

## **TLHRC Briefing**

### ***The International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, CICIG: An Update and Prospects for the Future***

**April 16, 2015**

#### **Rep. McGovern - Opening Remarks**

Good afternoon, and welcome to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's briefing on ***The International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, CICIG: An Update and Prospects for the Future***. I thank all of our panelists for their presence today, and I also thank the staff of the Commission for organizing this briefing.

In 1996, when peace accords brought an end to 36 years of internal armed conflict in Guatemala, we were pretty optimistic about the future. The peace negotiations ended a war that had cost the lives of more than 200,000 people, most of them Mayan. Civil society organizations and the private sector were at the table with the Guatemalan state and the guerrilla insurgency. The final accord addressed problems that were at the heart of the conflict, including agrarian issues, the rights of indigenous peoples, the need for political reform, and human rights.

But today, almost 20 years later, we still cannot say that Guatemala is fully at peace or that democracy has been consolidated. Yes, elections have been held regularly and power has changed hands peacefully. But the existence of powerful criminal networks that are deeply embedded in state institutions, benefit from corruption and undermine the rule of law, is a huge obstacle.

These networks evolved from illegal clandestine groups that began as part of Guatemala's counter-insurgency strategy. In keeping with the peace accords, they were supposed to have been dismantled. Unfortunately, due to weak institutions and lack of political will, that did not happen.

Instead, in the early 2000s, faced with spreading violence, a wave of attacks against human rights defenders, and impunity rates near 100 percent, sectors of Guatemalan society and the international community came together in support of a new strategy to fight the criminal networks and also strengthen local institutions. The Guatemalan government and the United Nations created the International Commission Against Impunity, CICIG for its Spanish initials.

CICIG is an international prosecutorial agency with a mandate to investigate illegal clandestine groups, their operations and financing; dismantle them; and recommend reforms to prevent their reappearance. Nothing like it has existed before.

Since its creation in September 2007, CICIG has opened over 200 investigations implicating dozens of public officials for corruption, links to organized crime and other illicit

activities. It has brought charges against a former president, two national police chiefs, an anti-narcotics czar, and a national prison director. These results have been possible in part because CICIG has enjoyed strong financial and political support from the international community, including the U.S., which has contributed some \$30 million for its operations over the past 8 years.

This afternoon our distinguished speakers, three of whom are from Guatemala, will bring us up to date on the state of human rights and rule of law in Guatemala, and on the role CICIG is playing. We especially look forward to hearing their recommendations, given that CICIG's mandate is scheduled to end this coming September, and Congress is considering proposals to increase U.S. aid to Guatemala and its neighbors. A bipartisan group of Members of Congress, led by Congressman Eliot Engel, recently wrote to President Perez Molina about the importance of extending CICIG's mandate.

Thank you.