that he had gone AWOL. They didn't launch an investigation into his whereabouts. His remains were found not far from where Vanessa Guillén's remains were found and in about the same time period. Is there a problem with the culture at that particular base, do you think, that is allowing this to happen?

The President. Well, let me ask you, do you know about that——

Ms. Khawam. Yes.

The President. ——particular case?

Ms. Khawam. Yes.

The President. What's about that case?

Ms. Khawam. So they found his remains while they were looking for Vanessa's.

The President. No kidding.

Ms. Khawam. Yes.

The President. Wow.

Ms. Khawam. So—that's right—he starts becoming suspect. And so, unfortunately, you know, the family did not get any information or—[*inaudible*].

The President. But are they putting that together? Because it's——

Ms. Khawam. Now—well, now it looks—it all looks——

The President. With the same guy. He was there, and then they find the other remains?

Ms. Khawam. So, you know, we'll find out. Hopefully, with the FBI—thanks for asking them to join this case and the DOJ. Hopefully, they'll see whether there's any kind of connection.

The President. That's a good question, John.

Q. We interviewed the mother a couple of weeks back.

The President. It's an interesting question. That you'd even know that is very interesting. [Laughter] It's impressive, actually.

Q. Mr. President——

The President. Yes?

The President's Personal Financial Assistance to Families of Fallen Servicemembers

Q. Mr. President, you offered to help pay some of the funeral costs.

The President. Yes.

Q. Have you offered to do that for other families before?

The President. I have. I have.

Q. Have you—and you've actually——

The President. Personally. I have to do it personally. I can't do it through Government.

Q. So you've written checks to help for other families before this?

The President. I have. I have, because some families need help. They need help.

I don't even know if you need help. Maybe you don't need help, from a financial standpoint. I have no idea what it—I just think it's a horrific thing that happened. And if you did need help, I'm going to—I'll be there to help you.

Are you using the military for the funeral though? Or is it—is it going to be——

Mayra Guillén. We actually declined, because my mom didn't want a military casket and stuff like that. Vanessa is very unique, so we wanted something unique for her. So far, a lot of people have been helping us, but it has been a rough 3 months.

The President. Okay, well, you'll let us know.

Ms. Khawam. Thank you.

The President. Okay? You let us know. That's fine.

[*Gloria Guillén spoke in Spanish, and her remarks were translated by Guadalupe Guillén as follows.*]

Guadalupe Guillén. "It's very painful," is what she just said.

The President. Yes, there is a lot of pain here. This is just a horrible thing.

Guadalupe Guillén. Another horrible thing just happened.

The President. What did your mother say?

Guadalupe Guillén. That CID is not a—you cannot have confidence in them, because they lied to us the first day, seeing my mom in pain. But yet there's another story that CID tried to just throw it under the rug. There was a baby that was murdered, and they threw him. It's just hard to say. An innocent life—a child—was thrown from the bedroom, all the way from the top of the building to the floor. And it happened on a military base. And an innocent child died. Why? Why is that happening? They have to be investigated.

The President. So was this at Fort Hood also?

Mayra Guillén. Right. I believe Fort Hood has a big problem.

[*Gloria Guillén spoke in Spanish, and no translation was provided.*]

Guadalupe Guillén. Like, this particular person, he is stationed on Fort Hood. He told my mother, because this is a pure example: He was—he's afraid to speak up. He's afraid to tell others, because they feel that they're going to endanger his own family. He's going to be in danger every day because—why are they afraid to speak up? Why?

The President. We're going to find out. Right?

Ms. Khawam. Yes. And I would love to work with whoever——

The President. We're going to find out.

Ms. Khawam. ——it is, because I know all the stories and I know what's happening.

The President. We'll look at that too.

[*Gloria Guillén spoke in Spanish, and Guadalupe Guillén then spoke on her behalf as follows.*]

Guadalupe Guillén. She wants justice for Vanessa Guillén and for all those soldiers that have been found dead and being killed on a military base and for those soldiers have been sexually harassed and don't have the opportunity to go and have confidence to report their sexual harassment.

Because a pure example that people are too afraid to report their sexual harassment and sexual assault, and it goes far to rape, is—and a pure example you can find articles: 2015 prostitution ring was led by a sergeant on Fort Hood, but yet that same sergeant was leading the SHARP classes, which—that same SHARP classes are supposed to prevent sexual harassment to happen throughout higher rank soldiers, sergeants. But yet how is that possible that someone is trying to protect soldiers from sexual harassment and rape and abuse and assault, but yet you're conducting a prostitution ring?

So the hashtag #IAmVanessaGuillen bill would have our men and women have the confidence——

The President. Yes.

Guadalupe Guillén. ——into reporting the sexual harassment.

The President. So we'll look into that too, Natalie. Okay?

Ms. Khawam. Thank you, President.

The President. We're going to look into that.

Ms. Khawam. Well, we don't want to take any more of your time.

The President. I want to thank you all for being here. It's a lot of courage actually. It takes a lot of courage. And your daughter is very respected. And she's respected by me, and you're in the Oval Office. Your daughter would be very proud of you right now. She's looking down. She'll be very proud of you. So—and your sister. So we will get to the bottom of a lot of this, and maybe all of it. Okay?

Ms. Khawam. Thank you so much, President.

The President. Thank you very much.

Mr. Guillén. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you.

[*Gloria Guillén spoke in Spanish, and her remarks were translated by the interpreter as follows.*]

Gloria Guillén. Justice for Vanessa.

The President. Justice. Yes. Absolutely. For Vanessa. Thank you. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:20 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In her remarks, Ms. Khawam referred to Cecily Aguilar, girlfriend of the late Spc. Aaron D. Robinson, USA, who was apprehended by police on charges related to disposing of Spc. Guillén's remains; and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization. Guadalupe Guillén referred to Sgt. 1st Class Gregory McQueen, USA, a former victim advocate in Fort Hood's Sexual Harassment and Assault Response/Prevention (SHARP) unit who pleaded guilty to several misconduct specifications and was sentenced to 2 years in prison. A reporter referred to Kimberly Wedel, mother of the late Pvt. Gregory Wedel-Morales, USA.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Slain U.S. Army Spc. Vanessa Guillén, meeting with family members; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Guillén, Gloria; Guillén, Guadalupe; Guillén, Mayra; Guillén, Rogelio "Roger"; Khawam, Natalie; Mullin, Markwayne.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Armed Forces, U.S. : Sexual assault, efforts to combat; Guillén, family of slain U.S. Army Spc. Vanessa; Justice, Department of : Bureau of Investigation, Federal.

DCPD Number: DCPD202000555.