Conflict and Foci of Conflict in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador: A Preliminary Assessment

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1. Introduction

This paper[1] is aimed at achieving two objectives, within the framework of the initiative for early response to emerging conflict in four Central American countries developed by the Latin American and Caribbean Platform for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding (PLACPaz), as a part of the Task Force on Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). The first objective is to identify and analyze the existing foci of conflict in Central America based on an assessment of the achievements and scope of implementation of the peace agreements and political agreements aimed at resolving political and military armed conflict and reinstating democracy between the 1980s and 1990s; on a survey on the existing structural conflicts in El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Honduras and the emerging strains and foci of conflict; and on an analysis of the actors involved, both at the regional and extra-regional levels. The second objective is to set the basis for the preparation of an "Early Action Plan for Conflict Prevention in Central America" and to establish the basic elements of an agenda promoted by and through civil society for the implementation of a three-year work plan to define training, monitoring and advocacy objectives, actions and tasks by PLACPaz-member citizens' organizations in the Central American sub-region. A separate paper is being prepared in relation to the second objective to set the basis for consultation and discussion of the work plan by PLACPaz-member civil society networks and organizations, with the participation of other government, non-governmental and inter-governmental actors.

This paper was issued within the framework of a series of projects and programs originally developed by the Regional Coordination for Economic and Social Research (CRIES), as the initiator and coordinator for the Latin American and Caribbean region of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). The first one of these projects was "Conflict mapping in Latin America and the Caribbean", developed between 2002 and 2003[2], and followed by the program "The Role of Civil Society in Conflict Prevention in Latin America and the Caribbean", which began in 2004[3] and is still under development. Several consultation, advocacy, organization, training and research activities have been developed during the past years within the framework of this program. Particularly relevant in this sense has been the ongoing reflection, debate and consultation among PLACPaz member organizations and networks on the creation of an early warning and early response system for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Latin America and the Caribbean, which has been captured in many publications[4], as well as the creation of an inter-regional task force on early warning and early response (EWER) within the framework of the GPPAC. As a result of this process, the Regional Steering Committee of PLACPaz and the Secretariat of this network, which is headed by CRIES, have initiated a pilot project of early response action against violent and/or armed conflict[5] in Central America in the second semester of 2008, with the support of the GPPAC Secretariat.

In this sense, this paper represents one step further towards civil society capacity building in the development of an early warning and early response

system in the region, based on the gradual development of a proprietary conceptual framework in relation to the structural and operational prevention of violent and/or armed conflict and on a learning process over a period of more than five years which has generated an accumulation of positive experiences, as well as lessons learned, which should be useful for its future development. Unlike in other regions in the world, the capacity building process and the articulation with other relevant actors, such as regional and international organizations, governments and different actors of society and the international community, are at an initial stage in our region. Consequently, the challenges ahead are many and varied. Among them, of particular importance is the need to consider the specificities of each sub-region and to adequately reflect them when addressing the particular dynamics of each conflict.

In this context, in order to develop a pilot plan in Central America for the next three years aimed at contributing to the learning and capacity building processes that are already under way, four countries of the sub-region were selected: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. These countries were selected based on their past experience in the development of peace agreements and political agreements aimed at resolving political and military conflict that, with certain differential features, occurred in these four countries and affected the sub-regional and hemispheric environment; on the need to draw a balance of the achievements, scope and limitations of these agreements twenty years after their signing; and on the analysis of potential recurrence of conflict today, under other forms of violence and in different political and institutional contexts associated with the reestablishment of the rule of law and the reinstatement of the democratic system.

In view of the need to conduct an in-depth study on the characteristics of emerging conflict in the four selected countries, a team of regional consultants was appointed to undertake research for this report. Such consultants have vast experience in the analysis of each regional scenario, a wide array of contacts (in particular, with civil society networks and organizations) and showed an open disposition to embark on a process to learn about the perspective of conflict and conflict prevention analysis, and its application. The team was supported by Latin American experts with experience in the peace processes developed in the region and in the conceptual aspects needed to address this report.

Two different methodologies were developed simultaneously throughout the research process: the compilation and analysis of bibliographic information gathered from different sources, such as government entities, international and cooperation organizations, academic sectors and civil society organizations that have studied and assessed the performance of peace agreements, as well as the problems related to their compliance; and a series of interviews aimed at understanding the perspective of different actors on: (1) the current political, social, economic and environmental scenario; (2) the main underlying foci of conflict that may escalate to armed and/or violent conflict; and (3) information on existing conflict prevention programs or projects promoted by the Government or by social organizations or international cooperation entities. To such effect, efforts were made to maintain a balance, to the extent possible, to reflect the geographical, environmental, ethnic, political, economic and social specificities of each country, which are in turn extrapolated to their conflicts.
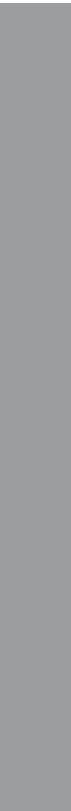
For reasons alien to its purposes, the research process was developed within a limited period of four months, including the discussion of research progress drafts at several meetings of the team of consultants, the re-elaboration and correction of such drafts, the preparation and editorial review of this final document, and a preliminary consultation with civil society networks and organizations held on September 2008 in the city of Guatemala, in line with the regional agenda that is to provide the guidelines of the work plan to be developed based on this document. The speed with which

the first stage of this process had to be developed is no excuse for the different problems that arose through the research process or the limitations or weaknesses that may be found in this first document. However, we regret that a series of difficulties had to be faced throughout the research process in such a short period of time. On the one hand, it would have been essential to have had more time to coordinate the work of the team, beyond the full commitment and dedication evidenced by its members, and to introduce them to the current debate on conflict assessment and analysis methodologies, resorting to the vast existing literature in that regard, both in English and Spanish. On the other hand, a greater availability of time would have made it possible to interview a wider spectrum of people to incorporate more diverse and plural perspectives into the final document, including the contributions of government, international and non-governmental actors, as well as people from the political, union and business sectors. Unfortunately, it was impossible for us to conduct all the scheduled interviews due to the tight agendas and engagements of some of the people we were to interview, especially during the holiday season and summer vacations in the south of the continent.

As a consequence of these and other difficulties, we consider this document to be a preliminary step to set the basis for further consultation and discussion among civil society networks and organizations on an early action plan for the prevention of conflict and collective violence. The incorporation of other relevant actors in this consultation and discussion is, on the other hand, essential to maintain a plural perspective in the elaboration of the early warning action plan and the development of alliances with different stakeholders and actors. Although the team who was engaged in the preparation of this paper is entirely responsible for all its achievements and deficiencies, we would like to extend special thanks to the people who kindly agreed to be interviewed by the team of consultants and we would also like to thank the GPPAC Global Secretariat, acting through the European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP); OXFAM International and the Lutheran World Federation for their support in this study.

Dr. Andrés Serbin,
Executive President of CRIES

2. Conceptual and Contextual Framework: Preliminary Considerations

The concepts and definitions used in this report are in line with the conceptual framework that resulted from a long process of discussion, research and analysis carried out by the members and experts of PLACPaz since 2003, which is aimed at articulating the literature and experiences pre-existing to the characteristics and dynamics of the conflicts of Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole and, at the same time, taking into account the particularities of the respective sub-regions and, in particular, for the purposes of this report, of Central America through the study of four specific countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

Within this framework, we understand that **violent and/or armed** conflict is "*...an intentional confrontation, clash or disagreement between two groups or entities of the same species that manifest hostile intentions against each other, generally in relation to a right, and, for the purpose of preserving, affirming or reestablishing such right, they attempt to break the other's resistance, possibly by resorting to violence...*[6]". This violence is characterized by being collective and by "*...the use of violence by people who identify themselves as part of a group —be it temporary or with a more permanent identity— against another group or cluster of individuals, to achieve political, economic or social goals*"[7]. We define **root causes** as those "*...structural causes ... associated with the relationship between the Government and the citizens, the legitimacy of the Government and its ability to provide basic services... Structural causes of conflict may include inequity, inequality, discrimination, rupture with the rule of law and unequal access to resources of power...*"[8]. Unlike the latter, **proximate causes** are those which lead to the aggravation of *root causes*[9]. Within this context, the **triggers** of a violent conflict are the events that, acting in conjunction with root causes and proximate causes, will set off or escalate armed or violent conflict[10]. Conflict **accelerators** are defined as "*...feedback events that affect the general conditions underlying conflict development, which also have a cumulative interaction effect that may increase escalation.*"[11]. Lastly, we will refer to the **de-accelerators**, which constitute "*...Events such as negotiations and policy reforms that are likely to de-escalate a crisis*"[12].

Based on this set of concepts, succinctly described for the purposes of their practical use in the preparation of this report, and which obviously call for further discussion, this paper begins with a historical evaluation of the peace processes promoted in Central America during the1980s and 1990s of the past century, which brought an end to the armed confrontations in the region, as well as a brief analysis of their scope, achievements and unaccomplished aspects, to then move on to a diagnosis of the specific and transversal conflict and strain factors of the four selected countries which may lead to new violent conflict in the region in the mid or long term, unless they are addressed through multidimensional strategies resulting from the collaboration and complementation of capacities of a wide spectrum of actors of different nature.

Throughout the development of the processes of *Contadora, Esquipulas I* and *Esquipulas II* and of the Peace Agreements subscribed in El Salvador

and Guatemala, the main causes underlying the armed conflicts were gradually and repeatedly identified. These causes are basically associated with the actual lack of democratic processes and effectiveness of rule of law, social and political exclusion and prevailing poverty, which can be linked to the deep social and economic inequalities that have characterized the four societies under study. These three factors were only partially overcome with the implementation of the peace processes and agreements which continue to be potential violence generators, particularly due to the emergence of new factors that tend to aggravate those structural or root causes. A relevant part of the report is devoted to analyzing the roots of existing conflict, among which special attention has to be paid to social and economic problems, given the fact that peace processes failed to resolve issues related to the social and economic marginalization which already existed during the armed conflicts.

In this sense, David Spencer[13] has argued that, in spite of the fact that democratization has been largely responsible for the reduction of armed conflict in Latin America since the 1980s, it has fallen short of delivering the much anticipated social and economic benefits that were expected to come along with it. Within this framework, Spencer pointed out that the economic liberalization and globalization that accompanied democratization have created their own set of unanticipated problems, such as the lack of access for large sectors of society to the benefits of economic growth, which further widened the gap between the rich and the poor in most Latin American countries.

Also, it is important to take into consideration the limitations to the institutional development of the Governments, since there has been a significant deficit in this regard. As stated by a group of non-governmental organizations specialized in the promotion and defense of human rights[14], the combination of "...*political institutions increasingly losing credibility and prevailing poverty and social exclusion situations constitutes a complex scenario rendering democracies vulnerable to the interference of the powers that be...*" further pointing out that "...*outlaw groups operating beyond the rule of law, which used to be a part of military structures, have evolved into a complex network of criminals involved not only in political repression, but also in drug trafficking, money laundering and other forms of organized crime. Although the interference levels are not known exactly, these groups are considered to have penetrated virtually every institutional level of our Governments...*"[15]

On the other hand, in the countries covered in this survey and within the framework of the recent globalization processes, confrontations have been registered in relation to land ownership and exploitation. These situations are brought about by local, farming, indigenous or Afro-descendent communities who defend their right to live off their crops and are against transnational companies that displace traditional productions with monocrops for export or crops for biofuel production; with extraction activities, such as open-pit mining; and with mega tourism developments; and the expansion of the commercial-road infrastructure and the hydroelectric dams, which have an adverse effect on cultivable lands, in addition to producing population movements and environmental alterations. These types of conflict are associated with the limited availability of cultivable land, its unequal distribution, the creation of large landed estates and the pressure and advancement of politically-connected large estate owners over the lands of farming or indigenous communities. On the other hand, the occupation by landless farmers of lands belonging to landowners or companies that own large estates have become a permanent source of strains in the region that may lead to or have derived in violent conflict.

