

**QUESTION AND ANSWER SERIES**

**GUATEMALA**

**HARDSHIP CONSIDERATIONS**

**[QA/GTM/00.001]**

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Question and Answer Series papers are one means by which information on human rights conditions in a country and/or conditions affecting given groups or individuals deemed “at risk” within a given country is presented to Asylum and Immigration Officers.

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## I. Introduction

Guatemala is the second most densely populated country in Latin America, after neighboring El Salvador. According to the CIA World Factbook, it has about 12.3 million people (July 1999 estimate) living on 108,430 square kilometers, an area slightly smaller than Tennessee.<sup>1</sup> That translates to 114 inhabitants per square kilometer, or 295 inhabitants per square mile.

Guatemalan society is characterized by extreme social and economic inequality. According to a 1998 study by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), Latin America has the greatest disparities in income distribution in the world. In gauging the relative levels of disparity in Latin America, the IADB study found that Guatemala was among the countries with the very highest levels of inequality. It had a Gini index of 59.6 percent, second only to Brazil (60.1 percent). Globally, it ranks third, after Sierra Leone (62.9 percent) and Brazil.<sup>2</sup>

According to the IADB, inequality has serious consequences. Were Latin America to have levels of inequality comparable to Southeast Asia, poverty would be a fifth of what it actually is. Greater inequality also undermines acceptance of democracy. The Central American country with the lowest Gini index, Costa Rica (47.0 percent), has by far the highest level of acceptance of democracy (83 percent, versus 48 percent in Guatemala).<sup>3</sup> Since the IADB has identified gaps in education as the primary cause of inequality, this issue is explored further in the section on education.<sup>4</sup>

The Human Development Index (HDI) maintained by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) provides a broad assessment of relative levels of development in the world. The HDI considers three basic dimensions—longevity, knowledge, and standard of living—and measures life expectancy, educational attainment

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<sup>1</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *CIA World Factbook 1999*, from Internet, <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/gt.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Inter-American Development Bank. *Facing Up to Inequality: Economic and Social Progress in Latin America, 1998-1999 Report* (Washington DC: IADB and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 13, Figure 1.3; World Bank. *1999 World Development Indicators* (New York: World Bank, 1999), pp. 70-72. The Gini index is measured on a scale ranging from 0 percent (perfect equality—everyone receiving the same level of income) to 100 percent (a single person receiving all of a nation's income). The higher the percentage, the greater the inequality.

<sup>3</sup> Inter-American Development Bank. *Facing Up to Inequality: Economic and Social Progress in Latin America, 1998-1999 Report* (Washington DC: IADB and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 22-23.

<sup>4</sup> Inter-American Development Bank. *Facing Up to Inequality: Economic and Social Progress in Latin America, 1998-1999 Report* (Washington DC: IADB and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 33.

and literacy, and income. In the 1999 HDI, Guatemala rated 117<sup>th</sup> out of 174 countries, while the United States rated third. Overall, countries fall into one of three categories—high, medium and low development. Guatemala is ranked in the bottom third of countries in the medium development category. Its HDI rank is 32 places below its real GDP per capita rank, indicating comparatively poor performance on human development in relationship to the material resources at its disposal.<sup>5</sup>

According to a UNDP study of Guatemala published in 1998, there are significant disparities in levels of development between the country's 22 administrative departments (see Map 1, "Human Development Index 1995-1996"). Only one of the country's departments, Guatemala, has a higher HDI rating than the national average. Guatemala, which includes Guatemala City, is in the high-development category. Four other departments—Zacapa, Sacatepéquez, El Progreso, and Retalhuleu—are in the medium-development category (defined as 0.500-0.799). The 17 remaining departments, where most of the country's Maya indigenous population is concentrated, are all in the low-development (HDI under 0.500) category.<sup>6</sup>

Another way of illustrating the gap between the capital and the rest of the country is to contrast the HDI for the Department of Guatemala (0.829) with the HDI of the department with the next-highest score, Zacapa (0.538). That is roughly the difference between Malaysia (0.834) and Iraq (0.538) or even the Congo (0.519). The lowest HDI scores are held by the departments of Sololá (0.391), Totonicapán (0.374), Quiché (0.366), and Alta Verapaz (0.355). In other words, Guatemala City is on a par with some of the Asian "tigers" while the rest of the country is comparable to parts of Equatorial Africa.<sup>7</sup>

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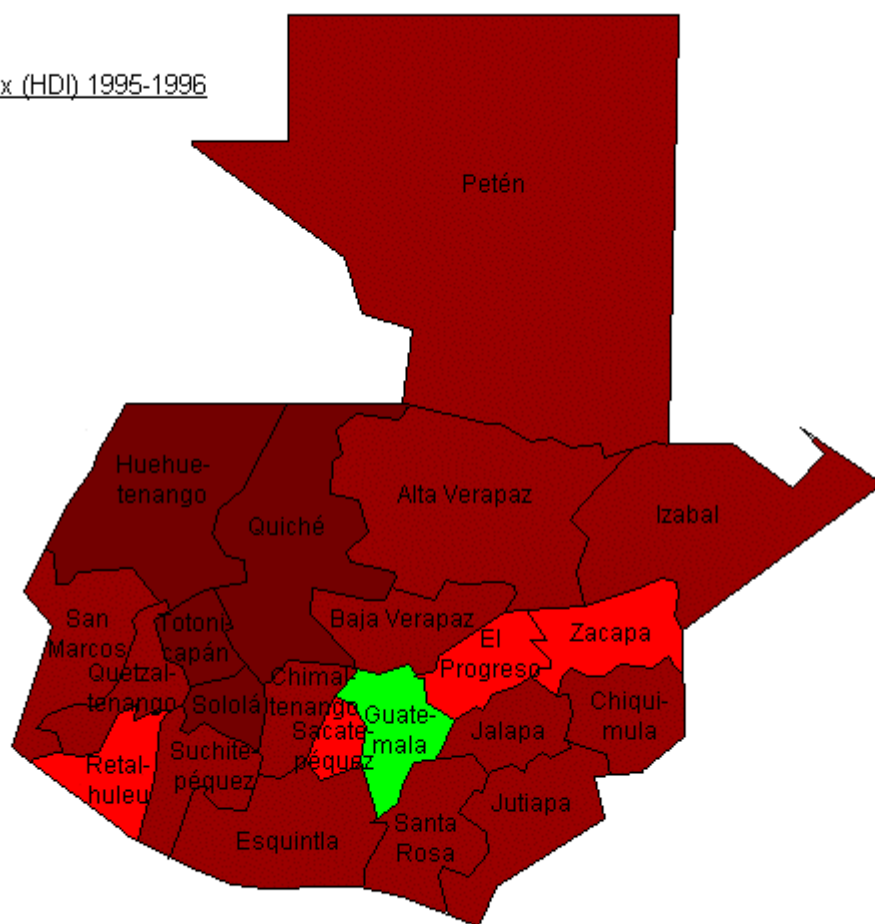
<sup>5</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1999* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 134-137.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 19; United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 1998* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 128-130.

