

# Executive Summary

Report ■ Updated to July 2012

## Guatemala en la Encrucijada. Panorama de una violencia transformada

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**D**espite the signing of the Agreement for a Firm and Lasting Peace in 1996, which marked the cessation of internal armed conflict, Guatemala still faces high rates of violence. In 2010 alone there were a total of 5,960 homicides. This suggests that fourteen years after declaring peace, the country has not yet achieved a total reduction of violence. On the contrary, the post-conflict period is characterized by increasing levels of armed violence, with the state failing to guarantee justice and security as public goods.

In response to this worrying scenario, this report aims to map the dynamics, intensity, distribution, and the factors that contribute to the persistence and cyclical reproduction of violence. The

report's analysis of armed violence shows that, while it has strong continuities with the past its character continues to transform over time. This perspective highlights changes as well as offering an understanding of the various forms of violence that affect the country. After offering a brief historical overview in the introduction, the five chapters of the report go on to describe the many effects of violence, its manifestations, its causes, and the efforts to reduce it.

The introduction provides a brief historical overview of the transformation of violence in Guatemala, noting three distinct periods, and analyzes the current relationship between the state and society:

- During the first period (1944–1961), violence is characterized as a mechanism used to contain and suppress reformist forces. The second period (1962–1996), sees the dynamics of armed conflict as framed within counterinsurgency policies and extreme violence exercised by the state. The third period (1996–present) describes how, despite the termination of the conflict and the numerous efforts made to consolidate peace, violence still persists but becomes more closely associated with criminal dynamics.
- Examining the state's relationship with society, the report highlights how conflict-related violence, in combination with the history of military and authoritarian governments, left an institutional legacy in which authoritarian and corrupt practices still exist, exacerbated by a precarious state that is unable to resolve conflicts nonviolently.
- It stresses that lethal and nonlethal violence is mainly concentrated in urban centers—the city of Guatemala being the most affected—as well as border areas such as the departments of Peten, Izabal, Zacapa, Chiquimula, Jutiapa, Santa Rosa, and Escuintla.
- Furthermore, it finds that homicidal violence is highly concentrated amongst male victims, although it notes there is a growing number of female victims. The increase in violence against women is characterized by the use of direct physical violence on the women's body, such as death by strangulation, by sharp weapons, or rape prior to the murder. These characteristics suggest that Guatemala is facing a particular phenomenon of violence: femicide.

- It draws attention to the notable victimization of youth. Homicides rates are especially high for the 18 – 39 age group.
- Looking at the instruments of violence, the chapter notes that firearms are the most prevalent mechanism used to commit homicide. Of all homicides registered in Guatemala for the period between 1986 and 2008, 73% involved the use of firearms.

The second chapter provides an analysis of the various manifestations and perpetrators of armed violence in Guatemala. It shows a number of continuities with conflict-related violence, and several areas where the dynamics of violence have taken different forms and directions:

- Organized criminal groups, involving the Maras, drug trafficking organizations, hidden powers, and clandestine groups, have adopted strategies of violence inherited from the conflict. However, their main incentives are the accumulation of revenue and maintaining impunity.
- Furthermore, manifestations of violence such as femicide, lynchings, social cleansing, and land conflicts are forms of violence exacerbated by inadequacies in the provision of security and justice. These phenomena are also related to a general socio-cultural acceptance of violence borne of experiences of armed conflict and a growing sense of insecurity.

The third chapter analyzes the factors that underlie these different manifestations of violence. Using relevant approaches to explain the emergence and perpetuation of violence (holistic, methodological individualism and institutionalism), it highlights that both historical and recent factors are essential to understand current violence.

- Structural factors, such as poverty, inequality and inequity, raise potential risks for the cyclical reproduction of violence, both during conflict and afterwards. Although the links between poverty,

inequality and violence need to be furthered researched, these factors are especially important in analyzing conflicts around social demands.

- Another factor analyzed is political exclusion. Political exclusion was a key factor during the period of armed conflict; yet structures of exclusion based on social or ethnic identities remain potential risk factors for the emergence and continuation of violence.
- Additionally, institutional factors—such as the inability of the state to adequately provide justice and security services—establish an environment conducive to organized crime and acts of collective violence, such as lynchings.
- Finally, the chapter examines individual and socio-cultural factors associated with a relatively low cost, and high benefit, of using violence in situations of impunity, and the trivialization of violence by Guatemalan society.