In this context, an element that is always susceptible of causing strains is the inadequate management of social discontent and protest arising from the situations mentioned above. In this sense, the Governments of the region have shown a tendency to focus their efforts on the use of

coactive and repressive social powers, under the justification of fighting crime, both in relation to the current proliferation of groups known as "*maras*", and other forms of organized crime[16], including international terrorism.

Among other conflict factors included in this work, reference is made to migration dynamics, the dependency of Central American economies on migrant remittances and increased deportations, mainly from the United States. These are important aspects to be taken into account in the current scenario, given the difficulties facing the global economy and, in particular, the American economy, to which the economies of the countries under consideration are strongly linked.

Based on these general considerations, and supplementing the conducted analysis, a proposal for an "Early Action Plan for Conflict Prevention in Central America" was drafted for the four countries under consideration. Such proposal, which is based on the findings and conclusions of this document, defines a series of strategic guidelines for the implementation of actions aimed at transforming the contextual and structural conditions that can currently lead to emergency situations and violent conflict escalation in the four Central American countries under analysis.

3. Peace Agreements in Central America and their Impact on the Different Countries

The peace processes and agreements developed in these four countries in the last two decades of the 20th century established mechanisms and procedures that were intended to promote the de-escalation of political and military conflict and marked the history of the Central American Isthmus during the Cold War. As a result of the negotiations pushed for by the parties in conflict and conducted with the participation of relevant actors from the international community, political reforms and adjustments were implemented which, without radically shifting away from the economic and political model in place in the region, made it possible to channel the social and political conflicts of previous years through institutional frameworks and without resorting to violence, while largely shrinking the external military influence that was typical of the Cold War years, and progressively establishing several mechanisms for civilian control of the security forces with a greater or lesser degree of success.

The starting point for this process was, essentially, the ideology advanced in the Esquipulas I and II Declarations. In this context, two sets of successive agreements can be identified, their importance and effects differing in each of the countries under analysis; for Guatemala and El Salvador, these led to a third set of more specific agreements that brought the political and military conflicts to an end.

The first set of agreements involves the Esquipulas I Declaration *(Declaración de Esquipulas I)* of May 25, 1986, recognizing previous peace-making efforts in the area,[17] and expressing the States' willingness to commit to finding a solution to the conflicts.

The second set of agreements involves the Esquipulas II Declaration *(Declaración de Esquipulas II)* of August 7, 1987. This Declaration was intended to define a general operating framework to achieve peace and lays down the "Procedure for Establishing Firm and Lasting Peace in Central America" *(Procedimiento para Establecer la Paz Firme y Duradera en Centroamérica),* which the countries in the region undertook to carry out in a programmatic, continued and effective manner. The ten issues addressed in said document revolved around the following: "(1) national reconciliation (dialogue, amnesty and reconciliation); (2) cease-fire; (3) democratization (free press, political and partisan pluralism, abrogation of situations such as states of emergency or exception); (4) free elections; (5) end of aid to irregular forces or insurgent movements; (6) banning of use of territory to attack other States; (7) negotiations over security, verification, control and restriction of armaments; (8) refugees and displaced persons; (9) cooperation, democracy and freedom for peace and development; and (10) international verification and follow-up, with the creation of the International Verification and Follow-Up Commission *(Comisión Internacional de Verificación y Seguimiento)* and the Support and Facilities given to the Reconciliation and Verification and Follow-Up Mechanisms. To control the progress made in the peace process, responsibility over this Commission was entrusted to the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS).

Over time, the Contadora and Esquipulas initiatives would become a Latin and Central American peacemaking alternative leading to an international correlation favoring dialogue as a means of conflict resolution, the

de-militarization of the region via disarmament, the handling of the humanitarian crisis, the outlawing of irregular or insurgent groups, and the democratization of the countries involved in the conflict.

These agreements had their greatest impact in **Nicaragua**. The signing of the Esquipulas II agreement had a decisive influence on the holding of the 1990 elections and the subsequent stabilization and conflict-dismantling process in that country,[18] up to the signing of the Sapoá Agreement *(Acuerdo de Sapoá)* in Rivas, Nicaragua, on March 23, 1988, under which the Sandinist administration of Nicaragua and the Contra forces[19] reached a cease-fire and agreed to the Contra becoming involved in the country's political life. Later on, the Montelimar Declaration *(Declaración de Montelimar)* of April 1990 provided for the immediate demobilization of the Contra under the Joint Demobilization Plan and provided support to a series of agreements, including the Protocol of Procedure for the Transfer of Presidential Authority *(Protocolo de Procedimiento de Transferencia del Mando Presidencial)* —which implemented the Toncontín Agreement signed in Honduras on March 23, 1990— and the Agreements for Concerted Economic and Social Action *(Acuerdos de Concertación Económica y Social)*. These agreements provided a framework of basic political stability for the government's transition from the Sandinist National Liberation Front (FSLN) to the National Opposition Union (UNO) and the jumpstarting of the Nicaraguan economy. As a result, the Nicaraguan armed conflict came to an end and Nicaragua's political institutions were reinstated.

As already noted, a third set of agreements stemming from the other two sets had to be implemented in Guatemala and El Salvador. **El Salvador's** Peace Agreements of 1990 and 1992, signed under UN intervention, reached beyond the agenda of substantive Esquipulas II agreements, following several relatively unsuccessful bilateral meetings for dialogue between the insurgents and the Salvadorian government. In December 1989, following the guerrilla offensive that had started the previous month and the resulting response of the government forces, both the government of El Salvador and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) separately sought the good offices of Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, the then Secretary General of the UN, to negotiate a solution to the armed conflict. For such purpose, Pérez de Cuellar entrusted this task to Álvaro de Soto, his Personal Representative for Central America. Once under way and in spite of the multiple tensions, the negotiation process became irreversible and, following several negotiation rounds leading to partial but important agreements, the final agreements that put an end to the armed conflict came into place in January 1992. The preventive measures taken to prevent a relapse into armed conflict included several aspects of military reform, such as a material reduction of the Armed Forces, the complete demobilization of the FMLN and its integration into political life within the framework of the democratic constitutional rules. They also included a far-reaching amnesty that applied to both the Armed Forces and the insurgents, in spite of the serious questions this raised.[20] The resulting military and police reform would bring about a radical change in the performance of the State's defense and public security roles as discharged in El Salvador thus far. Up to that moment, both the Armed Forces and the Police were run by the Ministry of Defense and Public Security. The segregation of both institutions was more than a mere formality, as it entailed changes in their vision, territorial jurisdiction, institutional policy and procedures. The military reform caused the dissolution of different elite military units as well as intelligence and paramilitary structures of the Armed Forces, a material reduction in the number of officers and a change in institutional doctrine, among other relevant aspects. The police reform entailed the dissolution of the three existing police bodies and the creation of a new civilian-run police force.

The armed conflict was thus ended without changing the basic conditions of the economic and social environment.

Peace negotiations in **Guatemala** could not start in the 1980s, in spite of the regional agreements. It was not until March 29, 1990 that, under the Oslo Agreement, the administration of Jorge Serrano Elías and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG) agreed to engage in a process that

would end in the signing of a peace agreement. Two moments were crucial in this process: the Mexico Agreement of April 25, 1991 and the Querétaro Agreement of July 25, 1991. By means of the former, the parties agreed to settle the conflict through political channels and defined the negotiation agenda. The latter agreement set the proposed conditions required to strengthen functional and participatory democracy. The substantive agreements laid down the general rules for the restructuring of the national Government. These include: the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights *(Acuerdo Global sobre Derechos Humanos)*; the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples *(Acuerdo sobre Identidad y Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas)*; the Agreement on Socioeconomic Aspects and Agrarian Situation *(Acuerdo sobre Aspectos Socioeconómicos y Situación Agraria)*; the Agreement on constitutional reforms and URNG's integration into Guatemala's political life *(Acuerdo para las reformas constitucionales e incorporación de la URNG a la vida política)*; and the Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and the Role of the Army in a Democratic Society *(Acuerdo sobre Fortalecimiento del Poder Civil y Función del Ejército en una Sociedad Democrática)*. The operating agreements were intended to implement peace measures as a "tangible" goal. Among others, these agreements included the Accord for the Resettlement of the Populations Displaced by the Armed Conflict *(Acuerdo para el Reasentamiento de las Poblaciones Desarraigadas por el Enfrentamiento Armado)* and the Accord to Establish a Commission for Historical Clarification *(Acuerdo sobre el Establecimiento de la Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico)*. The peace process in Guatemala was seriously hit when the constitutional reforms covered by the peace agreements were subjected to and rejected in the October 1999 referendum. This meant a step back in the political agenda, particularly as regards important subjects such as political parties and political reforms, dampening the possibilities for a more predominant role of civil society in the representative political process.

As for **Honduras**, it should be noted that even though there was no internal armed conflict such as those in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, there was widespread violence,[21] repression against the population, exclusion of leftist political forces from the political and electoral scenario, and consolidation of military power. Consequently, a formal peace agreement —aside from the contents of the Esquipulas II agreements— was not on the peace-making agenda for Honduras. The peace process can, however, be framed within the reforms aimed at consolidating the democratic political system and demilitarization that grew particularly strong from 1990 onwards.[22] By the time the Esquipulas II Declaration was adopted, Honduras had already consolidated electoral processes and put civilian governments in place that allowed representatives of the traditional parties —the Liberal Party (PL) and the National Party (PN)— to come to power in a military-controlled "tutelary democracy."[23] On the other hand, the Esquipulas II Declaration agenda was viewed as completed, as the commitments undertaken through the Declaration were satisfactorily met, particularly as regards the alignment with the policies advanced by the US in the Nicaraguan conflict, which included setting up military bases on Honduran territory, categorizing them as extraterritorial and vesting each member of the American armed forces deployed in Honduras with diplomatic status. Training for and the organization of Contra logistics and operations on Nicaraguan soil were done out of these bases. Accordingly, peacemaking in Honduras involved the dismantling of the Nicaraguan armed conflict, as a result of the alignment with the interests underlying the US policy against the Sandinist Nicaragua and the Salvadorian armed insurgency. The most notable consequence of the Honduran process was the decreased direct influence of the Armed Forces and the United States in armed conflicts in Central America.[24] Demilitarization in Honduras reached a point such that a return to authoritarianism and military involvement in the political scenario is not anticipated for either the short or the medium term.

To sum up, peace agreements in the region played a decisive role in the ending of the political-military conflicts in the four countries under analysis. It is owing to such agreements that common starting points were established in all four countries for the political democratization of the region and such countries' very own societies. As already noted, however, these agreements did not contribute to overcoming the structural conditions that still influence the region's conflicts and represent deep-seated sources for a potential resurfacing of violence.

