

Introduction

Objectives

Canada is committed to supporting the peacebuilding process in Guatemala. The Canadian government and non-governmental organizations have a long history of work in, and support to, Guatemala. Over the past year, a series of workshops and seminars have taken place involving governmental and non-governmental actors in discussions on how Canada can most effectively support sustainable peace in Guatemala. These discussions led to a series of recommendations. The challenge left to all was to prioritize and act on these recommendations. The dialogue described in this report was seen as the first of a series of working sessions. It brought together key government and civil society representatives, with peacebuilding and/or Guatemala expertise, to identify and prioritize the necessary actions to best support this moment in Guatemala through peacebuilding efforts. This was an example of highly collaborative organization and participation and will, as a dialogue model, be an important contribution to future peacebuilding discussions both on Guatemala and other countries. Strengthening the Government/NGO consultative process on peacebuilding issues is a key objective of the Canadian Peacebuilding Initiative launched by Minister Axworthy in October, 1996.

Definition of Peacebuilding:

Peacebuilding is a long-term series of actions and ultimately an outcome of social and economic reconstruction, democratic development, justice, civil society and government institutional capacity building. The CPCC defines peacebuilding as: *Peacebuilding is the effort to promote human security in societies marked by conflict. The overarching goal of peacebuilding is to strengthen the capacity of societies to manage conflict without violence, as a means to achieve sustainable human security.*

Overview of Peacebuilding Context in Guatemala

Guatemala has a legacy of 30 years of dirty war. It is a country of extreme historical ethnic division which has never known real democracy. There is a lack of civic trust, lack of democratic culture, lack of organizing tools and no tradition of accountability. The fabric of society is rent through violence to remote corners of the country - widespread, deep down, continual violence. No preexisting common ground exists on which to rebuild society. Peace negotiations were largely forced along by the international community. There is no broad political and social consensus in Guatemala. The armed forces are still not convinced that the war is over- for many, the war still continues by other means. Although the government has committed itself to the peace process, actors outside the process and factors such as the government's economic policies, are undermining both the process and the Peace Accords themselves. The end of the war has created the political context for a variety of actors and political agendas to emerge within both government and civil society. The electoral dynamic has intensified this situation. The jockeying for political positions is influencing the ability of actors to work towards a common goal - the peace implementation process.