The fourth chapter focuses on the economic costs of violence. In addition to highlighting the overall costs at the country level, the chapter presents a new analysis of the costs of violence in two departments, Escuintla and Chiquimula.

- In 2008, the costs of violence in Guatemala reached 7.3% of the gross national product (GNP). By 2006, these costs reached 6% of the GNP for the department of Chiquimula, and 10.5% for the department of Escuintla.
- The greatest economic burden of armed violence in Chiquimula arises from health expenses. For this department, health costs represented 3.39% of its GNP, from a total of 6% of the aggregate costs. In contrast, Escuintla's highest costs due to armed violence were related to the investment climate, with 4.94% of the GNP of this department from a total of 10.5% of the aggregate costs.

Finally, the fifth chapter presents an

analysis of some interventions that, directly or indirectly, seek to reduce and prevent armed violence and its impact at the global, regional, national, and local levels.

- At the global and regional levels, the chapter presents interventions that focus primarily on two elements: institutions and instruments. It describes how successive treaties and agreements aim at reducing armed violence indirectly. For example, by generating institutional commitments, interventions have stressed the need to establish more and better controls to restrict arms trafficking, carriage of firearms, and possession of firearms.
- At the national level, the chapter identifies several types of interventions: some related to the peace agreements, and others that have been adapted in response to the changing dynamics of contemporary armed violence. Actions such as the process of demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR), security sector reform, and peace agreements, are direct interventions in order to reduce armed violence. However, these actions have not been sufficient to address the deeply-engrained violence resulting from the armed conflict. In turn, other interventions such as the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and the National Accord on the Advancement of Security and Justice have emphasized the new dynamics of violence and its risk factors.
- Finally, at the local level, the chapter highlights initiatives that strengthen informal institutions and build trust between different social sectors. These interventions focus on treating people not only as victims, but also as potential agents of armed violence. They have also an impact at the community level, as they promote the positive transformation of social relations and reinforce cooperation between the community and the state.

The mapping of armed violence in Guatemala shows that, while there has

been significant progress in consolidating democracy and identifying key factors for armed violence reduction, there is still much to accomplish. Understanding the dynamics of how violence can be transformed provides a more complex view of the state's dual challenge: first, to generate strategies to reduce

and prevent armed violence in the context of crime; and second, to ensure adequate provision of security and justice services, by preventing the infiltration and cooption of state institutions.

It is therefore essential to develop comprehensive strategies to

communicate and coordinate efforts at all levels, and, additionally, to respond to the risk factors that catalyze armed violence. This will empower and enhance the capacity of individuals and communities to be able to tackle the problems associated with armed violence.

## Update Note “Guatemala en la Encrucijada. Panorama de una violencia transformada”

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The recent downward trend in homicide rates in Guatemala is a promising development. In the context of high levels of armed violence, the numbers and rates of homicides in the country have declined during 2010 and 2011. Improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of armed violence prevention and reduction may have been aided by important reforms within the institutions in charge of security in Guatemala, as well as improved interinstitutional coordination.

It is, however, important to highlight that, with more than 5,000 homicides recorded in 2011, levels of armed violence remain high. Indeed, Guatemala is still ranked among countries with the highest homicide rates in Central America (see Figure 1), and even the world.

The homicide rate in Guatemala for 2011—39 per 100,000 inhabitants—is, in fact, still above the average of the Central American subregion, which recorded an average of 29 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants between 2004–09 (GD, 2011). This rate is even more worrying given that Central America is the subregion with the highest homicide rates in the

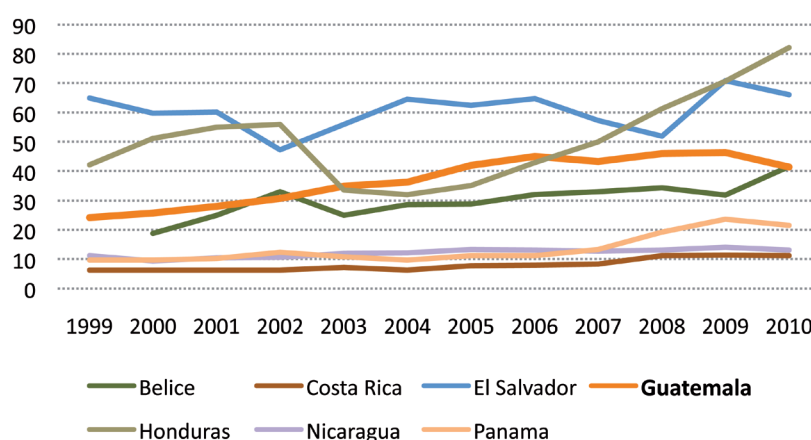
world, followed by South Africa (with a rate of 27.4 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants), and the Caribbean (with 22.4 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants). Moreover, Central America is at least 24 points above the global homicide rate—estimated between 6.9 and 7.6 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (GD, 2011, p. 60; GD, 2008, p. 5; UNODC, 2011, p. 9).