Map 1:

Human Development Index (HDI) 1995-1996



data source: UNDP, *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano*, 1998, p. 199

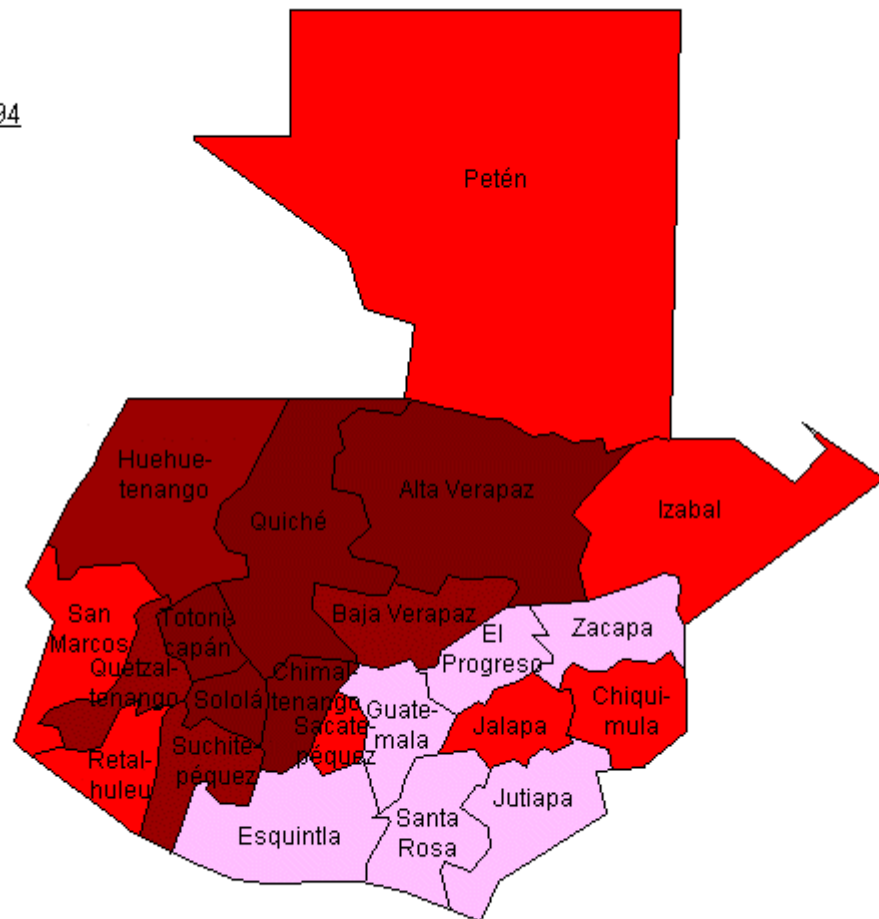
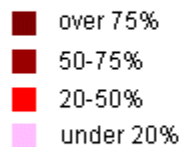
The link between human development and ethnicity is striking when one notes that those four departments also have the highest proportion of indigenous peoples (see Map 2, “Indigenous population 1994,” and Map 3, “Linguistic communities of Guatemala”). Totonicapán has the highest proportion of Mayan inhabitants (94.5%), followed by Sololá (93.6%), Alta Verapaz (89.0%), and Quiché (83.4%).<sup>8</sup> A more direct way of gauging human development in indigenous communities is provided by the HDI figures for major ethnic groups: Kakchikel (0.419), Mam (0.368), K’iche’ (0.366), and Q’eqchi’ (0.356).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 220.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 204.

Map 2:

Indigenous population 1994



data source: UNDP, *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano*, 1998, p. 220; from INE (1996).

Rates of political participation are the lowest in Latin America, with an average voter turnout of only 29.6% during the 1990s. Only war-torn Colombia came close to matching that figure, with 31.6%. Other Central American countries had much higher rates of participation: El Salvador (47.6%), Honduras (63.5%), Panama (70.1%), Nicaragua (74.8%), and Costa Rica (81.4%).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 227.

Map 3: LINGUISTIC COMMUNITIES OF GUATEMALA



SOURCE: BEST Project 520-0374, USAID – Guatemala



## II. General Conditions

### A. Poverty

According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the national poverty rate was 75 percent in 1989, with 58 percent living in extreme poverty. Among the indigenous population, 93 percent lived in poverty and 91 percent in extreme poverty.<sup>11</sup> In 1998, the U.S. State Department reported that approximately 80 percent of the population lived below the poverty line, and that the poverty rate rose to about 90 percent in the indigenous population.<sup>12</sup>

Poverty is not just a reflection of low income. More fundamentally, it refers to the deprivation of basic human needs. To measure poverty more directly, the UNDP has developed an Index of Exclusion from Social Development (IEDS, *Indice de Exclusión del Desarrollo Social*). The index, which has no direct economic component, combines the following: the percentage of the population that does not live to 40 years of age; the percentage of adults who are illiterate; the percentage of homes without access to water; the percentage of the population without access to basic health care; and the percentage of children under five who are moderately to severely underweight.<sup>13</sup>

The Department of Alta Verapaz has the highest index of exclusion (48.4), followed by Quiché (45.6), Sololá (40.4), Huehuetenango (39.5), Totonicapán (37.8), and Baja Verapaz (36.2), all of which are in the Mayan highlands (see Map 4, “Index of social exclusion 1994-1995”). At the other extreme is the Department of Guatemala (12.7), and neighboring Sacatepéquez (18.6).<sup>14</sup>

One cause of poverty is high population density in the countryside. According to the World Bank, Guatemala had a rural population density of 458 persons per square kilometer of *arable land* in 1996, only slightly behind El Salvador’s 498. The average annual rate of deforestation between 1990 and 1995 was 2.0%, four times the rate of deforestation in Brazil.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO, 1999), p. 294.

<sup>12</sup> US Department of State. “Guatemala,” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1998* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, March 1999).

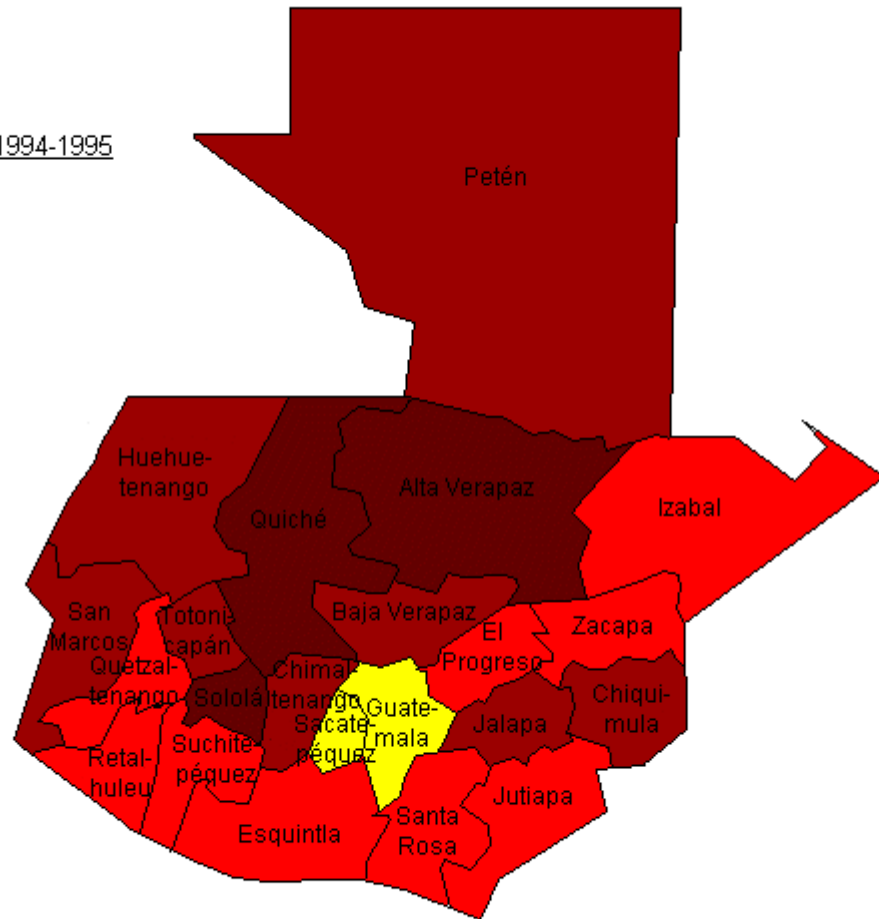
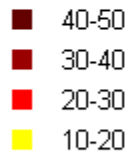
<sup>13</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 200.

