

On December 29, 1996, a final peace agreement was signed between the Guatemalan government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), bringing an end to 36 years of internal conflict. The final accord represents the best hope in decades for transforming Guatemalan society into a fuller democracy based on the rule of law and the broad participation of sectors historically excluded from economic and political decision-making. This is a critical moment of transition in which Guatemalan society, with the help of the international community, has an opportunity to consolidate the peace process by eliminating the sources of social conflict. It is an opportunity that may not come again.

The peace accords also afford a unique opportunity for the Canadian government, NGOs and other sectors of Canadian civil society to re-assess their respective policy options. To this end, the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development sponsored a three month consultative process with a wide range of actors from Guatemalan civil society which culminated in a one-day Roundtable to define priorities and proposals for Canadian responses in the context of peace-building.

Representatives of Canadian and Guatemalan civil society organizations met in Ottawa on March 17. The Roundtable was designed to generate ideas which respond to the challenges of this transition period in Guatemala. The participants were representatives of Guatemalan and Canadian NGOs as well as a representative from the UN Verification Mission (MINUGUA) and a contributor to a UNDP-sponsored evaluation of the implementation of the peace accords in El Salvador.

The Roundtable focused on two of the peace accords - **Indigenous Identity and Rights and Resettlement of the Population Uprooted by the Armed Conflict** - chosen, after widespread consultation in Guatemala, because they provide the foundation for strengthening civil society in Guatemala and overcoming the exclusionary and discriminatory policies that have marked Guatemalan society for over 40 years.

I. A MOMENT FOR PEACE-BUILDING

Guatemalan participants at the Roundtable reported that the peace accords have been greeted by the populace with happiness and a sense of relief that the war is finally over. There is a general recognition that new political spaces and opportunities for participation have been created.

The human cost of the conflict has not been forgotten, however, and, although the peace process has been well received, it has only barely begun to change the structures of power in Guatemala. **Of critical importance are the tasks of**