ance with the Comprehensive Agreement. The peace negotiations were given a fresh impetus when URNG declared, on 20 March, an indefinite suspension of hostilities, followed by the Government’s decision to suspend counter-insurgency actions. As a result, the 6 May Agreement was signed, after which URNG stated that it would stop collecting the so-called "war tax". On 5 June, the parties began negotiations on strengthening civilian power and the future role of the army in a democratic society.

The Congress of the Republic adopted a reform of the military code, making it inapplicable to members of the armed forces implicated in ordinary crimes. In March, the Congress adopted the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (No. 169) and ratified it in June. Steps were taken to include the crime of racial and ethnic discrimination in the Penal Code.

Significant personnel movements occurred within the police force and the military high command, including the retirement of some generals from active duty. Following a government decision, the army began to play an explicit role in fighting organized crime and ordinary offences, with positive initial results, while new heads were appointed for the Public Prosecutor’s Office and COPREDEH.

Important developments were noted in the areas of social conflicts and the public debate on human rights. Tensions rooted in land and labour disputes became more serious, particularly when small-scale farmers invaded agricultural holdings and were subsequently evicted by the authorities.

The lack of public safety and the State’s inadequate response to the situation were cited as factors contributing to a climate in which civilians took the law into their own hands and lynched several alleged criminals. Public debates took place on the imposition of the death penalty for kidnapping and on a possible general amnesty.

MINUGUA found a weakness of institutions for human rights protection, characterized by their insufficient presence in, or total absence from, large areas of the country, as well as by structural shortcomings and pressures restricting their independence, integrity and effectiveness. It also observed with concern the lack of coordination between the entities involved in the judicial process and the absence of a criminal justice policy integrating the bodies responsible for human rights protection. The repeated threats and pressure to which judges and prosecutors were subjected demonstrated, in the Mission’s view, the urgent need to implement special protection programmes and create proper coordination among State institutions. MINUGUA was concerned at the continuing weakness observed in the functioning of the Public Defender’s Office and at the repeated death threats against the Public Prosecutor.

In the current situation of impunity, the majority of serious crimes and violations went unpunished, the Mission noted, largely due to the inefficiency of the bodies responsible for investigation, judgement and punishment, as well as the influence of certain groups, mostly those connected with the State, on those bodies. That grave situation, MINUGUA stated, continued to be the greatest obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights.

Organizations existing on the fringes of State structures, including CVDCs, which used civil insecurity as a pretext of exercising control over their local communities, were a symptom as well as a consequence of the internal armed confrontation and a source of human rights violations; the provision of weapons to CVDC members by