

Human Rights Monitoring Network in Guatemala

Phase One Report

Concept

To assist the democratic development in Guatemala by promoting and strengthening human rights through the creation of a national network of human rights groups, the country's first human rights monitoring network. This network would also be linked to international bodies to receive and disseminate information.

A second, but not secondary, element would be to assist local NGOs in developing public relations campaigns, particularly on radio, to further promote democratic development and a respect for human rights.

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Human Rights Environment

Guatemala is a country where the human rights situation is now the focus of international attention. The peace process is fragile and there is still a real concern about continued human rights violations. The view was often expressed as in the course of our research that violence will continue to be endemic unless Guatemala moves swiftly toward a becoming a fully democratic society and receives international assistance to help with this transition.

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With former soldiers and former military leaders reintegrated into civil society, human rights organisations within and outside Guatemala are looking to neighbouring El Salvador as an object lesson. It is not a promising example. There is ostensibly peace in El Salvador but the violence continues because while people do not have jobs, many still have guns. What's more, in Guatemala the civil war has gone on for so long there is a fear that it has become almost institutionalised.

According to Suzanne Runsey, of the Inter Church Commission for Central America (ICMCA), the lead Canadian NGO in Guatemala, "People don't have good reason to be cautious about what they are doing. They are not sure if the rebels disarmed there are going to be a lot of people who will use a gun. There is a concern that there will be a new wave of violence from individuals."

Human rights groups are also concerned about the future of the country. Under it, both military personnel and UNPRO members are involved in human rights abuses -- such as murder, rape, torture and forced labour.

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