

The almost-total impunity throughout the country also remains of concern, due primarily to an ineffective judicial system which does not command the respect of most Guatemalans. As a direct result of the ineffectiveness of the judicial system, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of lynchings of suspected bandits, particularly in the countryside.

The recently created (1996) **Policia Nacional Civil (PNC)** has helped to reduce the number of extra-judicial executions in Guatemala. Newly trained and better paid recruits are on the street every day, in both the cities and in the rural areas, although there are concerns about the policing model adopted and its long term implications for Guatemalan society. **MINUGUA's** 8th Report to CHR emphasized that the effect of the deployment of the PNC has been positive. The number of accusations of human rights violations and corruption against the police has decreased, and the general public appears to trust the new police officers more than they did their predecessors.

Despite the fact that Guatemala ratified ILO Convention 169 in 1996, racism against indigenous peoples continues to be widespread among the Ladino population. Social classes are very marked, and Guatemalan society continues to be very rigid socially. Progress in the area of women's rights in Guatemala, particularly amongst indigenous women and poor Ladino women has been limited. There has been little improvement in the area of children's rights since 1997, and, faced with opposition from fundamentalist Christians and adoption lawyers, Congress decided to put off the implementation of the code on youth and children passed in 1997 until the year 2000. There has been minimal change in the rights of persons with disabilities in Guatemala since 1997, although awareness of the issue is beginning to increase. Homophobia continues to be prevalent in Guatemalan society.

The Guatemalan public school system continues to be a concern, particularly in the rural areas. Many remote areas do not have schools, others may have schools but lack teachers. According to the 1997 UNDP Report on Human Development, more than half of Guatemalan women (52.4%) and 33.3% of men are illiterate. Some gains have been made in education sector however, particularly the initiation of bilingual education.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada continues to monitor the human rights situation in Guatemala closely. In his address to the 1998 UN General Assembly, **Minister Axworthy** mentioned Guatemala as a case which Canada is committed to following. Canada's concerns about the lack of progress in investigations and trials related to a number of serious human rights cases such as the murders of Myrna Mack and Bishop Gerardi have been registered with senior Guatemalan officials, including at the IADB Consultative Group meeting in Brussels in October 1998. Canada has provided over \$600,000 in support of the work of Guatemala's **Historical Clarification Commission ("Truth Commission")**. The Embassy keeps in close contact with Guatemalan civil society groups, including human rights organizations, and has continued its active support of the return process for Guatemalan refugees through financial support to the activities of UNHCR. Over the past 8 years, Canada has provided over \$13 million to programs and activities in Guatemala which promote human rights, peace building and democratic consolidation.