4. Peace Agendas and the Real Agenda in Central America

As indicated in the preceding section, peace agreements played a crucial peace-making role in Central America and, generally speaking, their terms were complied with in the four countries under analysis in this report. There are, however, a number of limitations that still keep social conflicts from being resolved. Also, no peace agreement managed to anticipate the immigration-related social and economic conflicts or the environmental conflicts that exist today.

During the war in **Nicaragua**, the national defense commitments against the counter-revolutionary forces and the internal pressure of un-armed opposition groups —both supported by the US— pushed very strongly for moving forward in negotiating the peace agreements, while rendering further escalation of the conflict virtually unsustainable. The FSLN sought to use the Esquipulas II process to defeat the Contra and bring legitimacy to the Sandinist regime through the 1990 elections.[25] Back then, the FSLN failed to anticipate that this strategy would cause the opposition to prevail in the elections.[26] The peace-making process and the set of agreements thus produced instant results and became the framework of understanding for Contra disarmament and for transitioning to a non-Sandinist administration. With the UNO's win in 1990, the agreements had to be quickly implemented in order to allow institutional continuity and prevent a relapse into the armed conflict. On the other hand, because of the feeble balance of forces in the difficult political transition to a representative democracy, informal agreements had to be reached between the traditional elite and the new economic and financial elites that were formally back in power, and the newly born Sandinist elite,[27] all impacting at the institutional level. The 1990 Transition Protocols (*Protocolos de Transición*) initiated a process that establishes obligations for the government, the UNO and the FSLN, forcing them to abide by the constitutional order and causing the government to demobilize the Contra and provide broad guarantees to the Armed Forces. In exchange for that, FSLN would accept the national, non-partisan and subordinated-to-civilian-power status, as well as the progressive shrinkage, of the Armed Forces.[28] The FSLN further managed to maintain significant clout in the political-military structure of the Nicaraguan State, and to keep control over of a circle of organized civil society organizations.[29]

In **Honduras**, which is the country that was the least affected by armed violence, the fostering of new agendas and social programs allowed the creation of spaces for civil society, particularly after the tragedy of Hurricane Mitch, which gave way to a long country reconstruction process. Society and the Government redefined their relations with international cooperation, as a result of which international cooperation became the most influential operating actor. In recent years, international cooperation —at the government, non-governmental and inter-government level— has in fact supported the political and judicial reform processes as well as the efforts seeking further decentralization and greater transparency in public administration. An interesting phenomenon is currently developing at the municipal level, with the organization of open meetings to discuss different subjects, such as ecological issues and transparency, and to

propose solutions to problems that might cause an increase in conflicts. According to certain analysts, this is the most important citizenship-building process since the beginning of the democratization process.[30] This notwithstanding, the political co-opting of social organizations by political parties, among other factors, seems to have weakened the strength gained by such organizations in the post-Mitch years;[31] there is, however, a particular capacity for coordination between historic organizations and various types of emerging groups, including some that are more institutional or more closely related to the State, as evidenced by the crisis over the hunger strike launched by the anti-corruption prosecutors and the recent occupation of the Women's Institute to protest the resignation of the Institute's Executive Director, both in 2008.

In **El Salvador**, the post-peace-agreement developments significantly changed the actors involved in social and political life and created new dynamics in the political system and the legal and institutional framework. The FMLN became the main opposition party; today, after different changes and purges, the FMLN might win the next elections and take over the Executive after 20 years of government control by the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA). Moreover, the Armed Forces managed to accept military reform and become subject to civilian power. Since the 1990s, military officers have performed public security duties in joint patrolling efforts run by the new National Civil Police Department *(Policía Nacional Civil)*, which comes to show that, in any event, their role extends beyond their traditional border and national territory defense duties. This is why other actors are bringing such measure (the use of the armed forces for public security activities such as land patrolling of rural areas) into question.

An analysis of the Salvadorian case shows that, in spite of the achievements, there are elements of the peace agreements that are yet to be fulfilled. For instance, in its March 1993 report, the Truth Commission presented the results of its investigation concerning cases of violence between 1980 and 1992; the report evidenced greater involvement of government forces in human rights violations. The Truth Commission issued recommendations concerning the rights of the victims and recommendations on structural changes, including a more in-depth judicial reform. Virtually none of these recommendations has materialized.

As to structural prevention, the peace agreements in El Salvador fostered state reforms aimed at democratizing the country, including, most notably, the judicial reform, the creation of the Human Rights Advocacy Office (PDDH), electoral system reforms and a program for addressing economic and social issues. However, the agenda was quite restricted in this last respect. The greatest development is perhaps to be found in the creation of the Economic and Social Forum in 1992, which provided for dialogue between the different national sectors, including large businesses. This forum was soon closed in 1993.[32] The Geneva Agreements of April 4, 1990 provided that the main goals of the Peace Agreements were: "... *to end the armed conflict by political means as speedily as possible, promote the democratization of the country, guarantee unrestricted respect for human rights and reunify Salvadorian society.*"[33] Nineteen years later, very few still maintain that these meant anything other than a peace process merely aimed at achieving the first of the aforementioned goals, *i.e.* "...*to end the armed conflict by political means as speedily as possible*..." without more efficiently addressing the deep-rooted causes underlying the armed conflict.[34]

In **Guatemala**, the ambitious Peace Agenda was undermined by the result of the 1999 referendum. Still, this did not keep some of the commitments from finally becoming a reality. The true problem is that, even if a commitment is in fact reached, it does not translate into the actual achievement of the underlying goals. From a political standpoint, even though the measures stemming from the Peace Agreements created an expectation for a more participatory democratic system, the fact

remains that very few reforms have managed to consolidate the goal of greater participation by the social sectors. The low level of institutionalization of the partisan system and the system's lack of entrenchment in society cause the political system to be highly volatile and strongly connected to groups holding economic and political clout in the country. In combination with an insurgency that is incapable of taking on the role of an important political actor, this has prevented the Peace Agenda from materializing, thus leading to a rather unrepresentative system that is not enough to channel the demands of the population. These features of the political system have translated into problems hindering the achievement of other goals of the Agenda. In the social and economic area, the budgetary weight of the Agenda has come to stand in competition with the prevailing interests of today's economic policy. Accordingly, even though —in spite of material delays— the agreed-upon levels of public spending in health, education, housing and justice have been reached, the fact is that such levels remain insufficient to represent an improvement in structural social and economic conditions.

Likewise, certain achievements have been made as far as security goes: the security doctrine was redefined to fit a peace context; the Army was legally banned from becoming involved in police activities; a National Civil Police department was created and public spending in national defense was cut down. However, at the same time, violations exist as regards the Army's involvement in civil intelligence services, the use of extreme violence by the public security authorities, the Army's ongoing involvement in public security activities, particularly in connection with criminal matters, and the lack of legal frameworks regulating the possession of firearms and the private security forces under a human-rights-oriented approach.

5. Current Foci of Conflict in the Countries under Analysis

The foregoing historical summary and the analysis of its impact on the sub-regional and national scenarios of each one of the case studies allow us to more clearly identify the current foci of conflict in Central America. At the work meetings, the team of consultants and the sub-regional coordinator of this research decided to establish, based on the findings of the process, the following foci of conflict:

a. *social and political conflict*;

b. *social and economic conflict*; and

c. *social and environmental conflict*.

a. Social and Political Conflict

The peace agreements bestowed on the countries of the region a set of democratic reforms in the following areas: demilitarization, judicial system, institutionalization of the Ombudsman, new civil law enforcement, new electoral authorities, increased freedom of participation in the partisan system, as well as constitutional and law reforms that constituted major historical advances and resulted in a period of greater stability and governance vis-à-vis preceding decades.

However, at the beginning of this century, there was a reduction of democratic spaces through homeland security policies aimed at exerting population control by limiting individual liberties such as the right to privacy, free movement, due process of law, among others, within the framework of the fight against terrorism following the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States.

Some conflict-generating factors that were not or hardly visible at the end of the last decade of the past century, such as ecological issues, corruption and lack of transparency, and social and criminal violence, have strongly emerged in recent years. A particular expression of conflict that is shared across the region, although to a lesser extent in Nicaragua, is criminal or organized-crime-related violence of considerable magnitude. Criminal violence has resulted in the adoption of homeland security policies that may be considered "unsuccessful" [35] since they have strengthened the trend towards more militarized and interventionist law enforcement machineries with increased operating capacity, yet without developing at the same time their technical research capacity, alienated from the community and with limited achievements. Moreover, organized crime infiltration has been observed within their own ranks.

Even within the framework of the democratic reforms, the formal and informal powers that be have increased their scope of influence on the legal systems, the public defender's office and law enforcement. This influence leads to stagnation and deterioration in terms of administration of justice and security, which stems from the peace agreements, in addition to institutional inefficiency and impunity.

Another important aspect is the exclusion and lack of dialogue and consultation which perpetuate conflict among the Government and civil society groups that have no influence on formal political process through traditional democratic avenues. This leads to increased distrust by such sectors with respect to these political channels, thus generating political conflict. Special attention should be paid to the specific cases of Guatemala and Nicaragua.

In **Guatemala**, there is a growing perception that the government lacks the capacity to deal with issues that are considered a priority by public opinion (security, employment, inequality, etc.) The territorial development of political parties is not highly institutionalized, and the ethnic component is systematically excluded from politics. As a result of all this, popular participation is very low in Guatemala and the *status quo* is maintained. This situation is both the cause and effect of conflict since; on the one hand, the lack of institutional solutions justifies the use of spontaneous violence to deal with public problems such as crime, but, at the same time, the degree of abandonment of certain regions and their total lack of influence on political decisions increase the risk that they become engaged in actions linked to organized crime, whether of a violent nature or not.

In **Nicaragua**, the pact between the FSLN and the Constitutionalist Liberalist Party (PLC) was renewed in 2004, with the twofold purpose of restricting the powers of the Executive Branch through of a sort of "semi-parliamentarism", particularly regarding PLC's objective to protect the former president who was facing criminal charges for alleged political corruption[36], and maintaining the election projections of the FSLN which later put Daniel Ortega in office. This was achieved by granting greater powers to parliament, which sparked a governance crisis that called for the intervention of the OAS to stabilize the situation. Such stabilization was only achieved when the objectives of the two parties to the Pact were guaranteed.

a.1. Electoral-Political Conflict

In the four countries subject to analysis in this study, until 2001, political parties maintained active dialogue with civil society organizations, which trend has declined at present[37].

In **Honduras**, according to the interviews held, the population maintains confidence in the democratic system, but not in political parties, which only enjoy 2% credibility[38]. Political reforms, which reached their peak in 2004, were more of a systemic than a transformational nature[39] and have failed to make any significant contributions in terms of transparency. The two major political parties in Honduras, the PL and the PN, have been adversely affected by tendencies towards internal divisions and growing struggles for power; by the co-option by large groups having great economic power; and the deterioration of their relations with civil society organizations, all this in addition to the weakness of the Electoral Tribunal. This situation brings about conflict conditions, both within the political parties owing to the struggles for power, and also outside them, due to the deterioration of transparency and the lack of open dialogue with other actors of society.