<sup>15</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 1999* (New York: World Bank, 1999), p. 120.

Map 4:

Index of social exclusion 1994-1995



data source: UNDP, Guatemala: *los contrastes del desarrollo humano*, 1998, p.200.

More than half (55%) the population is under 20 years of age.<sup>16</sup> According to UNICEF, 27 percent of Guatemalan children under five years old are moderately to severely underweight, and fully half suffer from moderate to severe stunting.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 221.

<sup>17</sup> UNICEF. *The State of the World's Children 2000* (New York: UNICEF, 1999), p. 89.

## **B. Income**

According to the United Nations Development Program, real per capita income (adjusted for differences in purchasing power) was \$4,100 in 1997.<sup>18</sup> The World Bank figure for 1997 is virtually identical at \$4,060.<sup>19</sup> Because of the country's extremely unequal distribution of income, however, these averages are very misleading. A small part of the population has a considerably higher income, while the majority receives far less. According to UNICEF, about 53 percent of the population earns less than a dollar a day, or \$365 a year.<sup>20</sup>

More than one in ten Guatemalan households receive remittances from abroad, mostly from family members living in the United States, and those remittances provide about a sixth of their income. In 1995, remittances were estimated at \$350 million. That is ten times the 1996 U.S. foreign assistance of \$35.8 million, and about 16 percent of the value of all exports, making remittances one of the largest sources of hard currency. Without remittances, poverty levels would be even higher.<sup>21</sup>

## **C. Employment**

Though nominal unemployment rates are very low, underemployment rates are very high. According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the rate of open unemployment was 5.0 percent in 1996. But taking into account underemployment in the large informal sector of the economy, PAHO estimated total unemployment at about 37 percent.<sup>22</sup> In 1997, the INE (*Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas*) estimated total unemployment at 41.7 percent.<sup>23</sup>

According to the United Nations Development Program, one-third of the Economically Active Population (EAP) is self-employed. Another 14% are

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<sup>18</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1998* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> World Bank. *World Development Indicators 1999* (New York: World Bank, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF. *The State of the World's Children 2000* (New York: UNICEF and Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 105.

<sup>21</sup> Waller Meyers, Deborah. *Migrant Remittances to Latin America: Reviewing the Literature* (Washington DC: Inter-American Dialogue and Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 1998), from Internet, <http://www.iadialog.org/meyers.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO, 1999), p. 294.

<sup>23</sup> Inforpress Centroamericana. "Report on Employment in Guatemala," prepared for INS Resource Information Center, 22 February 1999.

unremunerated domestic workers. These two categories, the vast majority of whose members are in the informal sector of the economy, make up almost half the EAP, and are where most of the underemployment occurs. Coinciding with adult underemployment is child labor. Children aged 7 to 14 made up 5.5% of the EAP in 1994, due in part to poverty and to inadequate educational opportunities.<sup>24</sup>

In a 1989 survey, about 36% of the EAP did not even have a single year of formal education, almost half had not completed primary school, and only 16% had completed secondary school.<sup>25</sup> Such educational deficiencies result in low productivity. According to the UNDP, Guatemala's entire GDP could be produced with roughly 60% of its EAP. That means underemployment is equivalent to an unemployment rate of around 40%.<sup>26</sup>

The formal sector of the economy has been shrinking, as reflected in the decline in the proportion of the EAP covered by the IGSS (whose contributions are mandatory in the formal sector), from 31.6% in 1990 to 27.45% in 1996.<sup>27</sup> Real wages in the formal sector have been declining as well, at an average annual rate of 1.1% between 1985 and 1996.<sup>28</sup> Both trends have been contributing to an increase in already high levels of income inequality.

For persons working in the formal sector, the minimum wage, effective December 1997, was \$3.03 per day for industrial workers and \$2.75 per day plus mandatory productivity bonuses for agricultural workers. According to the U.S. Department of State, the minimum wage was not always paid, and was insufficient to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The Constitution prohibits employment of minors under the age of 14 without written permission from the Ministry of Labor. Yet that provision is commonly disregarded in the informal and agricultural sectors. Though the Labor Ministry has granted permission for 4,000 minors to work legally, thousands

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<sup>24</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 58.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 58.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 62.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 60.

<sup>28</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 61.

more work illegally. They typically receive no social benefits, social insurance, vacations, or severance pay, and earn below-minimum salaries.<sup>29</sup>

Less than 8 percent of the labor force is unionized.<sup>30</sup>

#### **D. Education**

The problem in education is twofold: inadequate investment of resources by the government; and extremely unequal distribution of educational opportunities among the population.

In 1996 Guatemala spent 1.7 percent of GNP on education, ranking it at the bottom of the hemisphere, below the Dominican Republic (2.0%), El Salvador (2.2%), and Peru (2.9%). That contrasts with countries that invested more heavily in health care, which included not only wealthier countries like the United States (5.4%) and Canada (7.0%), but also poorer countries like Cuba (6.3% in 1985) and Costa Rica (5.3%).<sup>31</sup>

There is a strong correlation between the percent of GDP invested in education and the rate of adult literacy, particularly when the former is sustained over an extended period. In 1997, adult literacy rates in Cuba (95.9%) and Costa Rica (95.1%) were almost level with the United States (99.0%) and Canada (99.0%). On the other hand, adult literacy rates were significantly lower in the countries that invested a much smaller percentage of GDP in education: Peru (88.7%), Dominican Republic (82.6%), and El Salvador (77.0%). Guatemala (66.6%) trailed every country in the hemisphere except Haiti.<sup>32</sup>

As pointed out in the Introduction, gaps in education explain most income inequality in Latin America. Guatemala's extraordinarily high level of income inequality is due above all to extraordinarily unequal access to education. Guatemala is the only Spanish or Portuguese-speaking country in the hemisphere in which the average person

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<sup>29</sup> US Department of State. "Guatemala," *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1998* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, March 1999).

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Department of State. *1997 Country Reports On Economic Policy and Trade Practices*, Department of State report submitted to the Senate Committees on Foreign Relations and on Finance and to the House Committees on Foreign Affairs and on Ways and Means, January 1998. From Internet, [http://www.state.gov/www/issues/economic/trade\\_reports/latin\\_america97/guatemala97.html](http://www.state.gov/www/issues/economic/trade_reports/latin_america97/guatemala97.html).