The report *Guatemala en la encrucijada: Panorama de una violencia transformada*, stresses that the dynamics of violence in Guatemala

are not easy to understand. Different manifestations of armed violence feed and overlap each other, and transform over time. For this reason, this brief update note seeks to outline recent changes in homicidal violence experienced in Guatemala after the publication of the report.

This note first explores the variation in numbers of homicidal violence nationwide. It goes on to analyze disaggregated figures by department, sex, and weapons used to commit homicides.

Figure 1. Annual homicide rates in Central American countries, 1999–2010 (per 100,000 inhabitants)



Source: UNODC, 2011. Data processed by CERAC

## Evolution of homicides at the national level

The most recent available figures confirm the general downward trend in homicides that Guatemala has experienced since 2009. The total of 5,681 homicides recorded nationwide in 2011 is the lowest figure during the last five years (see Figure 2).

In terms of annual variation, these figures show that, since 2009, the number of homicides fell 8% in 2010, and about 5% in 2011. At the national level this is a promising trend, taking into account that 2009 experienced the highest peak in homicides recorded in the history of Guatemala, a figure even greater than those registered during the civil war according to official sources. However, the levels are still far from those recorded at the beginning of the decade.

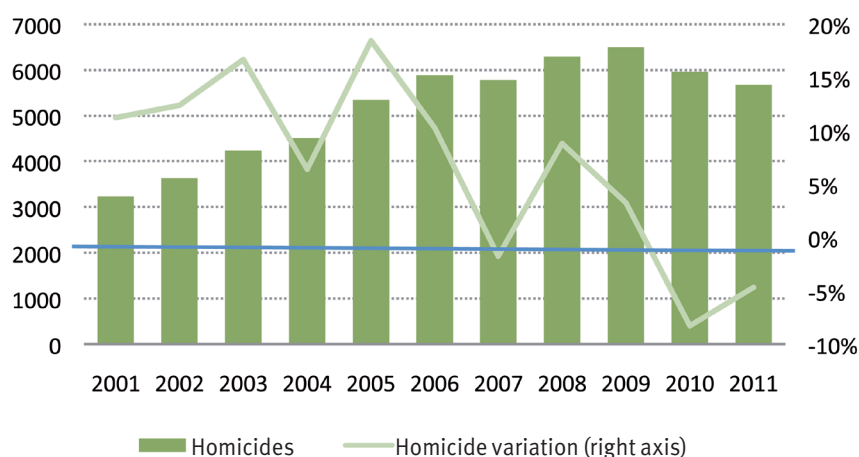
Thus, it is essential to continue strengthening institutional efforts aimed at reducing homicidal violence. Strategies that could sustain the downward trend of homicides include enhancing state efficiency in terms of institutional synergies and criminal investigation, and developing more and better violence prevention campaigns deep-rooted in civil society.

## Evolution of homicides by departments

The reduction in the number of homicides at the aggregate level may conceal the heterogeneity of the geographical distribution of violence. According to recent data on homicidal violence published by the National Civil Police (PNC, in Spanish), lethal violence is no longer concentrated in most of the central departments of the country, but it has worsened in most of the border departments, particularly those located near the south and east borders.

