

**SUPPORT NEEDED for Guatemala organizations
struggling to end impunity and
build the rule of law**

BELOW:

- an NPR report about drug-related violence in Guatemala and the impunity of the powerful sectors;
- a report from FAMDEGUA, a Guatemalan human rights organization, about still trying to have justice done for the 1978 Panzos massacre.

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MEXICO DRUG VIOLENCE SPILLS INTO GUATEMALA

by Jason Beaubien, NPR radio report, June 1, 2009,

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104789349>

All Things Considered, June 1, 2009 · As Mexican narcotics cartels come under increasing attack on their home turf, they have expanded their operations. Alleged Mexican drug gang members have been arrested as far south as Argentina.

Since Mexico launched an offensive against the cartels two years ago, their presence in Central America has grown dramatically. One of the countries hardest hit by the Mexican criminals' expansion is Guatemala, just across Mexico's southern border.

Guatemala is one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere, and its government is wracked by allegations of incompetence and corruption. Just a few weeks ago, the president was accused of murder.

Guatemala's problems have made it a paradise for drug traffickers. They thrive in the chaos, where they can easily bribe officials as they move cocaine north from Colombia toward the United States.

A NEIGHBORHOOD CONTROLLED BY TRAFFICKERS

El Gallito is a barricaded barrio of Guatemala City. There are only two streets in and two streets out. All the other roads have been cordoned off with concrete blocks. Women sell vegetables from makeshift stalls on the street. Young boys on bicycle taxis blare their radios while waiting for customers. Soldiers sit in sandbagged kiosks while police patrol in pickup trucks.

But residents say the cops and the military are there only for show: The drug cartels run El Gallito. At night, people drive with their windows rolled down and their interior lights on so that gang lookouts won't shoot them.

Several people decline to be interviewed, saying they'd be killed if they were caught talking to a reporter. A local priest, Jose Barrios, says if you walk around El Gallito you won't see street thugs, robbers or prostitutes.

"This is a clean neighborhood," he says. "The only issue is drug trafficking." Barrios, who runs a small evangelical church in El Gallito, says the muchachos, or "the boys" as he calls

them, control the area. They keep the streets clean. They enforce the cartels' rules. But one downside is that outsiders — taxis, delivery drivers, public servants, journalists — don't usually enter. Even the coroner won't come into El Gallito. If someone gets killed, Barrios says, the boys bring the body out to the barricades on the edge of the neighborhood. "The muchachos take the body out to the avenue," he says. "The city officials see it out there, and they pick it up."

GUATEMALA DECLARES ITS OWN WAR ON THE CARTELS

Carlos Menocal, one of Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom's top advisers on security, says that over the past two years, Mexican cartels have moved aggressively into Guatemala. Mexican traffickers have taken over entire parts of the north of the country, he says. "One of the objectives of the government is to reclaim territory from the Mexican cartels," Menocal says.

"This is a war, and to fight these criminals, we need to have a military presence in these areas."

Menocal says the Mexicans, particularly a group called the Zetas, are setting up airstrips and warehouses in remote parts of the jungle. The Zetas are a group of former Mexican soldiers allied with the Gulf Cartel. Menocal says the Zetas operating in Guatemala are well-organized, and have plenty of money and arms.

"We've dismantled bases from Los Zetas in which we came across anti-aircraft guns, military uniforms, anti-personnel mines," Menocal says. "We suspect that these guys are preparing to defend their territories inside Guatemala."

CARTELS MORE VIOLENT THAN HOMEGROWN GANGS

Drug trafficking is not new to this Central American nation. Locals have been plying the trade for decades. But officials say the Mexican smugglers have changed the climate. In December, a shootout involving Mexican gangs — allegedly over a disputed horse race — killed 17 people. Another Zeta rampage in the capital left 11 dead. Guatemalan police say the Zetas have issued death threats against the president.

Miguel Castillo, a political scientist at Francisco Marroquin University in Guatemala City, says Guatemalan narcotics traffickers traditionally were very close to their communities: They gave out presents at girls' coming-of-age parties; they built churches. The Mexican traffickers, on the other hand, are brutally gunning down their rivals and intimidating local officials, Castillo says.

Mexico is a much larger country with far greater resources to fight these groups, yet Mexico has been struggling to contain them. Castillo says the Mexican drug cartels pose one of the greatest threats to Guatemala's future. "In a country as weak as Guatemala, this could be devastating to the state," he says.

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THE STRUGGLE AGAINST IMPUNITY IN GUATEMALA CONTINUES ...

31st ANNIVERSARY OF THE PANZÓS MASSACRE

Communique by FAMDEGUA (Guatemala Association of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared), Guatemala, May 28, 2009 (Translated for Rights Action by Rosalind Gill: RGill@glendon.yorku.ca)

On May 29, 31 years ago, there was a massacre in the Municipality of Panzós (department of Izabal), when the Zacapa Detachment of the Guatemalan army opened fire on hundreds of campesino men women and children who had gathered in the Panzos town square to demand a solution to land disputes in the Polochic river valley area.

Panzós was one of the first massacres in the genocide that eventually spread to all of Guatemala.

In 1997, when the exhumation of the massacre victims took place, there was a call for a full investigation to find the individuals who gave the order to carry out the massacre of the indigenous Q'eqchi' campesinos.

The investigation that has been carried out over the 12 years since the exhumations is inadequate. It has failed to put an end to impunity or achieve justice. This investigation has not proven to be impartial and has helped with the cover-up of the military and civil authorities responsible for the massacre.

Many of the investigation procedures have been initiated by FAMDEGUA, which is a co-complainant in this process. While the Public Ministry is legally responsible for the criminal investigation, it has been left it to FAMDEGUA (co-complainant) to carry out the investigation and provide evidence.

Some 35 witnesses and victims have testified to what happened in this case. However, the Public Ministry does not appear to be impartial, given that it has not solicited testimonies from people who are directly or indirectly linked to military personnel involved in the Panzos massacre - this, despite the fact that FAMDEGUA has provided information that would lead to their being summoned to testify.

While the State has accepted over-all responsibility for the macabre events that took place in Panzos, it is the responsibility of the State to seek out the complete truth about what happened, fully compensate the victims and ensure that justice is served.

FAMDEGUA demands that the Public Ministry fulfill its commitment to the victims and name those responsible, put aside their indifference, put an end to impunity and carry out a full investigation that will lead to the prosecution of the perpetrators of this massacre.

THE RIGHT TO LIFE IS THE BASIS OF ALL RIGHTS

Asociacion FAMDEGUA, famdegua@gmail.com

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WWW.RIGHTSACTION.ORG: Based in Guatemala, Rights Action (with tax-deductible status in Canada and USA) funds and works with indigenous, development, environment and human rights organizations in Guatemala and Honduras, and also in El Salvador,

Haiti, Oaxaca and Chiapas; and educates about and is involved in activism related to global development, environmental and indigenous and human rights struggles. Information: [Grahame Russell: info@rightsaction.org](mailto:Grahame.Russell@rightsaction.org)

EDUCATIONAL DELEGATION TO GUATEMALA - JULY 6-14

Please join this trip that will investigate "Dam 'Development' Projects under-mining human rights & the environment". Over 9 days, delegates will meet with development, enviro and human rights activists; visit Chixoy hydro-electric dam affected Mayan-Achi communities; visit Mayan Q'eqchi communities that may well be harmed by the pending Xalala hydro-electric dam; visit Mayan-Mam communities being harmed by Goldcorp Inc's huge gold mine. Information: Karen Spring: spring.kj@gmail.com