<sup>31</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1999* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 188-191.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1999* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 134-137.

receives less than three years of schooling. Only Creole-speaking Haiti comes in slightly lower.<sup>33</sup>

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), less than three-quarters (73.8 percent) of the relevant age group attended primary school in 1997; and only slightly over a third (34.9 percent) attended secondary school.<sup>34</sup> According to UNICEF, only half of those who enter primary school reach the 5th grade.<sup>35</sup>

Widely-varying rates of secondary school attendance among Guatemalan departments highlight extreme disparities in education (see Map 5, “Percent of relevant age group in secondary school, 1996”). Whereas fully two-thirds attend secondary school in the Department of Guatemala (twice the national average), less than one in ten do so in indigenous Quiché.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, little effort has been made to bridge the linguistic gap between the *ladino* culture in Guatemala City and the impoverished Maya hinterlands. Even though almost half the country’s population speaks various indigenous languages, less than five percent of primary schools offered bilingual education through fourth grade in 1995.<sup>37</sup>

University education is of generally low quality. Only 10% of the teaching staff is full-time, another 15% half-time, and the remainder hourly. Only 15% of students obtain a degree. Most do not arrive with the minimum level of preparation needed to be able to do university studies. Only 17% of those who obtain degrees do so in engineering and the sciences, the areas most vital to a developing economy.<sup>38</sup> Because of the low quality of education in Guatemala, the wealthy tend to send their children abroad for a university education, reinforcing the pattern of inequality.

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<sup>33</sup> Inter-American Development Bank. *Facing Up to Inequality: Economic and Social Progress in Latin America, 1998-1999 Report* (Washington DC: IADB and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 48, Figure 2.19.

<sup>34</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1999* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 178.

<sup>35</sup> UNICEF. *The State of the World’s Children 2000* (New York: UNICEF, 1999), p. 97.

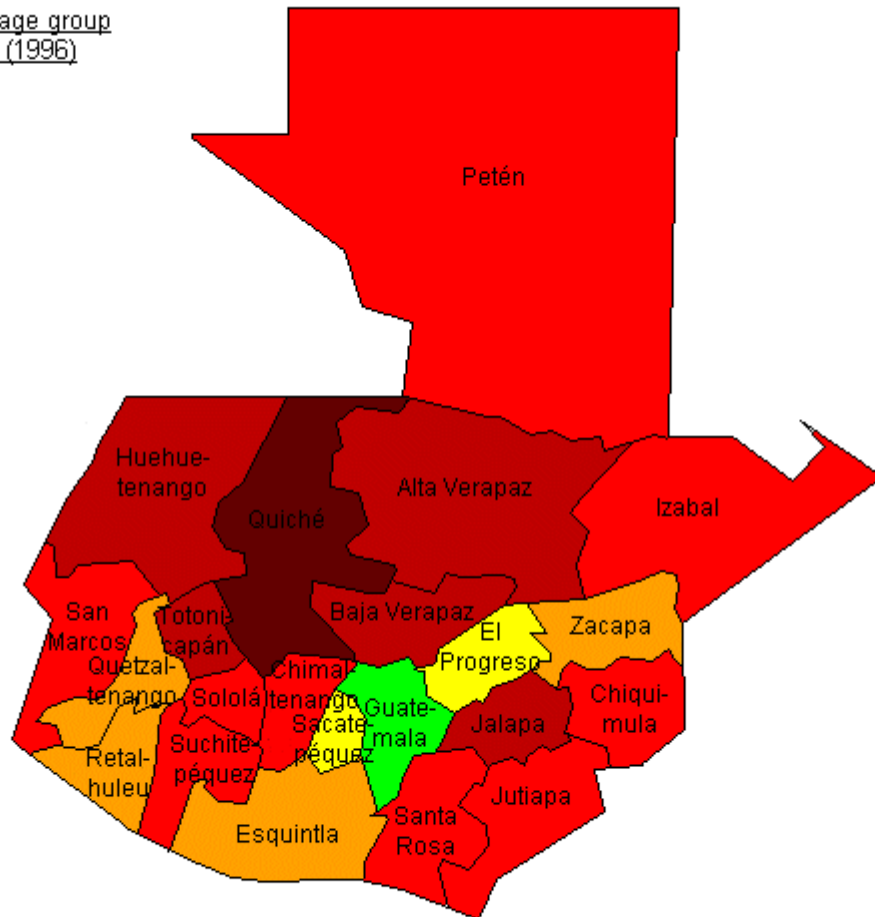
<sup>36</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), pp. 34-35.

<sup>38</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 40.

Map 5:  
Percentage of relevant age group  
in secondary school (1996)

- 67%
- 40 - 45%
- 30 - 40%
- 20 - 30%
- 10 - 20%
- under 10%



data source: UNDP, Guatemala: *los contrastes del desarrollo humano*, 1998, p.36.

## E. Housing

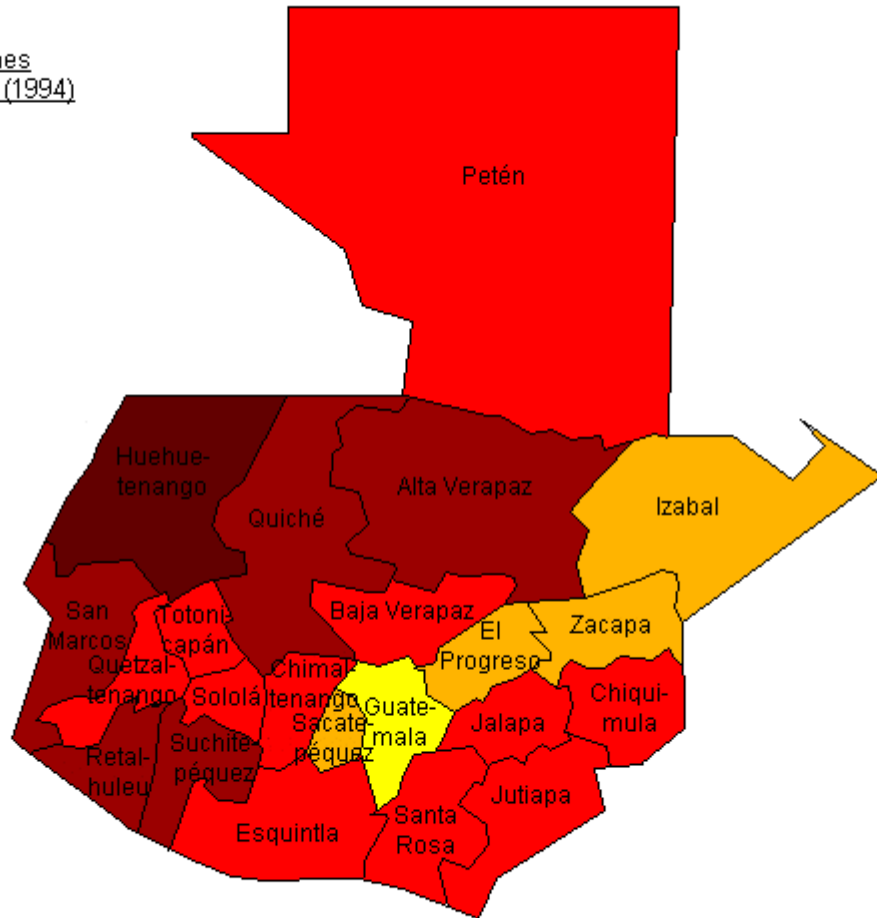
According to Guatemala's National Institute of Statistics (INE, *Instituto Nacional de Estadística*), 14 percent of households in the Department of Guatemala lived in housing that did not meet basic needs for shelter in 1994. In Alta Verapaz and Petén, more than half of households were in that category, as were more than a quarter in Sacatepéquez, Chimaltenango, Sololá, Retalhuleu, Baja Verapaz, Izabal, Zacapa, Chiquimula, and Jalapa.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística. "Estadísticas Económicas: Calidad de Vivienda." From Internet, <http://server.rds.org.gt/~ine/eco/necesidades/vivienda.htm>.