Although the department of Guatemala continues to experience the highest number of homicides (2,108 in 2011), it is no longer the most violent department when compared in

Figure 2. National homicides, Guatemala, 2001-2011

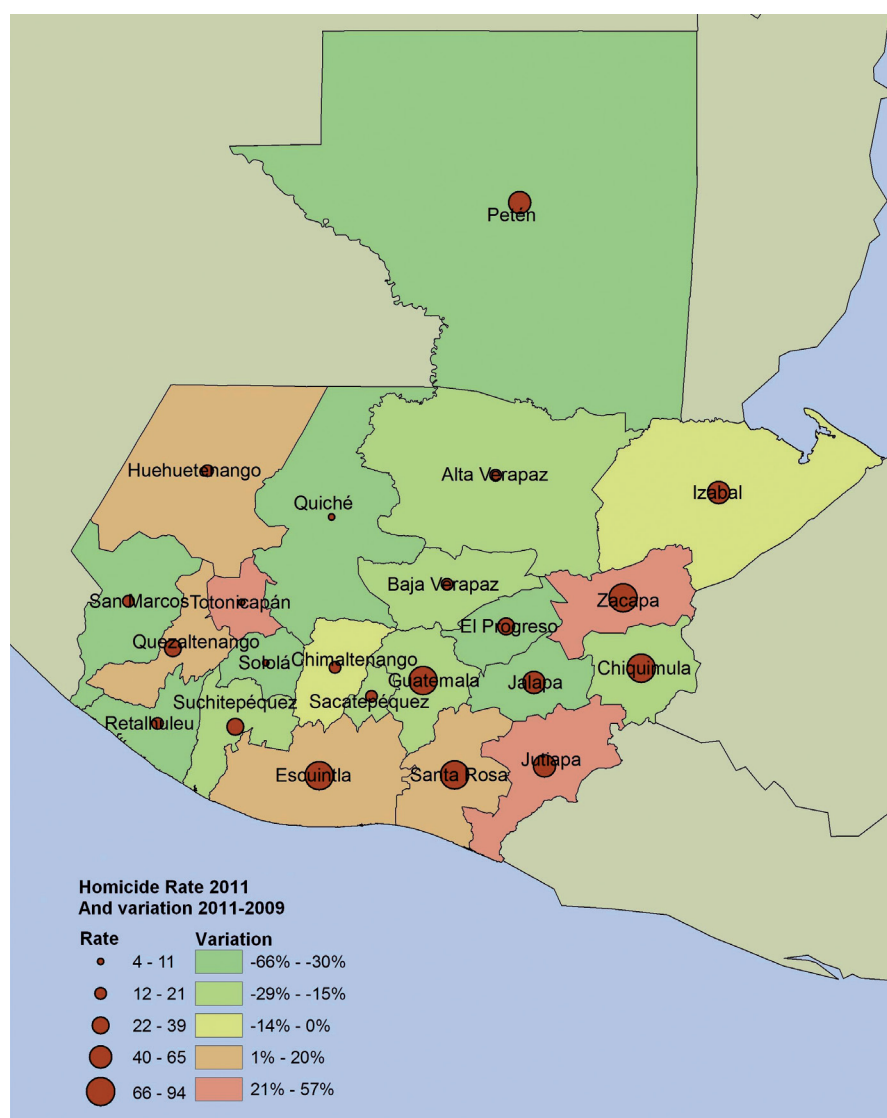


Source: National Civil Police (PNC, in Spanish). Data processed by CERAC.

terms of rates (see Map 1). In fact, the departments with the highest homicide rates in 2011 were Zacapa (with a rate of 93 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants), Escuintla (with

79), Santa Rosa and Chiquimula (both with 75), followed by Guatemala (with 66), Jutiapa (with 64) and Izabal (with 62)—all of which are located in border areas with the exception of Guatemala.

Map 1. Homicide rates and rate variations between 2011-2009.



Source: PNC. Data processed by CERAC.



The rate variation of homicides also confirms this trend towards a concentration of violence in border areas. In 2011, the departments with the most significant decrease in the number of homicides compared to 2010 were Alta Verapaz and Solola (-30%), Quiché (-21%), Peten (-17%), and Guatemala (-13%). With the exception of Peten, all departments are located in the central area of the country. On the other hand, the departments that showed the highest increase in the number of homicides were Totonicapán (+50%), Zacapa (+25%), Jutiapa (+22%), Chimaltenango (+21%), and Huehuetenango (+19%)—three of which are located in borders areas.

These changes in the geographical distribution of homicidal violence may be due to the ability of organized crime groups to exploit the border areas for the production and smuggling of narcotics. This dynamic is one of the main causes of insecurity in the country. Therefore, it is essential to focus all institutional efforts on controlling current manifestations of violence affecting the border areas, through a comprehensive anti-crime policy aimed at consolidating state presence, including not only a military or police presence, but also access to more efficient security and justice services—elements that underlie

the violence exercised by organized crime.

