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## Guatemala Schedules Terms of Peace Accords

by LADB Staff

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Four years after the signing of the peace accords ending the civil war in Guatemala, only modest progress has been made on the social, economic, and military reforms that were the core of the agreements. In a deal with the former guerrilla organization Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) in December, the government has set new deadlines to finish the peace process by 2004. After six years of negotiations, the URNG and the government signed the last in a series of 10 accords in December 1996. Not merely an armistice, the accords laid out an elaborate program of reforms designed, among other things, to eradicate the social and economic deficits that helped fuel the 36-year civil war that took 200,000 lives.

Included in the accords were agreements to modernize and demilitarize the state, reorient the economy to include the marginalized Guatemalans, and reincorporate the former combatants into civil society (see NotiSur, 1996-12-13, 1997- 01-17). Four years later, when all terms of the peace accord were supposed to have been met, most have been either ignored or delayed in Congress, which is dominated by the rightist Frente Republicano Guatemalteco (FRG) headed by former dictator Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt. The general presided over a military government in 1982-1983 when some of the worst atrocities committed by the military against civilian populations took place. The government's sluggishness in carrying out the reforms has also threatened international aid programs.

In 1998, the Consultative Group representing donor nations held back promised aid in part because of the lack of progress on reforms (see EcoCentral, 1998-10-29). Voters added to the problem by rejecting a 1999 referendum package of 47 constitutional reforms that would have cleared up much of the backlog of unmet peace-accord commitments (see NotiCen, 1999-05-20). Accords ended war, little else "Aside from the absence of war, the accords remain a great promise," said Gerd Merrem, head of the UN human rights verification team in Guatemala (MINUGUA). Some 119 points in the accords have yet to be fulfilled. Almost no progress was made in 2000 under President Alfonso Portillo and the governing FRG.

The largest backlog of unfulfilled promises 67 are in the accords dealing with socioeconomic reforms. Among them is a reform to bring tax collection from 8% of GDP to 12%. Unfinished also are land reform, agricultural subsidies, and increased funding for the justice system. Legislation guaranteeing women's rights and reforms in health care and education have yet to be enacted. The resettling of former combatants is still incomplete, accounting for seven points in the accords. Eighteen points referring to the rights of indigenous peoples are unattended. Twenty-two points dealing with changes in the responsibilities of the military have gone unfulfilled, as have 22 points designed to strengthen civil authority.

The government has claimed that lack of funds has caused the slow implementation of reforms. At the same time it has been unable to adopt the fiscal reforms needed to increase government

revenue. Currently, a fiscal package (pacto fiscal) covering tax and wage reforms has faced opposition from the labor and the business sector (see NotiCen, 2000-10- 19).

Assistant director of MINUGUA Juan Pablo Corlazzoli said, however, that Guatemala had all the resources it needed to carry out the accords but lacked the political will to do so. He called on the political class to reform the economic system that gave rise to the civil conflict. In its report covering the first months of Portillo's administration, MINUGUA said that human rights violations by police continued and that the government had not taken sufficient steps to demilitarize society (see NotiCen, 2000- 09-07).

Former secretary of peace Hector Rosada said people like Rios Montt were holding back the peace. "The problem is that the same actors trying to resolve the errors in the peace process are the ones who committed them," said Rosada. "The last word on important questions lies with Efraim Rios Montt, a man who does not believe in the peace accords." While admitting that progress has been slow, Portillo says that Guatemala is not the same as it was four years ago. He cites as examples of progress the "free and transparent elections, an independent electoral commission, a free press, and state policy free of terror and intimidation."

The URNG issued a statement on the anniversary of the accords, referring to them as the basis for modernization. But the gains made so far were threatened by the poor record of enforcement by Portillo and his predecessor President Alvaro Arzu (1996-2000). The result, said the statement, is a worsening of the economic backwardness, social exclusion, and poverty that provoked the civil conflict. An opinion poll conducted in November by Vox Ciudadana showed that only 6% of Guatemalans still think the accords are important, while 69% have forgotten about them. Forty-three percent said the accords only benefitted the government and the URNG, and only 39% thought they were of general benefit. The reforms mandated in the accords were to have been completed by the end of 2000.

Unable to meet that deadline, on Dec. 13 the government and the URNG agreed on a four-year timetable (Cronograma de Cumplimiento y Verificacion de los Acuerdos de Paz 2000-2004) rescheduling action on the accords. The new timetable was prepared last spring after Portillo had asked the UN to extend MINUGUA's presence beyond the end of its mandate on Dec. 31, 2000. The extension of MINUGUA's stay found support among human rights groups and in Congress, but there was serious opposition, especially from some agricultural organizations.

Ricardo Villanueva, president of the Camara del Agro, said MINUGUA has finished its mission and should leave. MINUGUA's view is that the new schedule of compliance has the same force as the accords themselves, and it intends to monitor and evaluate progress under the new calendar. Former URNG guerrilla commander Arnoldo Noriega said the new calendar does not guarantee completion of the peace accords, and he called for a turnabout in government attitude.

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