The situation is worse when it comes to overcrowding. INE reports that in 1994, almost a quarter (23%) of households in the capital were overcrowded. In all other departments, at least a third of households suffered from overcrowding, with levels reaching 61 percent in Huehuetenango, 54 percent in Quiché and Alta Verapaz, 53 percent in San Marcos, and 51 percent in Suchitepéquez and Retalhuleu (see Map 6, “Percentage of homes suffering overcrowding 1994”).<sup>40</sup>

Map 6:  
percentage of homes  
suffering overcrowding (1994)

- over 60%
- 50-60%
- 40-50%
- 30-40%
- 20-30%



data source: Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (INE), 1994

<sup>40</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística. “Estadísticas Económicas: Hacinamiento.” From Internet, <http://server.rds.org.gt/~ine/eco/necesidades/hacinamiento.htm>.



The housing situation is especially critical for residents of Guatemala City's "marginal neighborhoods" (*barrios marginales*). In 1997, a survey of 4435 residences in 60 such neighborhoods found that only 23 percent share rooms with up to two other persons. More than half share rooms with 3 to 5 other persons, and more than a fifth share rooms with 6 to 9 other persons.<sup>41</sup>

Restrictions on foreign investment in new "housing construction are so onerous they virtually exclude foreign participation," according to the State Department.<sup>42</sup>

## **F. Health**

In 1995 Guatemala spent 1.8 percent of GDP on health care, ranking near at the bottom of the hemisphere, alongside countries like Haiti (1.3%), Paraguay (1.8%), and the Dominican Republic (1.8%). That contrasts with countries that invested more heavily in health care, which included not only wealthier nations like the United States (6.5%) and Canada (6.9%), but also poorer ones like Cuba (7.9%), Belize (6.0%), and Costa Rica (6.0%).<sup>43</sup> There is a strong correlation between investment in health care and life expectancy, particularly when the former is sustained over an extended period. In 1997, life expectancies in Cuba (76), Costa Rica (76), and Belize (75) were almost level with the United States (77) and Canada (79), whereas life expectancy in Guatemala was only 64. Only Bolivia and Haiti scored lower in the hemisphere.<sup>44</sup> Infant mortality in 1997 was 43 per 1,000, compared to 7 per 1,000 in the United States.<sup>45</sup>

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), during the years 1990-1995, 43 percent of the population was without access to health services,<sup>46</sup> while

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<sup>41</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 154.

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Department of State. *1997 Country Reports On Economic Policy and Trade Practices*, Department of State report submitted to the Senate Committees on Foreign Relations and on Finance and to the House Committees on Foreign Affairs and on Ways and Means, January 1998. From Internet, [http://www.state.gov/www/issues/economic/trade\\_reports/latin\\_america97/guatemala97.html](http://www.state.gov/www/issues/economic/trade_reports/latin_america97/guatemala97.html).

<sup>43</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1999* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 188-191.

<sup>44</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1999* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 134-137.

<sup>45</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1999* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 168, 170.

<sup>46</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1998* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 146.

during the years 1990-1997, 23 percent of the population was without access to safe water and 17 percent was without access to sanitation.<sup>47</sup>

These figures, however, mask a wide disparity between urban and rural areas. According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), 46 percent of the population in rural Guatemala did not have access to safe drinking water, and 48 percent did not have access to sanitation in 1994. Overall, 3.7 million persons lacked safe drinking water, and 4.2 million lacked adequate sanitation.<sup>48</sup>

The primary health risks to Guatemalans come from diseases that could be prevented by greater investment in sanitation. Intestinal parasitism is by far the leading cause of disease. Also among the top ten are diarrhea, amoebiasis, intestinal disorders, and urinary tract infections, all of which are to a great degree caused by contaminated water supplies.<sup>49</sup> High rates of cholera in the early 1990s—a peak of 16,779 cases in 1994—tailed off substantially in 1996.<sup>50</sup>

Food poisoning is common. In 1993, 47 percent of dairy product samples tested did not meet safety standards; neither did 40 percent of food samples from street vendors in Guatemala City and 48 percent of such samples from elsewhere in the country.<sup>51</sup>

Less than three out of five Guatemalans—58.5 percent at last count—have institutional access to health care. 25 percent are covered by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance (MSPAS, *Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social*); 17 percent by the Guatemalan Social Security Institute (IGSS, *Instituto Guatemalteco del Seguro Social*); 2.5 percent by the Military Health Service; 4 percent by non-governmental organizations; and 10 percent by private insurance.<sup>52</sup> The IGSS covers workers in the formal sector of the economy, and is concentrated in Guatemala City. In a 1992 survey, three-quarters of those eligible to use its services described them as

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<sup>47</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1999* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 147.

<sup>48</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO, 1999), p. 299.

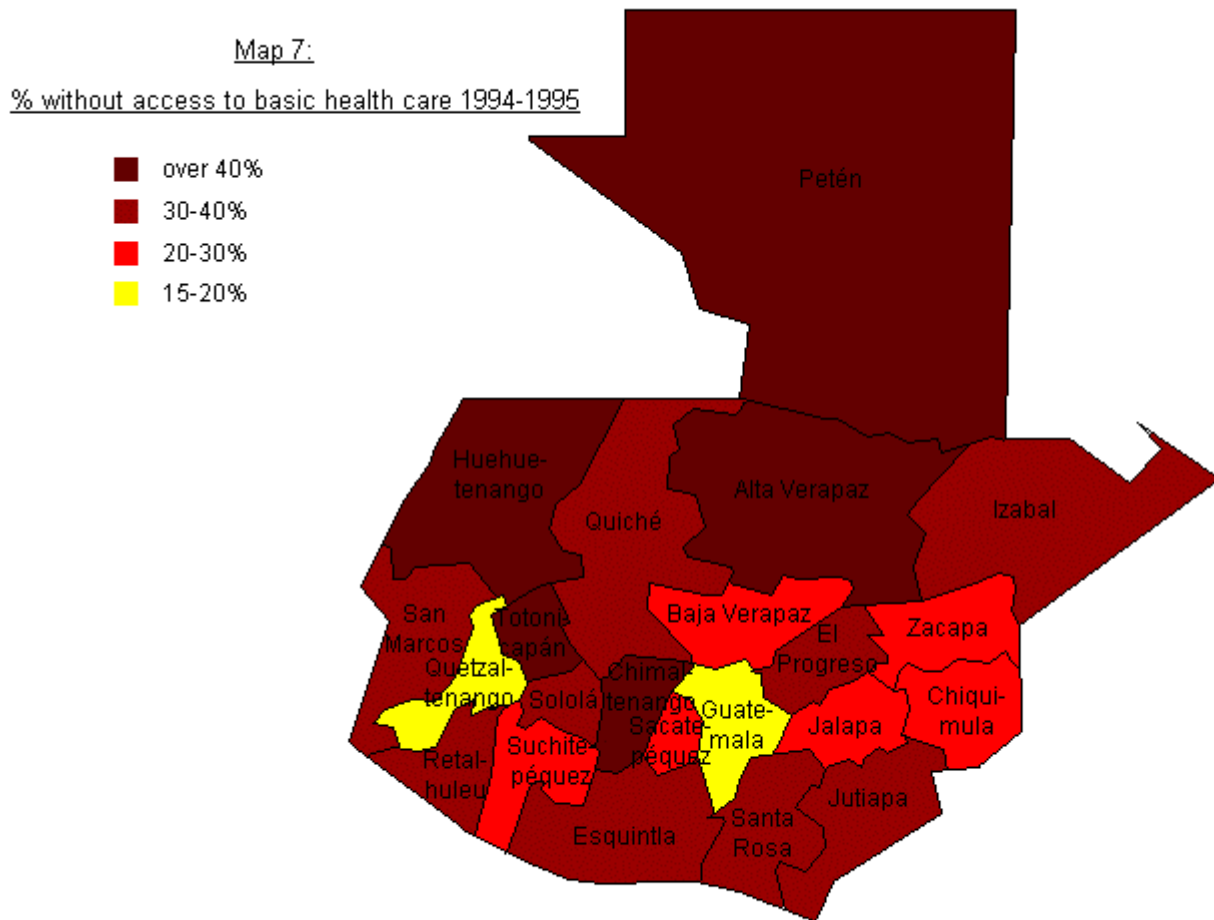
<sup>49</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), pp. 47-48.