In **Nicaragua**, on occasion of the constitutional reform of 2000, the National Assembly passed Electoral Law No. 331 which, with constitutional status, was aimed at restricting political pluralism and democratic representation in favor of the political pact signed between the FSLN and the PLC[40]. In some cases, the electoral roll and the situation of certain municipalities in autonomous regions

have stirred controversy, as registered by *Ética y Transparencia*[41] and the resolution issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (CIDH), which, among others, resolved and recommended: (a) to cease parallel and irregular issuance of identity cards; and (b) to bring a solution to the "legal limbo" of five municipalities located in autonomous regions, both of the Southern Atlantic and the Northern Atlantic areas[42]. On the other hand, political control in the Caribbean areas of the country becomes a conflictive issue due to the Governance Agreement executed between the Misquito Yatama party, the most organized party of the region, and the FSLN. Such agreement results in a vertical shift of political power, aimed at establishing the territorial control, political hegemony and identity homogenization of the miskitos, in spite of the fact that Yatama intends to represent all the ethnic groups of the Nicaraguan Caribbean, which is not well regarded by the rest. Furthermore, the area is still a space for the expression of peasant and environmental struggles, and an area prone to criminal activity related to drug trafficking.

In **Guatemala**, we can talk about a "deficient democracy", where the political party system is characterized by low institutionalization levels, and political parties fail to fulfill their roles as intermediaries between the citizens and the Government. At present, at the municipal level, 62.5% of political party leaders admit not having close relations with local civil society groups. Moreover, 81% of them point out that their parties never had a candidate proposed by such groups, which reflects the low influence of civil society organizations on the process of selection of electoral candidates[43]. This is a party system, with limited links to civil society, whose aim is to serve as a platform to obtain votes. The electoral system allows parties to be formed with minimum requirements and, thus, even the stronger parties show a virtual lack of organization and affiliation in the districts[44]. This comes to evidence that the political system is formally democratic and representative but, in practice, it is alienated from society. For certain civil society representatives[45], this constitutes a source of conflict, since there is no actual mechanism to channel citizens' demands through traditional political spaces and, therefore, many resort to pressure groups, which are not necessarily non-violent[46]. This particular phenomenon in Guatemala has a twofold origin: the first cause is that the dismantling of the military dictatorship in this country did not take place within the framework of the Peace Agreements, but before them, in 1986, with the beginning of the balance between forces. Thus, formal democracy did not stem from the articulation of political platforms and projects of multiple actors but from an elitist agreement[47]. The second cause is based on the fact that when the armed conflict came to an end, the presence of a left-wing political party resulting from the incorporation of armed groups into politics was not consolidated in the political system. It should be noted that Guatemala went through one of the most violent elections in 2008, when Alvaro Colom was elected President. The large amount of political-social activists that were assassinated led international organizations to adopt different positions and motivated the presence of a European Union mission to observe the elections.

In the case of **El Salvador**, the major political parties have been characterized by leadership control dynamics and they have failed to adopt the practice of party elections, which were temporarily implemented by the FMLN, and subsequently eliminated, in view of the internal divisions they caused. In 2008, ARENA's first attempt to hold party elections resulted in certain political weakening. This has not led to a legitimacy crisis of the political system. However, the high levels of political polarization generate strains due to the severe ideological confrontation existing between the two major parties, ARENA and the FMLN. As a result of this, the country has suffered periodical transition crises following election processes. The remaining parties tend to have a far more limited representation, although some of them have found themselves in advantageous positions when it came to breaking close legislative ties between ARENA and the FMLN.

In the short term, at the beginning of 2009, with local elections to be held in January and March, this form of political- and party-related conflict may lead to increased violence among militants during the electoral campaigns. For the first time, opinion polls indicate a chance of alternation in the Executive Power in favor of the FMLN[48]. Although the OAS, the EU and other international organizations are relevant in the electoral review process, such process is of a formal nature and political parties have done very little to overcome certain deficiencies affecting the process, to the extent that some experts consider that in the event of a "tie" in the elections, fraudulent actions could be committed to favor one of the candidates[49]. Such hypothetical situation could severely affect the credibility in the democratic system of the country and result in higher levels of political-social conflict.

Another issue that calls for attention is the indication that certain political parties, regardless of their ideological orientation, are resorting to groups that exert violence or strengthen their capacities to do so. The media has reported claims of threats and coercion by young gangsters or radicals. In general, these situations tend to worsen during election periods.

a.2. Corruption and Lack of Transparency

There is a widespread perception among the populations of the four countries that corruption practices take place in public administration and that authorities show no intention of investigating such behavior and prosecuting the officers who are responsible for such acts.

In **Honduras**, this issue has aroused great interest among the population and civil society organizations, resulting in the development of citizen participation processes through the so-called municipal "*social audits*", aimed at promoting spaces for citizen control in relation to the use of resources by municipal governments. The National Committee for the Defense of Human Rights estimates that this process has originated a relevant change for democracy in terms of civil society participation during the past decade[50]. On the other hand, social conflict situations occurred in the first semester of 2008 when a group of prosecutors of the Public Defender's Office engaged in a hunger strike to protest against the allegedly illegal closure of investigations related to corruption by public servants. The protest brought together several social sectors and had an impact on the media, to the extent that a parliamentary committee of investigation was formed; however, such committee eventually validated the closure of the cases that motivated the protest.

In **Nicaragua**, there is no mechanism or structure to articulate a national planning system including an accountability process. The absence of a national planning law reveals the Legislative Power's lack of participation in this matter.

In **Guatemala**, the Organic Budget Law establishes that the public budget is the annual expression of the Government plans, within the framework of an economic and social development strategy. Therefore, planning is statutory. Paradoxically enough, there is no regulation forcing public institutions to submit the operating statement and balance sheet in relation to such plans, evidencing the weakness of the current planning and control mechanism.

In **El Salvador**, although corruption acts are constantly reported, even by the United States Embassy, there is no sign of efforts by the Government to overcome impunity. Even the Court

of Accounts, which controls public finances, was co-opted by a political party throughout the post-war period. This generates conditions in the political system that lead to public outcry over corruption scandals.

a.3. Social Violence and Organized Crime

According to some opinions[51], the Central American Governments are "captive" or "kidnapped" entities, due to the influence that organized crime, in particular drug trafficking, has on the appointment of political and judicial officers. Other studies define them as "failed Governments"[52]. By this they mean that they are weak Governments in which the central Government has little effective control over its entire territory.

Guatemala, **Honduras** and **El Salvador** have the highest homicide rates of the region and the efforts of the Governments to reduce the rates of criminal violence, be it organized or not, evidence their institutional weakness, their limited crime control and their alienation from the problems of the communities, including the infiltration of organized crime groups within law enforcement ranks. Such levels of violence and their inadequate management by the Governments constitute another critical factor for democratic stability.

In 2007, there were 3262 homicides in **Honduras**; an average of 8.1 homicides per day and 49.9 per 100,000 inhabitants. This makes Honduras the third most violent country of the region in terms of homicides[53].

In 2004, **El Salvador** registered the highest homicide rate in Central America. In 2006, it reached an average of 10.76 homicides per day and 55 per 100,000 inhabitants. Although it showed a slight decrease in 2007 to 49.7 homicides per hundred thousand inhabitants, El Salvador is still one of the most violent countries of the region. Between January 2004 and April 2008, there were 15,153 homicides (9.58 per day; 213.42 per 100 thousand inhabitants according to the latest population estimates and 273.32 according to the 2007 census). Impunity and the high level of organized crime activity are considered to be alarming. Criminal violence, which can be identified as one of the most relevant current foci of conflict, is linked, in spite of its multiple structural causes, to the weakness of the Government in the law enforcement and criminal justice system arenas. Prevention in this sense is virtually absent from public policy[54].

The anti-gang strategies of recent years have drawn attention away from the Government's capabilities to control organized crime and ordinary crime mainly associated with violent crimes. Within this framework, organized crime has gained ground and there are no signs that public policy makers are going to offer a comprehensive solution to this problem. The Government has failed to develop a comprehensive criminal policy and has chosen to apply authoritarian public security policies, based on the strengthening of criminal legislation and awarding a more interventionist and deterrent role to the National Civil Police (PNC), to the detriment of crime investigation, community relations and prevention activities[55]. Within this framework, certain practices in violation of human rights carried out by members of law enforcement and military institutions were identified, some of which are even associated with the practice of extrajudicial executions.

Although there is a clearly defined geographic concentration, conflict linked to the increase in social violence and of a highly criminal nature is a major issue mainly in **Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador**.

In **Nicaragua**, the issue of criminality is not as marked as in the other countries and, therefore, it is not regarded as a priority issue for public debate. However, it is still a problem. The combination of deteriorating social and economic conditions and the lack of real and effective presence of the Government in the autonomous Caribbean areas render it an area prone to drug trafficking and a potential focal point of conflict, although its situation is not even comparable to the criminality in the Northern Triangle nations.

With the exception of the Nicaraguan case, in the three other countries covered by this report the issue of violence and criminality is mainly characterized by three conditions, which raise major concern:

1- *Atomization of conflict*. Unlike the violence that took place during the political-military armed conflict of the 1980s, today the violent expression of conflict is characterized by its atomization in multiple disputes spread across the countries.

2- *Depoliticization of conflict*. Unlike past armed violence situations, where both sides defended opposing political projects, a relevant part of current violence is remarkably depoliticized. Except for certain foci of conflict linked to rural and environmental issues, and the effective acknowledgement of human rights, social violence mainly responds to reasons that are not of an ideological nature (organized crime, drug trafficking, social discontent, youngster gangs, etc.).

3- *Lack of canalization*. Given its degree of atomization and depoliticization, violence is inevitably a complex factor for the Government to deal with. Unlike past political conflicts, were it was possible to use negotiated means of resolution, this option does not seem to apply to the social violence observed today. This, in turn, eventually leads to the toughening of measures to neutralize violence through repressive means.

b. *Social and Economic Conflict*

The Government democratization processes that took place at the beginning of the 1990s were accompanied by the adoption of structural adjustment policies, in a scheme aimed at the reduction of the Government, deregulation, liberalization of trade and macroeconomic growth associated with the market dynamics, in accordance with the prescriptions of the Washington Consensus[56]. The benefits that resulted from the implementation of this model were distributed in a wildly uneven fashion, adversely affecting large segments of the population.

El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala are ranked 103, 110, 115 and 118 respectively out of 177 countries in the World Human Development Report 2007. Recorded data shows that although the respective economies of these countries grow annually at an acceptable rate, they do so amidst profound inequalities. These are countries where:

- At least one third of their populations live in marginal conditions (37.2% in the case of El Salvador, 47.9% in the case of Nicaragua, 50.7% in the case of Honduras and 56.2% in the case of Guatemala);

- At least 50% of the households live under poverty conditions (64.5% in Honduras, 58.5 % in El Salvador, 51% in Guatemala and 46,2 % in Nicaragua);

- In Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, poverty percentages are generally higher in rural areas (at least 60 out of 100 households are poor in rural areas). Guatemala presents the most dramatic situation, with 72 households out of 100;

- Public investment in sensitive areas for large social groups is low. Public expenditure on health presents levels that range from 2.3% of GDP in the case of Guatemala to 4% in Honduras. Public expenditure on education is even lower (2.8% of GDP in El Salvador and 3.1% in the case of Nicaragua). These figures indicate that the allocation of resources to these areas is not massive enough to bear a relevant impact on the health and education of the population[57].

