

the army constituted a serious obstacle to the commitment to regulate the bearing of arms by private citizens, the Mission found, and a factor leading to acts of violence. Also observed was the emergence of various civilian organizations that carried out surveillance patrols, established curfews and made arrests, which was, according to MINUGUA, incompatible with the objective of strengthening the official security forces.

State officials were frequently implicated in crimes like kidnappings, vehicle thefts and other illegal acts; to purify the security forces, the Ministry of the Interior took certain actions for the dismissal or trial of members of the police, but more needed to be done, according to the Mission, to combat impunity effectively, by professionalizing the National Police, separating police and military functions, and other measures.

With Guatemala going through a critical period, in which genuine compliance with the commitments in the Comprehensive Agreement had become a matter of utmost urgency, MINUGUA recommended that the Government pay special attention to combating impunity, putting an end to the illegal security forces, strengthening the bodies for human rights protection, protecting individuals and entities working to promote those rights, and stopping the proliferation of weapons in private hands. To the URNG General Command, it recommended that it instruct its members to adopt safeguards in carrying out propaganda activities so as to avoid causing danger or fear to the population or damage to its property; instruct its fronts to refrain from confiscating weapons in the custody of CVDCs; and demand that all combatants suspend collection of the so-called "war tax".

Reports of Secretary-General (November/December). On 26 November, the Secretary-General reported [A/51/695-S/1996/998] that the peace process had made considerable headway. The Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and on the Role of the Armed Forces in a Democratic Society, signed on 19 September in Mexico City by the Government and URNG, contained a comprehensive set of provisions for solidifying the democratic institutions in Guatemala, including the executive, legislative and judicial branches of Government. Specifically, under a reformed Constitution, the police were to be restructured and consolidated in a new National Civil Police, which would assume responsibility for internal security, while the army would limit its role to external defence. The contents of that landmark Agreement were consistent with the recommendations of MINUGUA, the Secretary-General noted in his 30 September letter [A/51/410-S/1996/853] transmitting the text of the

Agreement to the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council, and, with its signing, the parties had concluded their negotiations on the substantive part of the agenda agreed on in the 1994 Framework Agreement. What remained to be negotiated were the reintegration of URNG, a definitive ceasefire, constitutional reforms and the electoral regime, and the timetable for implementing and verifying the peace agreements.

On 11 November, the parties confirmed that conditions existed for an agreement to be reached on all pending items and set 29 December as a target date.

The progress at the negotiating table was accompanied by tangible progress in compliance with the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights. According to MINUGUA reports, since the informal cessation of military activities by the parties in late March, there had been no military or civilian casualties related to the armed confrontation, and the Government had started a programme to disarm and demobilize the CVDCs, which was expected to be completed within 30 days after the signing of the final peace agreement. In addition, the Government had made a major effort, in its first year in power, to combat crime, corruption and impunity, removing from office or sanctioning a number of high-ranking officials implicated in criminal activities.

The Government's initiatives, however, had also drawn attention to the gravity of the institutional problems in the fight against impunity. Verification of complaints by MINUGUA revealed specific weaknesses in the administration of justice and law enforcement and pointed to the need to strengthen the relevant institutions. The Mission, therefore, placed increasing emphasis on its institution-building role, and there had been significant progress in pilot projects to improve the efficiency of, and access to, the administration of justice.

With the imminent entry into force of the final agreement, the United Nations would be called upon, as requested by the parties to the Framework Agreement, to verify compliance with the peace accords. Final recommendations on the mandate and structure of the verification mission could not, however, be completed until all agreements were signed. In the meantime, the Secretary-General recommended that the General Assembly extend MINUGUA's mandate for a further three months, until 31 March 1997, at its current strength. Anticipating that the future agreement on the timetable for implementation and verification of the peace accords would provide for a number of urgent implementation measures to be taken before 31 March 1997 and