SECURITY AND JUSTICE SECTOR REFORM PROJECT (SJSRP) IN GUATEMALA

CHALLENGES TO DEVELOPMENT

For 36 years, Guatemala lived through an internal armed conflict – among the most violent of its kind in Central America – that left behind more than 200,000 victims of human rights violations. In December of 1996, after a long negotiation process, the Peace Accords were signed, ending the war. Since then, civil society has become a force pushing for reform in Guatemala. However, democracy remains fragile, with vulnerable institutions and continued inefficiency and corruption. Social support for democracy is also weak, although this trend seems to be changing among the younger population. Additionally, women and indigenous communities are under-represented in governmental institutions. For example, female political representation in Congress is 12%, which is well below the average in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the last decade, violence and criminal activity have reached historical peaks. The combination of all these factors amplifies concern for the country's political stability.

Criminal activity – especially that caused by narcotrafficking groups, gangs, and organized crime – has increased significantly and represents one of the greatest threats to the country's stability. In 2016, the homicide rate was 27 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, and although this represents a decrease from seven years ago, Guatemala continues to be one of the most dangerous countries in Latin America. Violent deaths continue to be high, and this Central American nation continues to suffer from such scourges as corruption and impunity, including within the security and justice system. Currently, crime and violence are recognized as economic and social problems that generate enormous social costs, especially in urban impoverished areas.

Beginning in 2015, the Public Ministry, in conjunction with the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) began a series of criminal investigations that has resulted in the resignation and pre-trial imprisonment of the leadership of the previous administration – including ex-President Otto Pérez Molina and ex-Vice-President Roxana Baldetti – as well as dozens of officials, representatives, judges, businessmen and bankers accused of corruption crimes. Citizens' demonstrations bolstered the fight against corruption and impunity and demanded profound reforms to the electoral and political system, public services, and the security and justice system.

PROJECT INITIATIVE

The purpose of the Security and Justice Sector Reform Project (SJSRP) is to provide technical assistance and support to implement security and justice reform and the National Agreement for Advancement of Security and Justice, which includes the Supreme Court, Public Ministry, National Civilian Police, Police

Reform Commission, National Security Council, Public Defense Institute, and National Institute of Forensic Science. The Project also aims to implement and strengthen key legislation and promote civic responsibility, which necessitates rejecting the use of violence and relying on democratic security. In addition, the Project supports security and justice sector institutions in the implementation of approved legislation, which contributes to institutional strengthening and interinstitutional coordination – central aspects of justice reform – as well as the fight against corruption and impunity.

PROJECT IMPACT

Technical and financial assistance from the SJSRP is helping to improve the management of security and justice institutions by strengthening their administrative and financial systems and promoting reform to the Police Career System. The SJSRP is also strengthening the State's capacity to provide security and justice to Guatemalan citizens by improving institutional performance, efficiency, accountability and transparency.

SJSRP achievements include:

- Supporting the development and approval of the Democratic Criminal Policy of the State of Guatemala, which was an inter-institutional effort involving security and justice sector institutions and all three branches of the Government;
- Strengthening the 24 Hour Courts and opening two new High Risk Courts;
- Certification of ISO quality management standards for institutional processes;
- Strengthening management models in the Prosecutor's Offices against Corruption and Extortion to improve investigation of those types of crimes;
- Contributing to the strengthening of environmental justice in the Maya Biosphere Reserve; and
- Supporting the design and implementation of institutional Gender Policies in various security and justice sector institutions.

Within the framework of citizen movements against corruption, and in conjunction with actions lead by the Public Ministry, the SJSRP is promoting the approval of key legislation in security and justice themes and the improvement of criminal investigation and prosecution of corruption cases.

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