These quantitative data show slow progress in human development, compared to the progress in political democracy and unconstitutionality, which reflects the consequences of the fact that the peace processes failed to overcome the structural economic and social causes underlying the political-military armed conflict.

In spite of the adverse effects of neoliberal policies in major sectors of the population, there have been no strains or conflict in Central America revealing discontent among these groups affected by the economic and market conditions. Some experts[58] argue that certain cultural factors, such as the fear sparked by wars or repression, and the deterrent role of mass media and other actors (such as Churches) tend to discourage organized citizen protest and mobilization. Furthermore, surveys show that the migration flow has a twofold role in guaranteeing stabilization. On the one hand, by massively expelling adult citizens to other countries, it reduces social pressure to acquire goods and services. On the other hand, these citizens, who mainly relocate to the United States, generate a total flow of remittances that partially offsets the outflow of foreign currency of their countries of origin. This could partly explain social demobilization[59].

At present, and in relation to the issues mentioned above, a more complex situation is shaping up as a result of external factors, within the framework of the global financial market crisis of the end of 2008. This scenario will affect the countries under analysis in the short or medium term. Moreover, there is an additional pressure that would affect the functionality of migration as a safety valve for the social situation in Central America: the American labor market contraction will halt migration to the country and the potential intensification of its anti-immigration policy may lead to the deportation or self-deportation of a large number of Central American citizens.

This would, in turn, further aggravate the reduction of migrant remittances to this region. This scenario could increase the poverty and social exclusion levels of a large portion of citizens, thus increasing the tendency towards social protest and unrest, which the Governments covered in this report are not prepared to address in a coherent and efficient manner.

c. _Social and Environmental Conflict_

Environmental conflict is an important source of conflict, which manifests itself in the opposition of communities and/or ecological organizations to the interests of local or international groups and companies, some of which are supported by the Governments.

During 2007, there were confrontations in **El Salvador** between the community and the police over the construction of a solid waste treatment plant in the community of Cutumay Camones (Santa Ana) and protests to prevent the privatization of the water supply service in the community of Suchitoto. This situation led to the implementation of an anti-terrorist law against social activists who were imprisoned and prosecuted for several months and eventually acquitted[60].

In **Honduras**, the existing conflict caused by the over-exploitation of forest resources has sparked the protest and mobilization of communities and ecological organizations for some years. In addition to this, there are conflict situations in relation to the development of mega tourism or hydroelectric projects, especially in the territory of the indigenous peoples and the _Garifuna_[61] population.

The lack of Government protection to the populations affected by this type of commercial projects was evidenced by a recent interpretation of the Supreme Court of Justice which validated an executive order permitting the acquisition of land located 40 km landward of the territorial sea baseline, which was a constitutionally protected area. This resulted in a frenzy of land acquisition by international companies[62].

In this sense, the current development model promotes activities of higher profitability and based on the over-exploitation of limited natural resources with strong environmental impact. The legislation in force allows this to happen. It is common practice for all countries to breach agreements protecting indigenous territorial rights, such as the Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO), to favor the development of mining or hydroelectric projects or projects involving the extensive use of land for the production of feedstock for biofuel, to the detriment of food production.

At the same time, the social/environmental conflict is related to the denial of credit, technical support and land ownership or land use grants to production sectors, mainly farmers, indigenous and afro-descendent people. In addition to the widespread inequality in the distribution of land and agrarian loans to farmers, no significant progress has been made to solve conflicts over land registration.

Within the framework of the free trade agreements, national agricultural and livestock producers compete at disadvantage with the massive import of similar products that, being subsidized in their countries of origin, are placed in domestic markets at lower prices.

In **Guatemala**, the conflicts over the Sálala hydroelectric project, the mining exploitation in San Juan Sacatepéquez and Izabal, and the oil exploitation in Petén and Alta Verapaz have stood out.

In **Nicaragua**, we can mention the international conflict over mining in Crucitas (San Carlos, Costa Rica), the Copalar Hydroelectric Project and the contamination of the San Juan River bank, as well as La Chureca conflict, and the strains associated with wood extraction in the Caribbean, El Castillo and San Juan del Norte areas.

6. Actors involved

The mere review of peace agreements and the evolution of their implementation to date has contributed to identify the transformations of the main actors in the four case studies. Particular emphasis has been placed on the relation between the political power and civil society organizations, the Church, the economically powerful sectors and cooperation entities.

As regards the actors that played a prominent role during the armed conflicts, peace processes led to their disappearance, demobilization, reduction and transformation, which changes also affected the organizations and institutions controlled or decisively influenced by them.

Given the emphasis on the peace processes in the region, which were focused on ending the armed confrontation as soon as possible, the first actors to be affected were the armed forces of the countries involved and the combatants of revolutionary movements. Within this framework, reforms were introduced at the institutional level mainly in the legal system and the electoral system and a feeble approach to address socioeconomic problems was developed. In addition to this, new institutions were formed.

A fundamental and common aspect of the Peace Agreements of Guatemala and El Salvador, as well as the Nicaraguan Constitution reform enacted by Law N° 192 of 1995, within the framework of the Nicaraguan transition, was the limitation of the role of the Armed Forces to the defense of State sovereignty and territorial integrity, which terminated or significantly limited, as the case may be, the old functions of the armed forces in terms of homeland security. Also in Honduras, where there were no generalized hostilities, but there was repression and the militarization of homeland security, the constitutional reform enacted by Decree N° 136/95 created the civil National Police, significantly limiting the role of the Armed Forces in relation to homeland security. Subsequently, the constitutional control over the Armed Forces was strengthened when the President was empowered as Commander in Chief of the armed forces, and he was entitled to appoint a civil defense secretary, through the constitutional reform enacted by Decree N° 245/98. Finally, in the four cases, to different extents, under varied circumstances and with different results, reforms aimed at putting a stop to the political role of the armed forces and ending or limiting their homeland security functions were enacted.

Although in the case of Guatemala the constitutional reform, agreed to in the Strengthening Agreement, together with other reforms proposed by the Government, were rejected by popular vote, the recently issued National Security System Framework Law (2008) limited the role of the military intelligence organization, the Intelligence Unit of the National Defense Chiefs of Staff (DIEMDN), to the defense of State sovereignty and territorial integrity.

With respect to the militarily confronted forces, processes were established in Guatemala for the demobilization of Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG) combatants and paramilitary groups, such as the Civil Self-Defense Patrol (PAC). There was a downsizing of military personnel. In El Salvador, the Peace Agreements provided for the dissolution of the Rapid Intervention Squads, tactical elements designed for counterinsurgency, the elimination of the Civil Defense Units (paramilitary groups) and the suppression of the territorial service, also employed to form paramilitary elements, which was substituted by a new system of reservists under the Ministry of Defense who were to be trained and used only when needed in the event of external armed conflict. The compulsory military service was abolished and the National Intelligence Unit, a military-controlled body, was eliminated. In Nicaragua, the Sandinista People's Army (EPS) was downsized and transformed into the Nicaraguan Army, ensuring adequate integration of the armed forces into society and their acceptance by all sectors on agreed-upon basis. The Code of Military Organization, Jurisdiction and Social Security was established maintaining high levels of autonomy for the military, yet subordinating it to the civil power and limiting the function of the intelligence unit, which was barred from engaging in political intelligence activities. Furthermore, the Nicaraguan Contra was disarmed and demobilized and so were all armed rebel groups, and plans for their economic reintegration were developed.

In El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, major police-related changes were made for the purpose of demilitarizing homeland security. In El Salvador, the National Guard and the Treasury Guard, both militarized corps, were dissolved and their members were incorporated into the Army. The National Police force was eliminated and the National Civil Police was formed as the only police force, under the Ministry of the Interior, and later it was placed under the Ministry of Public Security. Thus, police institutions no longer operated within the Ministry of Defense. In Guatemala, the Treasury Guard, the Mobile Military Police and the National Police were dissolved and substituted by the National Civil Police, also under the Ministry of the Interior. In Honduras, the militarized public security body that was originally called Special Security Corps (CES) and that was later incorporated into the Armed Forces of Honduras as the fourth armed force, under the name of Public Security Force (FUSEP), was replaced by the National Police, a civil, demilitarized and professionalized force, and the National Intelligence Unit (DNI), a military-controlled intelligence body organized within the FUSEP, and the so-called 3.16 Intelligence Battalion, formed within the same institution, disappeared. Furthermore, significant measures were taken concerning public security, such as the creation of a Homeland Security Council (CONASIN), composed of homeland security officers, as well as representatives of the legal system and civil society, and progress was made in terms of the curricular reform. In summary, as regards the Armed Forces, reforms to the role of the army, its institutionalism and doctrine were proposed with a view to:

1) professionalizing it and subjecting it to civil control;

2) eliminating public security functions;

3) developing a new comprehensive democratic security concept;

4) reducing public spending on defense;

5) eliminating the military intelligence apparatus —in El Salvador— and replacing it with a civil one and enacting a law on the subject matter; limiting the role of the military intelligence and creating two civil intelligence organizations, enacting two laws on the subject matter and establishing internal and external controls —in Guatemala— promoting transparency in terms of military intelligence, by incorporating it into public laws establishing and limiting its mission —in Nicaragua— and dissolving two military-controlled police intelligence organizations that

participated in human rights violations, in Honduras, where there are plans for the creation of a civil intelligence body; and,

6) eliminating the compulsory military service for citizens. In El Salvador, the peace agreements and the Truth Commission paved the way for a process, yet to be completed, of institutional depuration and even a commitment to commence legal actions against officers responsible for gross violations of human rights[63]. In Honduras, we can mention the elimination of the compulsory military service, which was approved by Congress in May 1994 and which constituted a major demand by civil organizations and the population.

The most relevant former guerrilla forces of the region (URNG, FMLN and FSLN) have now formed political parties and have different degrees of State power, at the legislative, municipal and executive levels. To such effect, the electoral systems had to be reformed. In Honduras, for example, the political system managed to become more flexible and made room for the organized left (which used to be proscribed) to join the Democratic Union (UD) party.

Throughout the years, there have been many spin-offs within these organizations during their transformation or the incorporation of military political forces into political parties. Some of these spin-offs have given rise to new social forces or also political parties, each of them with different ideological positions and demands. Noteworthy are the expressions of war veterans, demobilized and disabled people, and associations of relatives of victims of political violence which maintain their autonomy from the human rights organizations that operated during the conflicts. The armed forces counterpart would be represented by organizations of disabled veterans and former patrol officers, rather than organizations of relatives, and by foundations and associations made up of high rank military officers, now publicly engaged mainly in academic and business activities.

New law enforcement institutions arose in the field of public security. At present, in Guatemala, the National Civil Police is staffed by 18.600 officers, financed by the executive branch and controlled by the civil government. Furthermore, a new Academy was created, as well as the Civil Intelligence and Information Analysis Unit, which, pursuant to the Strengthening Agreement, was engaged in the struggle against ordinary and organized crime, both with internal and external controls. In El Salvador, the old Security Corps (CUSEP) were dissolved and replaced by a National Civil Police which is currently staffed by 18,000 officers, and a new National Public Security Academy was created. In Honduras, as mentioned above, the National Intelligence Unit and the 3.16 Intelligence Battalion (involved in forced disappearances and other violations to human rights) were dissolved, opening the way for the creation of the Criminal Investigation Unit (DIC), currently integrated into the National Police as the National Criminal Investigation Unit (DNIC) and placed under the authority of the Public Ministry.