### The instruments of violence: Trends in the use of firearms

Firearms are still the main instrument through which lethal violence is exercised in Guatemala. According to the data gathered by the Small Arms Survey (n.d.), these instruments were used to commit 81.7% of all homicides in Guatemala from 2004 to 2010.

In fact, the use of firearms in homicides in Guatemala is higher than the world average as well as the average of the subregion. It is estimated that globally, between 2004 and 2010, about 40% to 60% of homicides were committed with firearms. In Central America, these instruments were used to commit 77% of homicides, while in Western Europe only 19% of homicides were committed with firearms (GD, 2008, p. 67; UNODC, 2011, p. 10).

The proportion of homicides committed with firearms is not expected to decline in the short term. Although the dynamics of homicides committed with firearms in Central America and Guatemala have been quite stable over the past five years, there has been an increasing prevalence in the use of firearms to commit homicides in Guatemala in the longer term (see Figure 3; GD, 2011b, p. 67).

The above finding confirms the need to bring forward policies, programs, and campaigns aimed at regulating the use of firearms and disarming the citizens of Guatemala. Improving firearms registration and control, broadening and strengthening restrictive measures in the use of these instruments as well as implementing citizen disarmament campaigns, are all crucial measures. They will not only contribute to reducing the risk of misuse of firearms among citizens and criminal organizations, but also enable control of the monopoly on the use of weapons of the state.

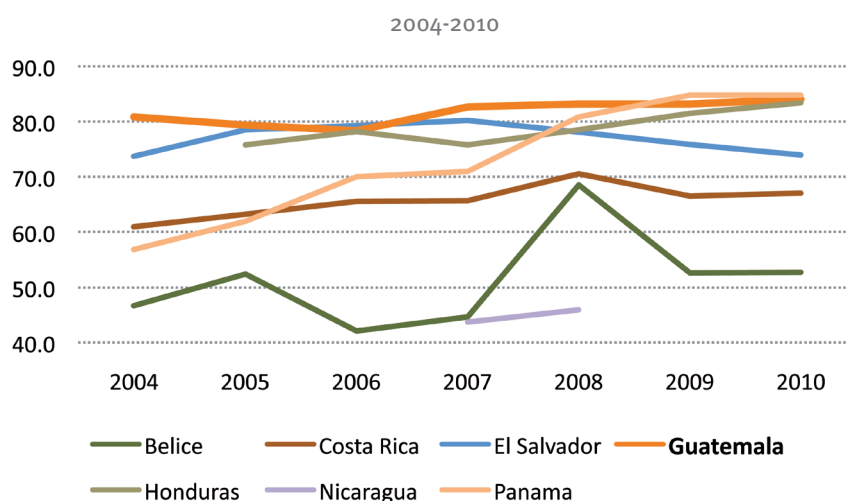
### Evolution of homicides by gender and the phenomenon of femicide

The vast majority of the victims of violence in Guatemala are young men between 18 and 39 years old (GD, 2011b, p. 61). Although after the signing of the Peace Agreements the rise in homicides against men has been greater than the homicides affecting women (74% and 68% respectively, between 1996 and 2008), it is important not to underestimate the significant increase in homicides against women during the last decade (see Figure 4).

Despite the reduction of homicides that has occurred between 2010 and 2011, homicides against women have not shown a notable drop compared to the number of homicides committed against men. Indeed, the recent trend of homicides shows that female victims have increased up to 0.14% (i.e. 1 case of homicide more than 2010), while male victims dropped 6.25% (i.e., 329 less homicides than in 2010). This asymmetry in the reduction of violence is worrying because it indicates that violence reduction policies are less effective in protecting women.

Furthermore, it is possible to state that violence against women continues to be predominantly urban. Lethal victimization of women continues to prevail in the department of Guatemala, which recorded 56% (391 victims) of all homicides against women occurred in 2011. Of these, 133 women were killed in Guatemala City

Figure 3. Proportion of homicides committed with firearms in Central America,



Source: Small Arms Survey. Figure elaborated by CERAC.

**Figure 4. Homicides by gender in Guatemala,**

2001-2011



Source: PNC. Data processed by CERAC.

and 258 in the rest of the department (PNC, 2011).

