

Press Release

Guatemala at the Crossroads: An Overview of Violence Transformed

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Despite recent reductions in homicide levels, Guatemala remains one of the most violent countries in the Central and Latin American Region.

The different manifestations of armed violence in Guatemala feed into each other and transform over time, argues *Guatemala en la encrucijada. Panorama de una violencia transformada* ('Guatemala at the Crossroads: An Overview of Violence Transformed') a new report launched today in Guatemala City. This is why violence in Guatemala **persists** and is difficult to confront and overcome, even considering the recent decrease in lethal violence. **Firearms, violence in border departments, and homicides against women** need to be dealt with as a **priority** by the Guatemalan state and society. In order to overcome armed violence it is crucial to understand which public policies works and which don't.

Guatemala en la encrucijada. Panorama de una violencia transformada was published in Spanish by **CERAC** and the **Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development** in Geneva and Bogotá. The report benefited from the **participation** of several Guatemalan civil society organizations.

For the launch of this report, an update document has been produced including the latest homicide data available. This data indicates that the past two years (2010 and 2011) have shown an **encouraging reduction of homicide** levels and rates. Indeed, there was an 8% decrease in the number of homicides in 2010 and nearly 5% in 2011.

In parallel to the reduction of homicide levels, the Guatemalan government has implemented a set of actions ranging from the reform of security institutions to enhancing inter-institutional coordination and the efficacy of justice. Guatemala is unique in the region, as it is perhaps the only country to include violence reduction as an objective in its development goals.

Though it is possible that state actions are responsible for the recent decrease in violence, it is difficult to ascertain whether they are the exclusive cause. What is clear is the need for **further research** on these policies and programmes. It is crucial to publicly **discuss and evaluate** whether security sector reforms and state actions have been the key factor in reducing armed violence, in order to advance evidence and knowledge on what works to confront this challenge.

However, the report emphasizes that the number of homicides—more than 5,000 recorded in 2011—still reflects a **preoccupying situation** of armed violence in Guatemala. The country still has one of the highest homicide rates in the world and in the Central American subregion.

With a homicide rate of 39 violent deaths per 100,000 people in 2011, Guatemala exceeds the Central American average of 29 deaths per 100,000 people for the 2004–2009 period. The country's homicide rate also exceeds by far the world average—estimated at between 6.9 and 7.6 violent deaths per 100,000 people.

The reduction in homicides over the past two years hides **important disparities between departments and municipalities**: while reductions can be noted in the departments in the central area of Guatemala, those on the southern and eastern borders of the country do not follow the same trends, some even witnessing increased homicide levels .

In 2011 the most important reduction in homicidal violence (since 2010) were seen in Alta Verapaz and Sololá (-30%) Quiché (-21%), Petén (-17%), and Guatemala (-13%). The most important increase in homicidal violence took place in the departments of Totonicapán (+50%), Zacapa (+25%), Jutiapa (+22%), Chimaltenango (+21%) and Huehuetenango (+19%).

One particular aspect of the recent reduction of armed violence is that it is concentrated within the male population (with a 6.25% reduction in 2011). Female homicide, in fact, has remained stable with only one case more in 2011 than in 2010.

It is important to signal that **firearms remain the principal tool of lethal violence** in Guatemala. The overall use of firearms in homicides in Guatemala is in fact much higher than the averages for the world or even the subregion.

According to data compiled by the Small Arms Survey, firearm-related homicides during the period 2004 – 2010 accounted for an average of 81.7% of all homicides in Guatemala. The regional share of firearm homicides is 77%, whereas the world average is estimated to range from 40% to 60% of homicides.

‘Guatemala at the Crossroads’ provides a map of armed violence in Guatemala, focusing on analyzing the legacy of armed conflict; the levels, scope, and distribution of contemporary armed violence; characteristics of the victims and perpetrators of violence; and prominent initiatives that seek to reduce and prevent armed violence.

Other findings of ‘Guatemala at the Crossroads’ show that:

- The manifestations of armed violence in Guatemala reveal dynamics that intersect with **organized crime, which has adopted violent strategies originating in the armed conflict** but focuses on the accumulation of revenues and maintaining a climate of impunity.
- **Other manifestations** of violence, such as femicide, lynchings, social cleansing, and land conflicts are still present in the country, and relate to the absence or **weakness of institutions** that govern security and justice.
- As well as noting the **economic cost of violence** at the national level, the report presents new findings by focusing the analysis on the costs to two departments: Escuintla and Chiquimula.
- The report takes stock of and assesses a wide range of direct and indirect **interventions** that seek to **reduce and prevent armed violence** and its negative impacts at the global, regional, national, and local level.

Published by the Geneva Declaration Secretariat, the report *Guatemala en la encrucijada. Panorama de una violencia transformada* is part of a series of research that addresses armed violence at the national level under the auspices of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development.

The **Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development** is endorsed by more than 100 countries, and calls upon states to achieve measurable reductions in the global burden of armed violence and tangible improvements in human security by 2015.

The **Conflict Analysis Resource Centre** is a research centre based in Bogotá, Colombia, that investigates violence and armed conflicts to provide evidence for their reduction.

The **Small Arms Survey** is an independent research project supported by various governments, and is the principal source of public information on all aspects of small arms and armed violence.

For more information, visit www.genevadeclaration.org

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