Furthermore, special focus was made on the need to regulate private security companies and control the citizens' possession of firearms. It is noteworthy that in the countries of the region the number of private security company employees is up to two or three times higher[64] than the number of State law enforcement officers, and that most of the violent deaths occur through the use of firearms. In Honduras, for example, 23 thousand men work for private security companies, compared to the existing 10.5 thousand police officers.

As regards institutional reforms, emphasis can be placed on the process of modernization of the legal systems of the sub-region through measures such as: (a) the increase in public spending on the Judiciary and enhanced Government support to this body, and (b) the relatively major legal reforms to the criminal, procedural, prison and juvenile justice systems; and the family

law reforms, all of which consolidated the guarantee of due process and the independence of the judicial branch. In Honduras, we can mention the establishment of an election system for Judges of the Supreme Court of Justice which provides for the participation of a plural commission (including civil society) that proposes candidates and which has a constitutionally-based mandate. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the scope of the reforms was not broad enough to fully guarantee the independence, impartiality and efficiency of the judicial system, in particular the criminal sub-system. A reflection of this is the publicly known impunity prevailing particularly in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. Furthermore, noteworthy is the existence of significant limitations to the development of institutional reforms, including budgetary deficiencies, delayed fulfillment of agreements, such as in the case of Guatemala, and a major limitation to the development and consolidation of institutional capacities. In the case of Nicaragua, although the political structures created during the Sandinista Revolution became non-partisan and new structures were formed under the control of the civil Government, the political leadership of judicial control institutions was subjected to the Political Pact executed between the Sandinista movement and the liberals.

Among the newly created institutions, in addition to police agencies, we can mention the office of the Ombudsman and its important role in the post armed conflict era. An example of this was the clarification of the whereabouts of the disappeared men and women, demanded by the National Human Rights Commission of Honduras in 1994, which triggered the filing of formal claims before the Public Prosecutor's Office by human rights organizations. The National Human Rights Commission has become a consolidated institution, which has allowed it to play the role of controller and liaison with the State, in line with the democratic transformations process65, although certain civil society organizations are requesting higher levels of coordination and joint action from this institution66. In El Salvador, the Attorney's Office for the Defense of Human Rights (PDDH) was created with constitutional status and with strong investigation and vigilance powers over State actions in terms of human rights at every level67.

Furthermore, funds and fora were created for the resolution of the agrarian issue. In the case of Guatemala, we can mention the creation of the National Land Fund (FONOTIERRAS), the Office of Agrarian Affairs and the establishment of agrarian courts and processes for the granting and registration of land. In addition to this, different bodies were formed to follow-up on matters related to Peace Agreements or to specific issues within the Agreements, such as the Secretary of Peace, the National Commission on Peace Agreements, the National Peace Fund (FONAPAZ) and the Office of Strategic Affairs. Also, commissions were created for popular and civil society participation in issues included in the Peace Accords and for Historical Clarification. Particularly relevant was the adoption of measures for the inclusion of the Mayan culture in education and the political system. However, as in the case of the judicial reforms, these processes face similar limitations to their fulfillment.

In the case of El Salvador, the economic and social issue was addressed by means of several Agreements aimed at: (a) transferring land to agrarian reform cooperatives, former FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) combatants, landholders and demobilized Armed Forces personnel; (b) channeling loans and technical support to micro enterprises and small farm producers; (c) creating a Consensus-Building Forum among employers, workers and the Government; (d) implementing a national reconstruction program; and (e) developing reintegration programs for veterans, disabled veterans and other people affected by war. In Nicaragua and Honduras no relevant institutional reforms were implemented or new fora created in relation to social and economic matters. In general, in spite of the policies mentioned above, the fulfillment and performance of economic and social aspects has been highly deficient.

Following the implementation of the peace processes, and in the light of the current conflict scenario, some of these actors play new roles, same as new actors also appear in new conflict scenarios.

As regards the role of civil society organizations in the democratization processes, its development has been dynamic and varied. However, in general, their ability to influence public policies has not been significant.

The advocacy of the union sector, which played a prominent role in the 1970s, has been reduced as a result of political co-option and clientelism. The union movement was among the most affected ones with the disappearance or weakening of the organizations that supported it. Their spheres of action are the public servants' union organizations. Since the 1990s, more and more union sectors such as doctors, nurses, teachers and public servants started participating in and even leading protest and activist actions, particularly those held in the streets as public demonstrations, which used to be carried out by farmers, blue-collar workers and students in the past decades. Furthermore, social movements have become quite specific and specialized in their particular struggles such as, for example, organizations related to the rights of women, environmental protection, rights of indigenous, Afro-descendent, disabled and gay and lesbian people.

As regards the new scenarios, the unequal access to land and natural resources has been identified as a potential social conflict accelerator, as well as the reduced access to health and education services, particularly by middle-class sectors. With particularities in each country, the agrarian reform processes allowed the development of farmers' organizations and fora; which have been remarkably weakened following two decades of structural adjustment[68]. A sector born in the post-war era still exists, and its actions are restricted not only by the neoliberal model, but also by the dynamic of migrations and the lack of sector-related public policies[69].

On the other hand, noteworthy is the increased participation of the population in local issues, particularly in relation to the defense of natural resources such as water and forests. There is a growing number of community associations and municipal and micro-regional organizations that make up more complex national structures that are not of an organic but rather a coordinating nature, acting as specific theme–based networks. In this scenario, the processes of investment in mega projects, tourism or farming production that lead to land concentration are clearly accelerating conflict. There is intolerance to the work of this type of groups, in particular environmental activists, which is resulting in threats towards its members and even their murder.

In **Guatemala**, civil society has failed to follow up on the democratic transformations that came along with the peace agreements. This was largely due to the atomization of organizations and movements, an inadequate leadership and the absence of effective interlocutory channels with Government authorities. This opinion is shared by representatives of the Association for the Advancement of Social Sciences in Guatemala (AVANCSO)[70], as well as several authors specialized in the subject matter[71].

In the case of **Nicaragua**, political actions were carried out aimed at promoting the engagement of civil society in the transition process, particularly as a result of the social tensions that occurred during the first years of administration of Violeta Chamorro. However, even when they achieved a high level of organization, these entities had little influence on the way the economy was being structured by the Government[72]. On the other hand, the replication of the Nicaragua Pact entailed the co-option of civil society by the elites and political powers in force, to the detriment

of the inclusion and effective representation of the new political forces. In particular, there is a tendency in the current administration of Daniel Ortega to adopt a strategy of confrontation with social organizations that are not aligned with the FSLN. This further narrows the democratic representation channels.

Also, noteworthy is the transformation of actors related to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In the case of El Salvador, the Catholic Church, which has traditionally been a reference point for dialogue and peace efforts, now plays a much more limited and conservative role, with a relationship of no confrontation with the political powers.

On the other hand, in **Nicaragua**, the Catholic Church hierarchy, who had been one of the main voices against the *Sandinist* movement, has now aligned itself to the Pact[73], which has led to internal dissention within the Church itself, as shown with the appointment of Monsignor Obando y Bravo as Chairman of the National Reconciliation Council.

However, in **Honduras**, Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga has become a reference point who challenges structural adjustment measures and enjoys high credibility.

At the same time, the Catholic Church in **Guatemala** maintains a moderate profile, with the exception of certain bishops who join protests against extraction companies, as a result of which they have suffered attempts on their lives and threats, the latest of which occurred in March 2008.

As regards the economic arena, the end of the war between **Guatemala** and **El Salvador** allowed the recomposition of the traditional economic powers and the gradual primacy of the financial sector, which gathered strength from 2007 onwards, through the articulation of alliances with international financial networks. From the beginning of this decade, there have been changes that consist in the consolidation of the investments of international corporations throughout the region, in addition to a market expansion in favor of economic interests of the United States, Europe and other regions through free trade agreements[74]. Also, the economic elite in **Honduras** was smart when it came to regaining its position in the light of the new democratic scenario and has achieved high levels of co-option and control over the traditional political parties, which has fostered the development of clientelistic networks and the patrimonial use of the Government[75].

The new scenarios in the area have also brought along transformations in the role of international cooperation organizations. Until very recently, international financial entities generally favored and instrumented economic policies based on the Washington Consensus.

On the other hand, although with different particularities, international non-governmental organizations and churches and religious organizations of different creeds have generally tended to support moderate citizen-building efforts [76] and are involved in relevant initiatives of international governmental cooperation which favor the development of local infrastructure and democratic institutionalization[77]. Many international cooperation agencies and international non-governmental organizations have promoted technical cooperation as a priority for this decade[78]. In this sense, it should be noted that, particularly in the case of certain Central American countries, cooperation agencies of European countries and of North America (including Canada), as well as international non-governmental organizations —in particular those based in the countries of the North— have played a significant role, for several decades, in promoting development and human rights projects, and processes of peace and institutional consolidation, by working with local organizations and networks.

Within this framework, when it comes to analyzing the potential foci of conflict in the four countries under consideration, we should not exclude the actors who represent illegitimate forms of association and interests related to crime expressed in different forms, both organized at a large scale (as in the case of international organized crime and drug trafficking) and those related to varied modalities of violence, associated with what some have come to call the "uncivil society". The impunity of the criminal informal powers and their infiltration within certain spheres of the State, as well as the inefficiency of the internal and external controls of law enforcement institutions and the weaknesses of the judicial system translate into illegal governmental violence and violations to human rights.

In this context, actors that were present during the armed conflicts, such as the "Death Squads", have mutated into structures related to organized crime, which sometimes can be linked to the physical perpetration of politically-motivated crimes, through modalities such as contract killing. Moreover, organized crime structures, such as drug trafficking, exceed the capacities of government entities to guarantee citizens' protection and security, even at the territorial level. Areas such as Zacapa, in Guatemala, are controlled by these forces, and law enforcement and judicial bodies are incapable of efficiently eradicating them.

A phenomenon linked to social violence and criminality in the region is the appearance of "*maras*", i.e. groups initially identified as youth gangs that, in the past few years, have developed links and a sense of belonging with organized crime. A report prepared for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2006 informed of the existence of approximately 62.700 members of "maras" in Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador[79].

With a view to analyzing this phenomenon, this paper draws on the statements of the American historian Eric Hobsbawm, who associates the proliferation of criminal gangs with readjustments of social structures. This occurs because in these structural readjustments the State or the political authority tends to become disoriented at first. If the State continues to abandon its duties, obligations and the sense of legal protection, as it happens in the case of Central America, there are gaps left open that will be filled with some other social mechanism or dynamic, since, finally, the needs do not disappear under the new situation; they persist and they will be satisfied some other way, be it legal or not[80]. In Central America the association between structural readjustment and proliferation of criminal gangs is confirmed.

Finally, it would be pertinent to add to this chart the inter-governmental organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS), and actors of the international community with specific interests in the countries of the region, in particular the United States, which should be taken into account in any initiative including alliances and different forms of cooperation between varied actors for the development of conflict prevention and peace building activities[81]. In this sense, in the light of the impact of the peace processes that begun in the 1980s and the different globalization processes and their differentiated effects on certain sectors of the population, any initiative of this type calls for a much more complex analysis of the multiple internal and external actors involved; their interests and motivations; their availability of funds and their political advocacy capacities and structures.