<sup>50</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO, 1999), p. 297.

<sup>51</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO, 1999), p. 300.

<sup>52</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO, 1999), pp. 299.

“deficient” or “irregular.” The emphasis of both the MSPAS and IGSS is urban rather than rural (see Map 7, “Percent without access to basic health care 1994-1995”) making for an odd match in a country that is still two-thirds rural. The emphasis is also curative, rather than on prevention, even though the vast majority of afflictions are of a preventable nature.<sup>53</sup>



data source: UNDP, *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano*, 1998, p. 200.

<sup>53</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), pp. 52-55.

One outcome of the Peace Accords has been a government initiative to address the health care needs of the 41.5 percent of the population that has until now been excluded from coverage. With the establishment of the Comprehensive Health Care System (SIAS, *Sistema Integral de Atención en Salud*) in 1996, the government reallocated 44% of public health spending to basic needs, such as maternity care, infant nutrition, vaccinations, treatment of respiratory infections and diarrheal diseases, and prevention and treatment of infectious diseases.<sup>54</sup>

Metropolitan Guatemala City has 16 waste treatment plants, but only four are in operation. Of the remaining 329 municipalities, 286 have a sewerage system, but only 15 have a wastewater treatment plant. That means only 4.5 percent of municipalities treat their sewage; the rest dump it untreated into surface water. Nowhere in Guatemala is there a system for the final disposal of solid waste. In urban areas, solid waste collection reaches less than half the population; in rural areas, only 4 percent of the population.<sup>55</sup>

Air pollution is severe in Guatemala City. A 1995-1996 joint study by San Carlos University and the Central American Ecological Program measured concentrations of particulates, nitrogen dioxide, and ozone that exceeded World Health Organization safety standards.<sup>56</sup>

Pesticide poisoning of agricultural workers is common, and primarily involves organophosphates. The overwhelming majority of cases of pesticide poisoning occur on export crops such as sugar and coffee, where application rates often far exceed recommended rates.<sup>57</sup>

In December 1997, the National Council of Disabled People in Guatemala (established in 1994) estimated that there were 500,000 people with disabilities, about nine percent of the population, of which 12,500 were directly attributed to the civil war. Other contributing factors were lack of prenatal care, misuse of pesticides in food

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<sup>54</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO, 1999), pp. 299, 302. Also United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 53.

<sup>55</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO, 1999), pp. 299-300.

<sup>56</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO, 1999), p. 300.

<sup>57</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO, 1999), p. 300; United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 114.

production, malnutrition, criminal violence and auto accidents. As of the end of 1997, there was no provision of government services for the physically disabled.<sup>58</sup>

### **G. Environmental Degradation**

The name “Guatemala” is derived from the Nahuatl *guauhtemallan*, which means “land of trees.” That was still an apt name in 1950, when two-thirds of the country was forested. By 1996, however, the forested area had been cut in half to one-third.<sup>59</sup> And the remaining forest cover is under unprecedented assault. Between 1980 and 1990, the average rate of deforestation was 1.7 percent per year. From 1990 to 1995, the rate of increased to 2.0 percent per year. That compares with an average rate of deforestation in Brazil of 0.8 percent per year, and an average rate of *reforestation* of 0.3 percent per year (-0.3 percent deforestation) in the United States, between 1990 and 1995.<sup>60</sup> Deforestation is especially severe in the coastal mangroves, which are being destroyed at a rate approaching 3 percent per year. If allowed to continue, that destruction will imperil the nation’s shrimp industry, since shrimp rely on mangroves as nurseries.<sup>61</sup>

Tropical soils are particularly vulnerable to erosion when forest cover is removed. By 1992, half of Guatemala’s surface area had undergone moderate erosion, and another quarter had suffered severe to irreversible erosion. That erosion is obvious in the heavy sediment load and brown color of many of the nation’s rivers.<sup>62</sup>

Beginning in 1989, with passage of the Law of Protected Areas (*Ley de Areas Protegidas*), efforts have been underway to salvage some of the remaining forest cover. In a purely legal sense, those efforts have been successful. In 1986, protected areas covered only 914 square kilometers, representing less than 1 percent of the country’s surface area. By 1996, nominally protected lands had increased to 19,253 square kilometers, or 17.7 percent of the land mass.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> US Department of State. *Guatemala Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, March 1998), pp. 12-13.

<sup>59</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 103.

<sup>60</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Human Development Report 1999* (New York: UNDP and Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 205-207.

<sup>61</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 113.

<sup>62</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 105.

<sup>63</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), pp. 105-106.

But the newly-created national parks and biosphere reserves are not being allocated sufficient funds for adequate management. Without enough rangers to patrol these areas, they continue to be susceptible to invasion by peasants who slash-and-burn their way through the forest, by poachers and tropical animal collectors, and by timber thieves.<sup>64</sup>

A major cause of deforestation is reliance on wood for cooking. Though Guatemala has the potential to generate another 4,000 Megawatts of hydroelectricity, its energy source profile has not changed much in 30 years. A shocking 60 percent of energy use comes from firewood, 28 percent from direct burning of hydrocarbons (oil, coal, natural gas), and only 7 percent from electricity.<sup>65</sup> Two-thirds of all families rely on firewood for cooking. In the Department of Guatemala, less than one in five families use firewood. In every other department, a majority do. And in Quiché, Huehuetenango, Totonicapán, Sololá, Alta Verapaz, and San Marcos, over 90 percent of families depend on firewood for cooking.<sup>66</sup>

Guatemala has the highest carbon dioxide emissions in Central America. Industry contributed some 5,657 metric tons a year in the early 1990s. But deforestation was responsible for more than three times that amount, and the half million vehicles in Guatemala City added to that burden as well.<sup>67</sup>

## **H. Personal Security**

Guatemala has one of the highest homicide rates in Latin America. The homicide rate for persons over 15 years old was 47 per 100,000 in 1994.<sup>68</sup> That placed it behind Colombia and El Salvador among the most violent countries in the Americas. The comparable rate for the United States, which has the highest murder rate among advanced

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<sup>64</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 112.

