

## PROTECTION AGAINST CRIME

*Crime, especially violent crime, has soared as a result of the economic crisis spawned by the devaluation of the peso in December 1994.*

Mexico's larger cities have always been relatively dangerous, and the economic crisis that was precipitated by the peso devaluation of December 1994 made the situation worse. With just over 2,000 murders per year for a population of some 10 million, the Federal District — including Mexico City — is still less dangerous than many large American cities. But its crime problems are much worse than Canada's. Criminals tend to be heavily armed and, in the absence of adequate police protection, they have become very bold. Armed robbery is the most threatening problem. Every day, almost 60 occupied cars are seized from their owners, typically at gunpoint. A total of 30,000 automobiles were stolen during 1995, and the number of violent robberies of homes rose by 36 percent. Crime against business has increased by similar proportions, and organized crime has become a growing threat.

These events have led to a rapid growth in the market for security products. According to United States Department of Commerce estimates, the market for personal security equipment was expected to grow by 15 percent to reach US \$54 million in 1996. About 80 percent of this equipment is imported.

This subsector is dominated by relatively small companies with specialized products and services. *Securat '96*, a trade show held in Mexico City in July 1996, included a vast array of products designed to protect businesses, homes, vehicles and persons from theft and robbery. The items attracting the most interest included self-protection sprays and electric shock devices, as well as all types of car theft protection systems. Devices designed to foil violent attacks on automobiles also attracted considerable attention. These included tempered glass to deter both window smashing and bullets, and a device that fills the vehicle with smoke. According to media reports, Mexico is the largest market in the world for armoured automobiles, with customers paying up to US \$65,000 for a conversion.

Products and services for business are in demand, especially closed-circuit television systems, and automatic detection systems and alarms. Systems that protect against armed robbery and shoplifting are in strong demand in the retail sector. There is also an emerging market for security consultants who are not tied to particular product lines.

The government recognizes the severity of the crime problem. President Zedillo recently acknowledged that "Mexico is undergoing a period of public insecurity." A five-year public security plan was unveiled in July 1996. Twelve thousand new police officers will be hired, and there have already been a number of publicly-