Given this trend, it is important to highlight that state institutions have generated important mechanisms to deal with homicides committed against women. For example, Guatemalan law has incorporated “femicide”—which means ‘the murder of a woman based on her gender’—as a legal category based on the premise that ‘the vulnerability of women is increased as a result of the institutional incapacity to prevent, prosecute and punish those responsible of the murders of women’ (GD, 2011b, p. 105)<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, the recently created Task Force against Femicide is expected to develop initiatives aimed at reducing impunity

in cases of femicide as well as reducing the numbers of victims of this violence during 2012.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusions

This brief update note summarizes the latest and most recent trends regarding homicidal violence in Guatemala, as well as outlining the general characteristics of homicidal violence in Guatemala today. In synthesis:

- It finds that there is a reduction of homicidal violence of 8% in 2010 and 5% in 2011—victimization of women increased 0.14% while homicides against men showed a reduction of 6.25% for the same period.

- In spite of this reduction, homicidal violence remains high and is distributed heterogeneously. Guatemala City and in the Guatemala department suffer from a concentration of homicides in absolute numbers. In terms of rates, however, violence has intensified in the departments located in the borders—in the south and east areas of the country—and dropped in those departments located in the center of the country.

- Most homicides in Guatemala involved the use of firearms: 81.7% of all homicides for the period 2004–10, were committed with these instruments.

Although the latest downward trend in homicides in Guatemala is promising, the importance of efforts aimed at better understanding the dynamics of armed violence should not be disregarded in order to prevent and reduce more effectively its several and complex manifestations, particularly given that levels of homicidal violence remain high in the country.

Although the dynamics of violence are changing, the recommendations presented in the report *Guatemala en la encrucijada: Panorama de una violencia transformada* are still of great value for deepening and consolidating, in the long term, a sustainable reduction of armed violence in Guatemala.

**GUATEMALA en la ENCRUCIJADA**

**PANORAMA de una VIOLENCIA TRANSFORMADA**



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Un estudio realizado por el  
Small Arms Survey y CERAC.  
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## Endnotes

- 1 See the Law against Femicide and other forms of violence against women. Decree No. 22-2008, available at: <http://www.eclac.cl/oig/doc/Gua2008LeycontraFemicidio.pdf>
- 2 See <http://www.s21.com.gt/nacionales/2012/01/25/comienzan-operar-cinco-fuerzas-tarea>

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## Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, endorsed by more than 100 countries, commits signatories to supporting initiatives intended to measure the human, social, and economic costs of armed violence, to assess risks and vulnerabilities, to evaluate the effectiveness of armed violence reduction programmes, and to disseminate knowledge of best practices. The Declaration calls upon states to achieve measurable reductions in the global burden of armed violence and tangible improvements in human security by 2015.

Core group members include Brazil, Colombia, Finland, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, Morocco, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, and the United Kingdom. Affiliated organizations include the Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO).

For more information about the Geneva Declaration, related activities, and publications, please visit [www.genevadeclaration.org](http://www.genevadeclaration.org)

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## Small Arms Survey

The Small Arms Survey is an independent research project located at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. Established in 1999, the project is supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and current contributions from the Governments of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The Survey is grateful for past support received from the Governments of France, New Zealand, and Spain. The Survey also wishes to acknowledge the financial assistance it has received over the years from different United Nations agencies, programmes, and institutes.

The Survey sponsors field research and information-gathering efforts, especially in affected states and regions. The project has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies, sociology, and criminology, and collaborates with a network of researchers, partner institutions, non-governmental organizations, and governments in more than 50 countries.

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## CERAC

The Conflict Analysis Resource Centre (CERAC) is a private and independent non-governmental research center, specialized in the study of conflict and armed violence. CERAC produces policy-relevant information and analysis in order to contribute to violence reduction and conflict resolution.

CERAC currently has four research areas that focus on (1) Conflict Analysis, (2) Conflict and Armed Violence Measurement, (3) Armed Violence and Development (4) and Conflict Resolution and Transitional Processes. Across these areas CERAC studies violence and conflicts using a wide variety of methodological perspectives, emphasizing the human impact. The center was established in December 2004 by an international group of researchers with a wide range of disciplinary expertise, from political science to demography, anthropology and economics.

CERAC's researchers and research associates, have ample experience in conflict measurement and the design and use of information systems for memory building and analytical study of conflict from a policy-relevant perspective. CERAC also counts with the experience and expertise of dedicated coders and information gatherers, as well as the methodological standards and tools for documenting and processing information. Although CERAC has worked mostly in the Colombian case, it has also extended its research to several Latin American and Caribbean countries. It has conducted research on a global scale, in terms of data inclusion and with micro data from several countries and conflicts.

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