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U.N. Gives Guatemala Mixed Evaluation on Compliance with Peace Accords

by LADB Staff

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In February, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan released the year-end report by the UN human rights verification team in Guatemala (MINUGUA), evaluating compliance with the December 1996 peace accords signed by the government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG).

The report, covering April 15 to Dec. 31, 1997, shows progress in several areas. But in delivering the report to the General Assembly, Annan said popular support for the peace process is still hampered by public-security issues and by persistent social and economic problems. Progress made in social development & political liberty Among the positive evaluations, the report noted the increased emphasis on rural development, indigenous rights, professionalization of the new Policia Nacional Civil (PNC), reforms in the justice and financial systems, decentralization of the state apparatus, and the growth of "pluralism and political liberty."

In particular, the report noted the incorporation of the former guerrilla URNG into the political process "without violence or acts of reprisal." In addition, the state has moved to institutionalize social programs through a rural-development bank, a legal-assistance agency, and an agency for resolving land conflicts. The major areas MINUGUA found disappointing were the military and public security, human rights, and the economy. In response to the rising crime rate, the government has deployed army troops to assist the PNC.

MINUGUA recommends that the Congress amend the Constitution to prohibit the use of the military for police work and, until it does so, recommends that the deployment be carefully coordinated by the Interior Ministry. Care should be taken to keep military units out of areas where their presence would inspire fear or resentment in the local population because of experiences during the civil war, said the report.

Military is slow to meet obligations under accords

MINUGUA has been unable to verify that the military has made the required 33% reduction in force. Moreover, the military has closed only four bases in the interior of the country. The accords call for it to close 19, redeploying troops near the borders for strictly national defense purposes. Compliance with the human rights content of the accords has also been slow, in part because of inadequate funding for the office of Procurador de los Derechos Humanos (PDH). The government allocated a 10% increase in PDH funds for 1998, but 80% of its budget goes to administration and only 20% to operations.

The "truth commission" (Comision de Esclarecimiento Historico) began work in July and by December had received more than 5,000 depositions concerning human rights violations. While the

URNG has cooperated in supplying information on its activities during the civil war, the response in 1997 by the Ministry of Defense was "slow and incomplete." Access to documents was restricted, and documents sent to the commission were not those needed to evaluate military actions in relation to human rights. The report called this response "troubling." Government is failing to meet vital fiscal goals MINUGUA director Jean Arnault singled out the conclusions about Guatemala's fiscal picture as the most "worrisome." He said fiscal health was the key to implement the peace accords and to promote democracy. The economic and agrarian section of the accords set 2000 as the date by which tax revenues should increase by 50% over 1995 levels.

Besides meeting this goal, the government is supposed to end widespread tax evasion and to establish equity in the tax system. Tax revenues were 9.1% of GDP in 1997, better than the target of 8.6% set in the peace accords. However, the government is not expected to meet the 1998 goal of 10% because of the 1998 fiscal package approved by Congress. Instead of moving toward a progressive tax structure, the package includes increases in various regressive indirect taxes, which still account for 75% of revenues.

Collections in 1998 are projected at only 9.7% of GDP and may be less in 1999. Arnault said that, while Guatemala has the largest economy in Central America, the report shows "it devotes the smallest proportion of its resources to public and social expenditures." In a related matter, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) will visit Guatemala in March to evaluate progress in meeting the goals of the accords.

The purpose is to report to the international lending community on how much financial assistance Guatemala will need over the next three years to carry out programs mandated by the accords. Donor countries are committed to supplying 67% of the necessary funding. [Sources: Central America Update (Center for International Policy), 02/14/98-02/20/98; Agence France-Presse, 02/20/98; Prensa Libre (Guatemala), 02/21/98; Notimex, 02/23/98,

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