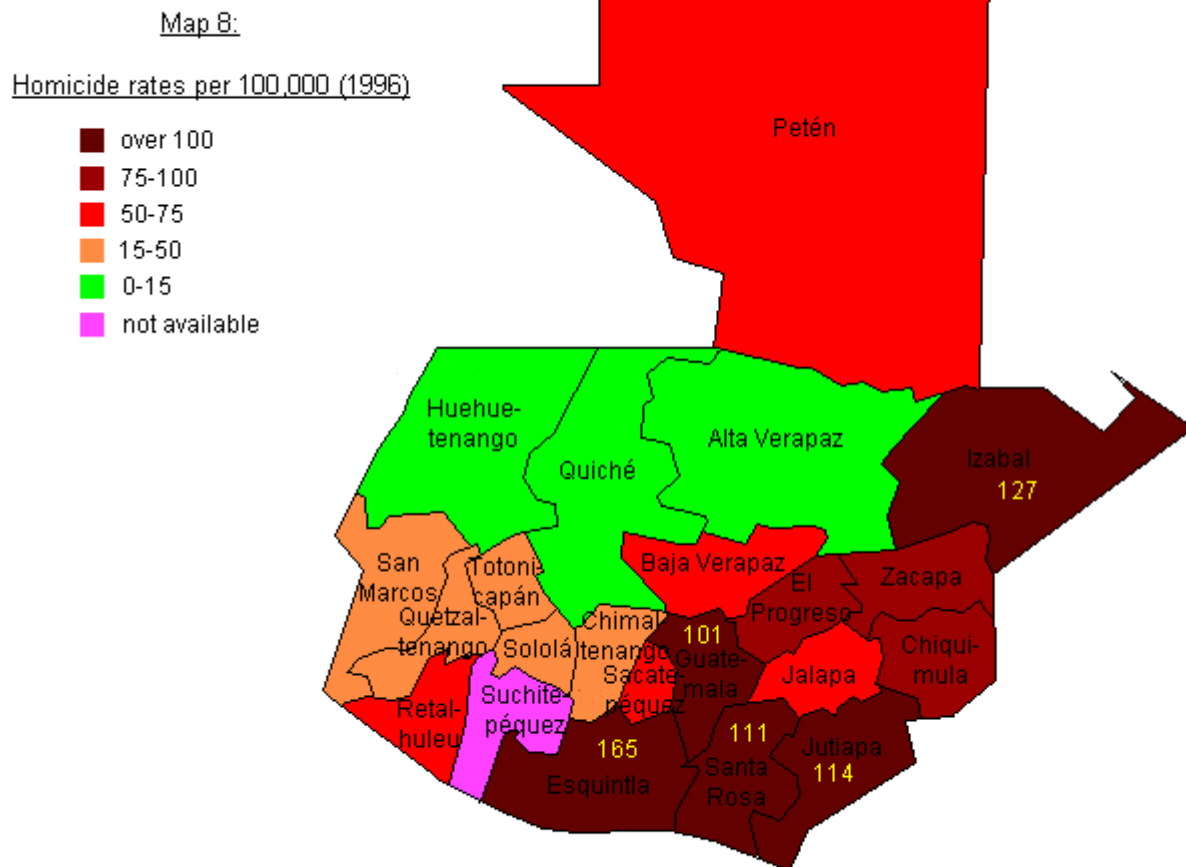
<sup>65</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), pp. 108-109.

<sup>66</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE). Table, "Contaminadores y Deforestadores," under "Estadísticas Sociales," from Internet, <http://server.rds.org.gt/~ine/soc/index.htm>.

<sup>67</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), pp. 115-116.

<sup>68</sup> Pan American Health Organization. *Health in the Americas, 1998 Edition, Volume II* (Washington DC: PAHO, 1999), p. 298.

industrialized countries, was 9.9 per 100,000 in 1993.<sup>69</sup> Based on 1996 data, homicide rates were highest around Guatemala City and the eastern Pacific Coast (165 per 100,000 in Escuintla, 127 per 100,000 in Izabal, 114 per 100,000 in Jutiapa, 111 per 100,000 in Santa Rosa, 101 per 100,000 in Guatemala), and lowest in the Mayan highlands (10 or less per 100,000 in Quiché, Huehuetenango, Alta Verapaz)—see Map 8, “Homicide rates per 100,000, 1996.”<sup>70</sup>



data source: UNDP, *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano*, 1998, p. 149; from MINUGUA (1997)

<sup>69</sup> Mayra Buvinic y Andrew Morrison. *Nota Técnica 2* (Washington: Inter-American Development Bank, July 1999), Cuadro 1: Tasas brutas de mortalidad por homicidios, 1, from Internet, <http://www.iadb.org/sds/utility.cfm/546/ENGLISH/pub/1291>.

<sup>70</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 149.

Among Latin American urban areas listed in a 1999 Inter-American Development Bank study, only Medellín and Cali in Colombia had higher homicide rates than Guatemala City.<sup>71</sup> A major contributor to the high crime rate in Guatemala City and other urban areas are youth gangs (*maras*). Reasons for the explosive growth of gangs over the past decade include severe crowding, the lack of educational, vocational, and recreational opportunities in the marginal neighborhoods (*barrios marginales*), and the breakdown of the family under such severe social strains.<sup>72</sup>

In rural areas, a primary source of violence and insecurity are disputes over land. The indigenous Maya cultures held land at the level of the community, through custom and oral history. The conquering Spanish culture held land through legal deeds. It was commonplace for the Spanish, their *ladino* descendants, and 19th Century immigrants from Switzerland and Germany to take advantage of the illiteracy of indigenous peoples by having them place their thumbprints on documents they could not read. That has left a legacy of bitterness and distrust that continues to foment rural conflict. Within nine months of the signing of the Peace Accords, 338 land disputes had been tabulated by the Presidential Office for Resolution of Land Conflicts (*Dependencia Presidencial de Resolución de Conflictos de Tierras*)—see Map 9, “Unresolved land conflicts submitted to CONTIERRA as of November 1997”).<sup>73</sup>

Guatemala continues to be haunted by its past in more ways than one. Because of its large unassimilated indigenous population, the country has never developed a culture of respect for the rule of law. The imperatives of maintaining control over the impoverished indigenous majority have tended to take precedence over democracy and modern notions of justice. It is no coincidence that the counterinsurgency during the 1970s and 1980s was the bloodiest in all of Latin America (see Map 10, “Massacres during the civil war,” which shows how indigenous areas were hardest hit). Nor is it a coincidence that almost no one has been made to answer for the killings of almost 200,000 civilians during that period. Though most of the murderers and torturers of that period are no longer employed by the security forces, they have now entered the private sector with little prospect of remunerative employment in other fields. In an atmosphere

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<sup>71</sup> Mayra Buvinic y Andrew Morrison. *Nota Técnica 2* (Washington: Inter-American Development Bank, July 1999), Cuadro 1: Tasas brutas de mortalidad por homicidios, 1, from Internet, <http://www.iadb.org/sds/utility.cfm/546/ENGLISH/pub/1291>.