7. Conclusion

The peace and democratization processes that begun in the 1980's in Central America have achieved, among others, the cessation of political-military armed confrontations in the four cases under analysis, and have laid the foundation, particularly within the framework of democratic institutionalism, to prevent the future recurrence of this type of confrontations. However, these processes were articulated with the development of structural adjustment policies that resulted from the so-called Washington Consensus. The eradication of political/military armed conflict and the re-establishment of the rule of law and democratic institutionalism were vital elements for the implementation of such policies which benefited economically powerful sectors both within and outside the region. Consequently, in spite of the fact that, from an institutional perspective, the political-social conflicts mentioned above were addressed through democratic channels and processes, the lack of or limited implementation of structural policies of a social character and the effects of the globalization phenomena have contributed to the persistence and widening of large social gaps. Although these were developed under new conditions, the pre-existing inequalities and social and political exclusion phenomena that originated, in part, the armed confrontations of previous decades, were perpetuated under new modalities, within a framework of greater institutional stability, but with an evident shift from political-military violence to violence of a social nature, more diffused and fragmented and less prone to be addressed or overcome through channels similar to those fostered by the peace agreements and processes in the region. This scenario has caused a similar impact in terms of current conflict on Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, in spite of the marked differences in the conflict processes these countries have experienced.

On the other hand, the democratic changes generated in terms of Government institutionalism and reinstatement of civil and political rights, as well as the de-militarization and absence of repression, have allowed an increased political participation of ideologically diverse sectors. These progresses of historical relevance have made it possible to achieve sustained peace. The reduction of such conditions, or, even worse, their regression, would imply the deterioration of such sustainability.

The neoliberal economic model has deepened exclusion, inequality and poverty, which until now found in migration a de-accelerator of potential conflict that would otherwise build up in economically and politically excluded sectors. In the light of the current global financial crisis scenario, the changes in the migration flow, which will generate flow reduction or pressure as a result of the self-deportation of migrants, will have an impact in the short term on social conflict, owing to the increase in social demand for employment, goods and services. At the same time, this would entail a reduction in the flow of remittances that provide large sectors of the population with liquidity for consumption and stabilize domestic economies, which could in turn constitute a conflict accelerator in the short term.

Within this framework, one of the most salient features of the countries of the region is the lack of social investment. The public administrations of the Governments allocate limited resources to social development and, in addition to this; the management of such allocated resources lacks transparency and suffers from severe technical deficiencies. The execution of major infrastructural projects and the extraction industry —which affect the environment and alter the living conditions of the population by forcing evictions, changes in the use of land, as well as land concentration— generate strong tension and may lead to conflict. These projects are generally run by powerful and influential international corporations that are usually protected by the provisions of agreements such as the CAFTA. Therefore, the Governments find it hard to address emerging issues in this sense and they agree to implement hasty measures of repression, replicating the conditions that provide breeding ground for certain modalities of crime which may eventually lead to the escalation and expansion of violence.

In all the countries covered in this report, although to a lesser extent in Nicaragua, criminal violence and organized crime tend to escape Government control. This has resulted in the consolidation and expansion of criminal groups that act as informal powers that be, infiltrating or controlling certain levels and spheres of the government. To a greater or lesser extent, this phenomenon is present in all the countries with the participation of Government, armed forces and law enforcement officers, and political leaders linked to drug trafficking and other criminal organizations. At the same time, this situation creates an environment of impunity, due to the connivance existing between criminal organizations and political or government structures. It is in this context that the so-called *maras* operate; and although *maras* are not responsible for all crime-related issues, they are frequently held publicly liable for them, to avoid the development of strategies and actions aimed at the higher levels of organized crime. This scenario could contribute to a crisis in the democratic system, given the fact that the only measures taken to solve these issues are public safety policies focused on the Government's coercion powers, and no effective, comprehensive and regional efforts have been made to overcome the nationwide problem of citizen insecurity and to control organized crime.

The Armed Forces in Central America having formally subjected themselves to civil power and having accepted the democratic reforms is an important result of the peace processes. However, it is important to study the dynamics of the intervention of the armed forces in civil life, particularly those related to public security, since this opens up spaces for the arbitrary expansion of such functions to the detriment of a relevant achievement of the peace processes. However, it needs to be noted that the participation of the Armed Forces in functions other than guaranteeing territorial defense and sovereignty or, in exceptional cases, providing public assistance in the event of emergencies or national disasters, arouses controversy. In this context, initiatives associated with the peace processes, such as the Amnesty Act of 1993 in El Salvador, may generate tension and maladjustments in transition times.

Furthermore, in the past few years the political parties have grown less open to developing exchange and relationship with civil society and the citizenship in general, failing to comply with their duty to serve as instruments for citizen participation in politics and eventually becoming an obstacle to this effect.

Central America is peculiar in terms of its history, customs, culture, strengths and weaknesses. However, and to conclude, no reference has been made to certain features that contribute to better characterizing the isthmus. This sub-region is included in the "Ring of Fire" that stretches along the border of the Pacific Plate with one of the largest concentrations of volcanoes. Also, this is a narrow isthmus, a torrid belt located between the two largest oceans of the planet,

and exposed to their influence. These particularities define a high level of seismicity and a high exposure to weather phenomena which cause different sorts of natural disasters. The combination of these natural threats with the vulnerability caused by population concentration, poverty, and weak government structures results in considerable risks for the population. Natural disasters are a part of the history of the region; however, social tension and the previously described institutional conditions may have the effect of magnifying damage caused by them. It should be noted that a natural disaster may barge into the social and community life of these countries at any time, affecting the pre-existing conflict levels of the area.

In this context, the articulation of the different foci of conflict analyzed in this report with the growing complexity of the political dynamics of the countries under consideration, in the light of the development and incorporation of new actors, creates the conditions for the recurrence of potential violent conflicts. The prevention of such conflicts can only be addressed through early action coordinated among the varied actors and factors of the analyzed countries, within the framework of a comprehensive and sustained strategy of early response to the outbreak of different forms of violence, which not only threaten the continuity of a difficultly achieved democratic institutionalism, but also deepen the harmful and evil effects of the lack of or limited implementation of reforms aimed at consolidating this institutionalism, both in the political/institutional and the economic/social and environmental fields.

To conclude, we have prepared a matrix which may prove useful to summarize this report, and to systematize the analysis of conflict in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, based on the impact of the peace agreements in the main actors, the unaccomplished aspects and the factors that could accelerate, trigger or de-accelerate the causes of new outbreaks of violence in Central America.

NOTAS

1. Conflict assessment report on the Central American Sub-region prepared by CRIES and the Latin American and Caribbean Platform for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding (PLACPaz) for the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) within the framework of the Early Response Action Project of the Task Force on Early Warning and Early Response.

2. In this regard, see research findings published in Pensamiento Propio (Buenos Aires), Edición Especial 20 Aniversario, January-June 2003, No. 17.

3. See La sociedad civil y el reto de la construcción de la paz en América Latina y el Caribe: un balance preliminar, Buenos Aires: CRIES / CEGRE, 2004, and Serbin, Andrés (coord.) (2007) Paz, conflicto y sociedad civil en América Latina y el Caribe, Buenos Aires – Barcelona: Editorial Icaria/CRIES.

4. In this regard, see Pensamiento Propio (Buenos Aires), julio-diciembre 2004, No. 20, and Serbin, Andrés (coord.) (2008) Construcción de paz y diplomacia ciudadana en América Latina y el Caribe, Buenos Aires- Barcelona: Editorial Icaria/CRIES, in addition to further papers and research bulletins by CRIES.

5. In this regard, see the discussion on this concept and its application in Latin America and the Caribbean. Serbin, Andrés and José Manuel Ugarte (2007) "Prevención de conflictos armados y sociedad civil en América Latina y el Caribe", en Serbin, Andrés (coord..) Paz, conflicto y sociedad civil..., op. cit., pp. 11-48; Serbin, Andrés (2008) "Paz, violencia y sociedad civil en América Latina y el Caribe" and Ugarte, José Manuel (2008) "La prevención estructural del conflicto armado o violento", en Serbin, A. (coord..) Construcción de paz y diplomacia ciudadana..., op. cit., pp. 11-91 and pp. 203-251, respectively.

6.   Julien Freund, Sociologie du Conflit, Paris: PUF (Presses Universitaires de France) 1983, p. 65.

7.   Krug, Etienne G., Linda L. Dahlberg, James A. Mercy, Anthony B. Zwi and Rafael Lozano (2003) Informe Mundial sobre la Violencia y la Salud, Washington D.C.: Organización Panamericana de la Salud, Chapter 8. "Violencia colectiva", p. 235.

8.   Sriram, Chandra Lekha and Nielsen Zoe (ed) (2004), Exploring Subregional Conflict. Opportunities for Conflict Prevention, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 2-4.

9.   Ibid.

10.   Esty, Daniel C., Goldstone, Jack A, Gurr, Ted Robert, Harff, Barbara, Levy, Marc, Davelko, Geoffrey D. Surko, Pamela and Unger, Alan N. (1998), State Failure Task Force Report: Phase II Findings, Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, p. 58, at http://www.wilsoncenter.org/events/docs/Phase2.pdf (acc. 30.7.2007)"

11.   Ibid.

12.   Ibid.

13.   Spencer, David (2008). Potential Conflict in Latin America, available at www.dni.gov (acc. 7.8.2008). It is pointed out that this work does not necessarily represent the views of the US Government and that it has been posted on the site for discussion purposes only. As quoted by Dr. José Manuel Ugarte in the article "Las causas profundas del conflicto armado o violento en Latinoamérica, y particularmente en Centroamérica", which was prepared to serve as input for this document. October 2008.

14.   In the report "Derechos Humanos y Conflictividad en Centroamérica" of 2008, presented by the following organizations: Mutual Support Group of Guatemala (GAM); Foundation of Studies for the Application of Law of El Salvador (FESPAD); Salvadoran Committee of Relatives of Victims of Human Rights Violations (CODEFAM); Center for Human Rights Promotion in Honduras (CIPRODEH); Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Honduras (CODEH); Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH); Legal Department of the Costa Rican Lutheran Church (ILCO) and Human Rights Committee of Panamá (CONADEHUPA). These organizations make up the regional team in charge of monitoring and analyzing the human rights situation in Central America.

15.   Press release of the regional team in charge of monitoring and analyzing human rights issues in Central America. Guatemala, 25 May 2007.

16.   Organized crime is growing in the region, in particular drug trafficking, asset laundering, illicit trafficking in firearms, people trafficking, smuggling, promotion and trafficking of illegal immigrants, cattle theft, piracy and counterfeiting of products and prescription drugs, kidnapping for ransom and trailer jacking and subsequent sale of stolen merchandise. The "Maras" are gangs originally formed by Central American youngsters in the US, mainly in California, where they engaged in violence, petty drug trafficking, crimes against property, and even violent crimes for hire. These gangsters were later deported back to their countries of origin where they replicated and aggravated their criminal behavior, forming large gangs such as the Mara Salvatrucha 13, and the Mara 18, which have criminal links with gangs in the United States.

