2-17-2011

The Bloods and Crips: Belize’s Deadly Gangs

Louisa Reynolds

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
The Bloods and Crips: Belize’s Deadly Gangs

by Louisa Reynolds
Category/Department: Belize
Published: Thursday, February 17, 2011

On Jan. 12, Raymond "Killa" Gentle, a prominent leader of the Kraal Road Crips Gang, was shot dead at the corner of Baracat Street and Kraal Road while he supervised the construction of a house under the Hurricane Richard Rehabilitation Program.

The two suspects for Gentle’s murder, including 18-year-old Corwin Bennet, are believed to be members of the rival George Street Gang. This type of gang-related murder has sadly become all too common in Belize City.

Belize is the smallest country in the Americas with a population of just over 30,000, but, since becoming a major transit point for cocaine trafficked from Colombia to the US in the late 1980s, it has developed a serious gang problem.

Until recently, guns and cocaine were practically unheard of in Belize. Today, the country is facing a massive crack-cocaine problem, hundreds of semi-automatic weapons are in the hands of gangs, and the country has a per capita murder rate five times higher than that of the US, 98% of it gang-related, according to the report "Gang Situation in Belize," compiled by the Ministry of Public Safety.

In 1961, the destruction caused by Hurricane Hattie triggered a migration to the US of Belizeans, who settled primarily in Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. Many of these young Belizeans joined existing street gangs in different parts of the US such as the Rolling 30s, Hoovers, 123rd, and others affiliated with the Bloods and Crips, two of the US's most notorious gangs.

In the 1980s, the use of Belize as a point on the route for drugs transshipment to the US marked the beginning of the use and sale of hard drugs in Belize City and a new breed of street drug dealers who made connections with their Belizean counterparts in the US.

Belizeans residing in the US often returned for short visits, bringing ideas and shared experience of their criminal street-gang involvement. By the 1990s, Belize had youths claiming to be members of the Crips and the Bloods fighting vicious turf wars.

In October 1997, New York police conducted an anti-gangs raid in which 27 Belizean members of the Rolling Crips gang were arrested and indicted on charges ranging from drug peddling and sexual assault to attempted murder. Once they had served their prison terms, they were deported to Belize, "where they quickly established their bases and introduced new subcultural behaviors among their associates", says the report.

During this period, Belize saw the arrival of many Central American migrants, primarily from El Salvador, who fled the civil wars in their countries. Although limited in numbers, Belize now has Latinos and mestizos who claim to be members of the notorious Mara Salvatrucha (MS) gang, one of Central America’s largest and deadliest street gangs.

The Belizean police say most gangs have between 10 and 15 members (predominantly 14-to-30-year-old males), and the problem is largely concentrated in Belize City.
Today, Belize regards gangs as its main national-security concern, with gang-related shootings accounting for most of the murders involving the use of firearms in the country. Turf wars between rival gangs involved in drug peddling accounts for the spate of shootings and murders that has sown terror in Belize City's south side.

**Grenades on the streets**

Today, 37% of the cocaine smuggled to the US travels through Belize, and gang members are often recruited by major drug traffickers as security in the drug trade. Their involvement has given rise to the illegal importation of high-powered rifles and short arms by drug traffickers who from time to time receive these weapons as part of a payment for work done in Belize in support of the drug trade.

In 2008, award-winning British journalist Ross Kemp caused controversy when an episode of his series documented the extent of Belize’s gang problem. Kemp describes Belize City as "a place on the verge of anarchy," and, after the documentary was aired, the tourism sector expressed fears about the negative publicity it would bring the country.

In one of the most poignant scenes of the documentary, Kemp shows a hand grenade in the hands of Belize City gang members. "In all my travels around the world, I have never seen a gang with this kind of hardware," says Kemp on camera.

Weeks after the documentary was released, a similar British Army grenade was hurled against a crowd watching the Carnival Road March near the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital, sowing panic among onlookers, although fortunately there were no casualties. The attack was intended to kill members of a rival gang, but had it been successful it would have claimed scores of innocent lives.

Although some Belizeans claimed that Kemp’s documentary contained sensationalist and exaggerated content, assistant police commissioner Crispin Jeffries says it largely reflects reality. "There are some harsh realities that we need to face", says Jeffries.

Jeffries adds that, for the past ten years, the Belizean police have known of grenades being on the streets. Many are old, rusty, and unsafe to those holding them in their possession.

-- End --