

tural and information activities designed to increase public awareness; and lectures to police force personnel on the subject of observance of the principle of equality, non-discrimination and the rights of the child and of women.

The government also noted that the topic of women and their protection was incorporated in the Peace Agreements concluded with National Revolutionary Union of Guatemala. Special attention was given to women heads of household and to widows and orphans. The government noted its undertaking to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to facilitate their access to land, housing and credit, as well as their participation in development projects forming part of the global development strategy. Concerning indigenous women and their vulnerability to twofold discrimination, the government has decided: to promote legislation classifying sexual aggression as an offence that will be treated as aggravated if committed against an indigenous woman; to establish an office of Defender of Indigenous Women; to promote the publicizing and strict implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and to revise the formal and non-formal education manuals intended for indigenous people in order to eliminate from them any cultural stereotypes or stereotypes based on sex. An effort was also made to take account of the special economic and social situation of women and to integrate them into development strategies, plans and programmes.

The report notes that steps have also been taken by the government to ensure for women equality of access to education and training, and access on an equal footing with men to health care in employment and to decision-making at the local and national levels, as well as their participation in government. Laws currently in force will be amended to ensure fulfilment of these commitments. A decision was also made to take the necessary measures to encourage political and social organizations to adopt specific policies that will help women participate in the process of strengthening the civil power. The report notes that a Women's Forum was set up in 1997 in order to follow up the commitments assumed by the government.

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### Report of the Secretary-General

The report of the Secretary-General on the UN Verification Mission in Guatemala (A/53/421, A/53/421/Corr.1) relates to compliance with the agreements signed by the government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG). The Mission's mandate was scheduled to end on 31 December 1998. The report covers the period from January to July 1998.

In commentary on the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights, the report notes that while human rights violations have decreased, there is still a need for a national institution to monitor the performance of the administration and to promote new relations between the state and citizens. Factors hindering implementation

of the Agreement are noted as including delays in the development and launching of a programme of assistance to victims of violations, related to, *inter alia*, compensation. It was recommended that projects in this area be initiated immediately to assist the villages and areas which were most directly hurt by the armed conflict, and for which such assistance would be not only moral compensation for the suffering endured but also a much-needed socio-economic contribution.

Efforts to facilitate the return of refugees from Mexico were hampered, partly because of difficulties in negotiations over properties, the presence of intermediaries who distort the price, over-valuation by the owners, the government's determination to negotiate lower prices and the lack of alternatives for acquiring other land. With regard to the resettlement of internally displaced persons, there remain basic infrastructure problems, such as a lack of drinking water, sanitation and emergency food supplies. The Mission underscored the urgent need for concrete, specific measures to alleviate the situation of the uprooted population. Difficulties were also encountered in terms of the registration of births, marriages and deaths for members of uprooted population groups and demobilized members of URNG.

The report notes that the substantive activities of the Commission to Clarify Past Human Rights Violations and Acts of Violence that have Caused the Guatemalan Population to Suffer were concluded at the end of July 1998; January 1999 was set as the deadline for delivery of the Commission's report. In terms of the Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, reference is made to the initial reports of the commissions concerning land rights, official recognition of indigenous languages and educational reform. On the question of languages, the Commission devised a strategy that combines: a process of linguistic standardization and rescue of at-risk languages; a process of encouraging bilingualism and multilingualism for all citizens, particularly public servants; and prioritization of bilingual public services (if necessary by providing interpreters) in such key areas as education, health, justice, elections, the media and municipal services. Policies and strategies related to education include: decentralization and social and ethnic participation; increased investment in education to promote efficiency and academic excellence; organization of educational services based on linguistic and cultural situations and needs; and strengthening of comprehensive training for democracy, the culture of peace and sustainable development. On land rights, preliminary procedures were established to facilitate access to land ownership for peasants who do not own any land or sufficient land and to promote rural development. The report notes that the commission concerned with indigenous holy places was having difficulty completing its task, partly because of questions related to who would administer such places — an autonomous indigenous body or a body on which indigenous representation is ensured. Difficulties were also encountered by the commission mandated to take a comprehensive look at the issue of the multicultural state and the reforms that this involves including, for example,