<sup>72</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 154.

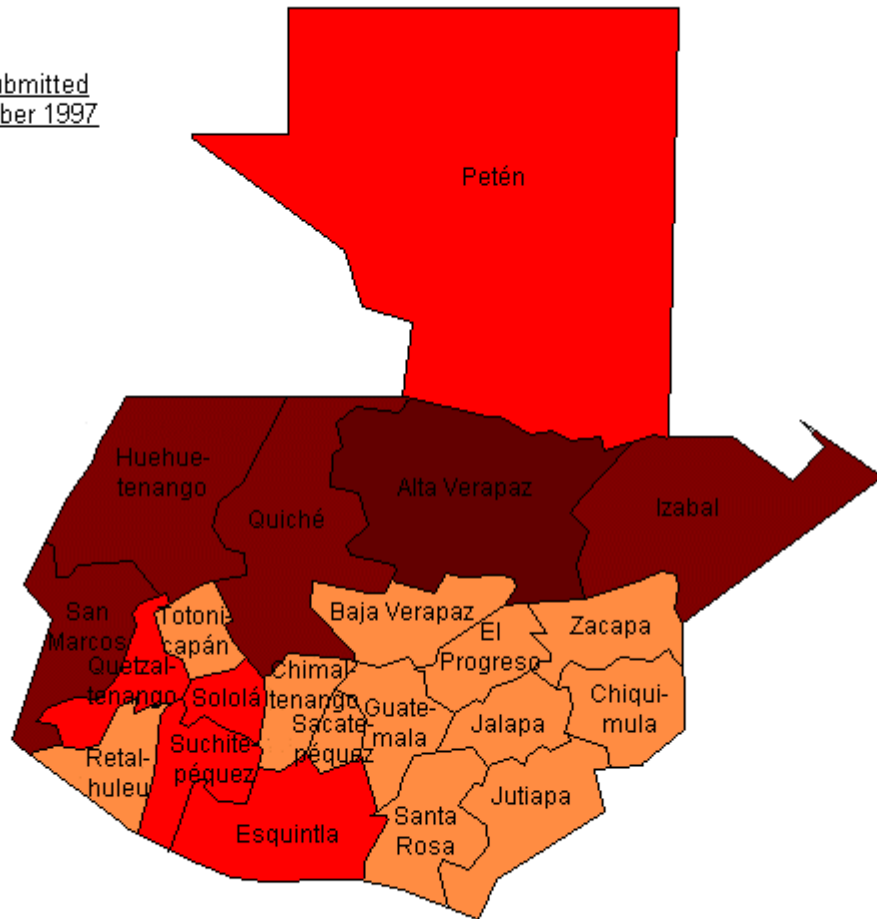
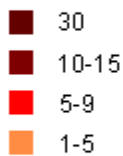
<sup>73</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano* (Guatemala: UNDP, 1998), p. 155.



of continued impunity, many of them are now using the skills acquired in the security forces for private gain. Some are now kidnapping for ransom. Others have taken up armed robbery. Still others have hired themselves out as private security guards to combat labor unions and land invasions. And in rural Guatemala, former civil patrollers are still armed, and are now using firearms to defend the land and homes they seized from neighbors who fled into the mountains or abroad during the civil war.

Map 9:

Unresolved land conflicts submitted to CONTIERRA as of November 1997

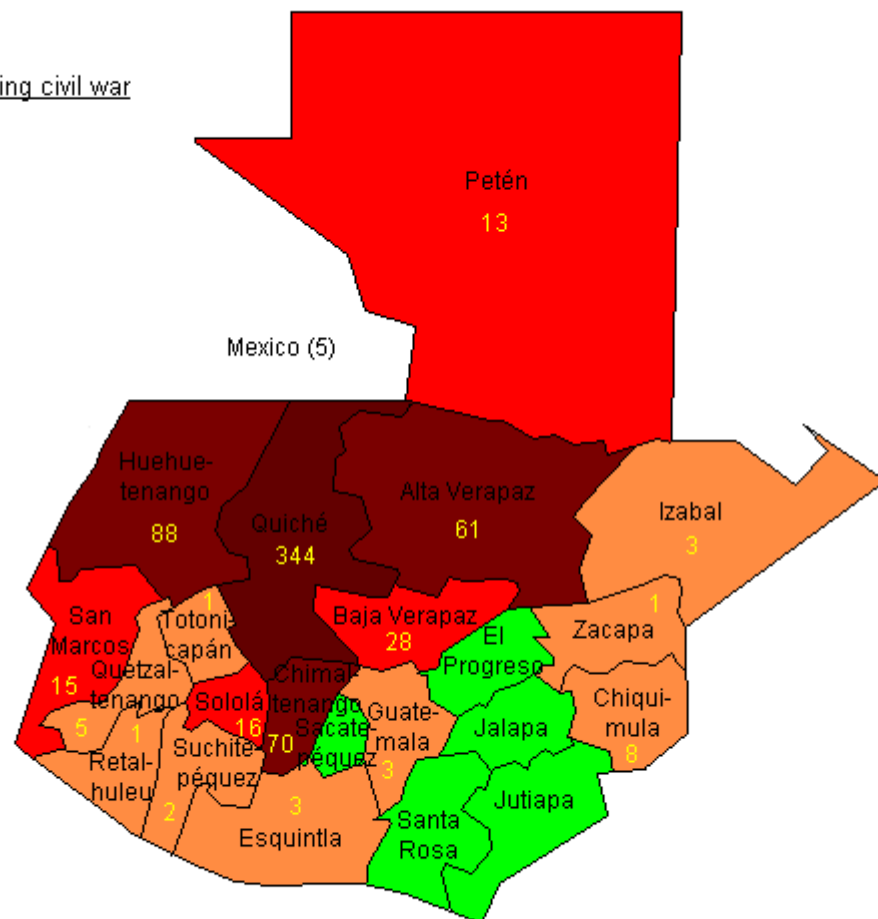


data source: UNDP, *Guatemala: los contrastes del desarrollo humano*, 1998, p. 102; from CONTIERRA (1997)

Map 10:

Documented massacres during civil war

- over 100
- 50-99
- 10-49
- 1-9
- none



source: Commission for Historical Clarification, *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, February 1999

### III. Hurricane Mitch

#### A. Losses

Mitch entered Guatemala from the Caribbean in late October 1998. The worst effects were felt in the eastern coastal department of Izabal, the neighboring department of Alta Verapaz, and the Amatlán River basin. Direct and indirect damages were estimated at about \$750 million, including destruction of banana plantations. The death toll was at least 268, with another 121 missing, some 300 injured, and 106,000 persons displaced, 55,000 of whom were still living in shelters a month later. The storm destroyed 37 bridges, 90 sections of major highways (633 km), and 34 sections of rural roads (718 km). It also destroyed 27 schools and severely damaged another 175. Poor rural zones bore the brunt of the damage.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Inter-American Development Bank. *Central America after Hurricane Mitch: The Challenge of Turning a Disaster into an Opportunity* (Stockholm: IADB, 25-28 May 1999), "Guatemala," from Internet, [http://www.iadb.org/regions/re2/consultative\\_group/background5.htm](http://www.iadb.org/regions/re2/consultative_group/background5.htm). Document presented to the Consultative Group Meeting for the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America.