Chapter III
Political and security questions

Americas

In 2004, the United Nations continued to advance the cause of lasting peace, human rights, sustainable development and the rule of law in the Americas.

In Guatemala, peaceful elections in December 2003 and the orderly handover of power in January 2004 brought a sense of relief and renewed optimism. The United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) continued to fulfill its mandate of verifying compliance with the peace accords signed in 1996 between the Government of Guatemala and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca. MINUGUA, in anticipation of the termination of its mandate at the end of the year, continued its two-year phase-down of operations and carried out a transition strategy designed to build national capacity to promote the goals of the peace accords. The formal public closure of the Mission took place in November.

Despite efforts in January by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to end the polarization and build consensus in Haiti, the political and security crisis in that country escalated into violence in February. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide resigned and the constitutional President, Boniface Alexandre, requested UN assistance to restore peace and stability, thereby authorizing international troops to enter Haiti. The Multinational Interim Force (MIF) was immediately deployed and an interim government was selected. May floods and Hurricane Jeanne exacerbated the situation and appeals to donors were made. In view of the unstable and complex security situation, the Security Council established the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which assumed the operations from MIF in June. In December, in response to a number of kidnappings in the capital and warnings of possible increased violence, MINUSTAH conducted an intensive patrolling operation, which resulted in a peaceful and secure environment through the end of the year.

In other developments in the region, the Andean Zone of Peace was established at the fifteenth meeting of the Andean Presidential Council in Ecuador. Cuba denounced new restrictions placed by the United States on visits to Cuba by relatives, family remittances to Cubans and tourist travel. The General Assembly again called on States to refrain from promulgating laws and measures such as the ongoing embargo against Cuba by the United States. It also adopted resolutions on strengthening United Nations cooperation with the Organization of American States and CARICOM.

The General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the situation in Central America in 2005 and decided to consider the item every two years.

On 23 December, by decision 59/552, the General Assembly decided to consider the item “The situation in Central America: progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development” at its resumed fifty-ninth (2005) session.

Central America

Guatemala

Following the successful conclusion of elections in Guatemala in 2003 [YUN 2003, p. 282] for the third time since the signing of the Guatemala peace agreements in 1996 [YUN 1996, p. 168], the orderly handover of power in January brought a sense of relief and renewed optimism to the population. The country continued to make significant progress in consolidating the peace and laid a firmer foundation on which to construct a better future. Notable progress was made in the areas of human rights, demilitarization and the strengthening of civilian authority, and in decentralization, which allowed the increased participation of citizens in decision-making. However, in the socio-economic sphere, especially agrarian reform, progress remained limited, due mainly to inadequate financing.

The United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) (see below) continued to verify the 1996 Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace [YUN 1996, p. 168], signed by the Government of Guatemala and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG), and to monitor compliance with the 2000-2004 verification timetable [YUN 2000, p. 239]. In anticipation of its departure at the end of 2004, MINUGUA continued its two-year phase-down of operations and carried out a transition strategy designed to build na-