17.   By means of the first Esquipulas agreement, the governments in the region acknowledged that the best reference and political precedent for reaching peace and democracy and reducing the tensions and conflicts in their countries was the Contadora process that started in 1983. As a result of this process, which was driven forth by Latin American countries (the Contadora Group, consisting of Panama, Venezuela, Colombia and Mexico; and a Support Group consisting of Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Uruguay), the States signed the Contadora Act for Peace and Cooperation ("Acta de Contadora para la Paz y la Cooperación en Centroamérica") in Panama, on June 6, 1986. To the same effect, and owing to the precedent set by Contadora, significant progress was made in the institutionalization of

the mechanisms of political dialogue to achieve peace, by transforming the Meeting of Presidents into a formal forum for dialogue and creating the Central American Parliament as a popular-representation permanent regional political forum. The Central American Parliament (PARLACEN) is the result of the Esquipulas II meeting held in Guatemala on August 7, 1987, at which the Presidents of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, acting on the initiative of Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, agreed that the Parliament would be a symbol for the reconciliation expected to be achieved in Central America.

18. The Costa del Sol Agreement, of February 1989; the Tela Declaration, of August 1989; and the San Isidro Declaration, of December 1989.

19. "La Contra" is the FSLN-given name of the Nicaraguan Resistance, whose members the FSLN viewed as counter-revolutionaries. U.S. President Ronald Reagan called them the "freedom fighters."

20. To date, the Government of Salvador has been asked to abrogate or amend the Amnesty Act in reports and Recommendations of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, as well as observations of the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

21. Referring to the type of violence characterized by repression against popular movements, particularly farmers, that was inflicted by the Honduran army until 1982, and thereafter to clashes between armed groups moving through, or operating or keeping their rear guard in Honduras (the Contra, infiltrated Sandinist forces, the Salvadorian insurgency, forces for the control and protection of US bases in Honduras).

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56. Cálix, Álvaro (2007) Una mirada al desempeño socioeconómico en Centroamérica; veinte años después de los Acuerdos de Esquipulas II; p. 23.

57. UNDP (2007). Human Development Report 2007-2008. Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

58. Moreno Raúl and Red Sinti Techan, El Salvador. Interview held in September 2008.

59. Moreno Raúl and Red Sinti Techan, El Salvador. Interview held in September 2008.

60. Ibarra, Ángel; National Ecological Union (Unidad Nacional Ecológica) of El Salvador. Interview held in September 2008.

61. The Garifuna story begins in 1665 with the shipwreck of two British slave Ships near the island of San Vicente. The ships were carrying Africans to be used as slaves in the British colonies in the area of Martinique, Santa Lucia, Granada, Dominica, and Barbados. The slaves swam to freedom on the island of San Vicente. At present, they are located in the Atlantic coast of Honduras and Guatemala.

62. Rivera, Reina; Center for Human Rights Promotion in Honduras (CIPRODEH). Interview held in September 2008.

63. Chapultepec Peace Agreements, 16 January 1992.

64. Gómez del Prado, José Luis. President of the UN Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and undermining the right of peoples to self determination. Oral statement made on 10 March 2008 before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights: "…In the countries we visited, the Working Group has confirmed a rapidly increasing trend to outsource the use of force to private security companies and even to place law enforcement functions in private hands. Often, private security companies have three times the manpower of the national police. Most of the people hired by private security companies are retired police or military officers. Often, one of the requisites to create this type of companies is that one of the partners or shareholders has to be a former army officer…".

65. Mejía, Thelma; interview held in Tegucigalpa in September 2008.

66. Oliva, Betha; interview held in Tegucigalpa in September 2008.

67. Constitution of the Republic of El Salvador, Sect. 194.I and Law of the Attorney's Office for the Defense of Human Rights (PDDH).

68. Acevedo, Saríah. Foundation for the Local Development and Municipal and Institutional Strengthening of Central America and the Caribbean (DEMUCA). Interview held in September 2008.

69. Aguilar, C. (1999). Los procesos de democratización bajo el esquema neoliberal, el caso de Nicaragua. Buenos Aires, CLACSO. pp.9 and 12.

70. Arenas, Clara, Association for the Advancement of Social Sciences in Guatemala (AVANCSO). Interview held in September 2008.

71. Yagenova, S. et al. (2006). Partidos políticos y organizaciones sociales: relaciones y percepciones mutuas. Guatemala: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales. pp 31-33; see also, Acevedo, Sarriá, Foundation for the Local Development and Municipal and Institutional Strengthening of Central America and the Caribbean (DEMUCA). Interview held in September 2008.

72. Martí. S. (1997). Nicaragua 1990-1996 ¿Hacia qué tipo de democracia? Barcelona: ICPS., p. 11.

73. In Nicaragua, because of the feeble balance of forces in the difficult political transition to a representative democracy, informal agreements, yet with formal effects on unconstitutionality, had to be reached between the traditional elite that was formally back in power (incorporated to the PLC) and the newly born Sandinist elite, which largely benefited from multiple political pillage activities during the departure from power of the Sandinist party. This is a pact of political domination whereby the elites implicitly acknowledge each other, in search for political balance between them when it comes to exercising power, and which becomes visible in the unconstitutionality control of the Nicaraguan Government by part of the groups aligned with the PLC and FSLN.

74. Moreno, Raúl; Red Sinti Techan. El Salvador. Interview held in September 2008.

75. Meza, Víctor (2008). Los grupos fácticos y la transición a la democracia; Tegucigalpa: Centro de Documentación de Honduras (CODEH); March 2008.

76. Moreno, Raúl; Red Sinti Techan. El Salvador. Interview held in September 2008.

77. Aguilar, Antonio; Assistant Ombudsman for the Defense of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of El Salvador. Interview held in September 2008.

78. Flores, Nelson; Foundation of Studies for the Application of Law (FESPAD), El Salvador. Interview held in September 2008.

79. USAID report and «La juventud en Iberoamérica Tendencias y Urgencias». Ernesto Espíndola. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Conference presented on 2 October 2006, in Antigua, Guatemala.

80. "Maras y pandillas, comunidad y policía en Centroamérica". Findings of a comprehensive study conducted by Demoscopía S.A. Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency –ASDI-. October 2007. Page 3.

81. Bourse, Ana (2008). "Si vis pacem, para pacem. Actores en la prevención de conflictos violentos y armados en América Latina y el Caribe", at Serbin, Andrés (coord.) (2008), op. cit., pp. 93-152.

APPENDIX
Interviews Conducted
for this Report

In El Salvador

Abrego, Abraham; *Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho* (Foundation of Studies for the Application of Law), El Salvador. Interview held by David Morales on Friday, 5 September 2008.

Aguilar, Antonio; Assistant Ombudsman for the Defense of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of El Salvador. Interview held by David Morales on Saturday, 6 September 2008.

Flores Nelson, *Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho*, El Salvador. Interview held by David Morales on Thursday, 4 September 2008.

Ibarra, Ángel; *Unidad Nacional Ecológica* (National Ecological Union) of El Salvador. Interview held by Zaira Navas on Tuesday, 9 September 2008.

López, Jaime; former coordinator of Probidad Foundation, El Salvador. Interview held by David Morales on Friday, 5 September 2008.

Moreno Raúl; Sinti Techan Network, El Salvador. Interview held by Zaira Navas on Thursday, 11 September 2008.

In Guatemala

Acevedo, Saríah. 2008. Foundation for the Local Development and Municipal and Institutional Strengthening of Central America and the Caribbean (DEMUCA). Interview held by Alonso Ramírez on 9 September 2008.

Arenas, Clara. 2008. Association for the Advancement of Social Sciences in Guatemala (AVANCSO). Interview held by Alonso Ramírez on 5 September 2008.

Arévalo, Marcel. 2008. Latin American School of Social Sciences (FLACSO) and Network for Social, Economic and Cultural Rights of Guatemala (DESC). Interview held by Alonso Ramírez on Tuesday, 9 September 2008.

Corral, Enrique. 2008. Guillermo Toriello Foundation (FGT). Interview held by Alonso Ramírez on Tuesday, 9 September 2008.

Félix, Walter. 2008. Congressman. Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG). Interview held by Alonso Ramírez on Wednesday, 10 September 2008.

Mack, Helen. 2008. Myrna Mack Foundation (FMM). Interview held by Alonso Ramírez on Monday, 8 September 2008.

Morales, José Roberto. 2008. Center for Human Rights Legal Action (CALDH). Interview held by Alonso Ramírez on Wednesday, 10 September 2008.

Reyes, Manolo. 2008. Social Legal Services (SERJUS). Interview held by Alonso Ramírez on Friday, 5 September 2008.

Sarti, Carlos. 2008. Propaz Foundation (PROPAZ). Interview held by Alonso Ramírez on Wednesday, 3 September 2008.

Sibrián, Anabella. 2008. *Plataforma Holandesa contra la Impunidad* (Dutch Platform Against Impunity). Interview held by Alonso Ramírez on Tuesday, 9 September 2008.

In Honduras

Acevedo, Javier; Center for Human Rights Promotion in Honduras (CIPRODEH). Interview held by David Morales on Wednesday, 27 August 2008.

Custodio, Ramón; Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Honduras (CODEH). Interview held by David Morales on Wednesday, 27 August 2008.

Mejía, Thelma; Journalist, Honduras. Interview held by David Morales on Friday, 29 August 2008.

Oliva, Bertha; President of the Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH). Interview held by David Morales on Thursday, 28 August 2008.

Palacios, José María; Former Supreme Court Justice and former member of the Ad Hoc Committee for the investigation of the DNI (National Investigations Department), Honduras. Interview held by David Morales, on Wednesday, 27 August 2008.

Rivera, Reina; Center for Human Rights Promotion in Honduras (CIPRODEH). Interview held by David Morales on Wednesday, 27 August 2008.

Sierra, Rolando; National Anti-Corruption Council, Honduras (CNA). Interview held by David Morales on Friday, 29 August 2008.

In Nicaragua

Bautista, Francisco (2008) Independent Consultant. Interview held by Andrés León on Monday, 8 September 2008.

Carrión, Gonzalo (2008) Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH). Interview held by Andrés León on Tuesday, 9 September 2008.

Cuadra, Elvira (2008) Nicaraguan Communication Research and Information Center. Interview held by Andrés León on Monday, 8 September 2008.

Gurdián, Galio (2008) United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

López, Nehemias (2008) Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Interview held by Andrés León on Wednesday, 10 September 2008.

Meléndez, Javier (2008) Institute for Strategic Studies and Public Policy (IEEPP). Interview held by Andrés León on Tuesday, 9 September 2008.

Orozco, Javier (2008) Institute for Strategic Studies and Public Policy (IEEPP). Interview held by Andrés León on Tuesday, 9 September 2008.

Sierra, Marlín (2008) Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH). Interview held by Andrés León on Tuesday, 9 September 2008.

Stuart, Roberto (2008) Center of Political Research and Analysis (CEAP). Interview held by Andrés León on Monday, 8 September 2008.
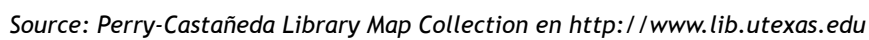
Téllez, Dora María (2008) Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS). Interview held by Andrés León on Wednesday, 9 September 2008.

MAPS

Central America

Source: www.mapquest.com

Nicaragua

Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection en http://www.lib.utexas.edu

Guatemala

Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection en http://www.lib.utexas.edu

Honduras

Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection en http://www.lib.utexas.edu

El Salvador

Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection en http://www.lib.utexas.edu