



THE BECKLEY FOUNDATION



JUNE 2012

INVITATION FROM THE PRESIDENT OF GUATEMALA

The Beckley Foundation is honoured to have been invited by President Otto Pérez Molina to set up a Latin American Office in Guatemala. The President has asked the Beckley Foundation to convene an Advisory Board of international experts who will assist in

- *producing a rigorous, evidence-based analysis of the impact of current drug policies on Guatemala and the wider region*
- *developing and proposing a series of alternative drug policy options that would reduce the violence and corruption suffered by Guatemala and other countries as a result of the current policies, and that would thereby allow resources currently devoted to tackling violence and criminality to be re-allocated for health, education and development.*

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The Beckley Foundation was founded by Amanda Feilding in 1998, with the goal of reforming global drug policy by promoting evidence-based, health-oriented, harm-reducing, cost-effective policies which respect human rights. It is now a leading international drug policy think-tank, with its influential academic publications, on both policy and science, disseminated worldwide.

Over the last 14 years it has hosted a series of international drug policy meetings, mainly at the House of Lords in London; and commissioned and published over 35 books, reports and briefing papers on drug policy issues, including the seminal *Global Cannabis Commission Report*. In 2004 it established the *International Society for the Study of Drug Policy* (ISSDP) and the *International Drug Policy Consortium* (IDPC). In 2010 it commissioned *Rewriting the UN*

Drug Conventions and A Cost-Benefit Analysis of a Regulated and Taxed Cannabis Market in the UK, both to be published later this year. In 2011 it launched the *Global Initiative for Drug Policy Reform* at a meeting at the House of Lords attended by members of the Global Commission on Drug Policy and representatives of 14 countries interested in drug policy reform.

In November 2011 the Beckley Foundation published a *Public Letter* in the *London Times* and the *Guardian* signed by over 60 international figures, including 7 former Presidents and 12 Nobel Laureates, calling on governments and parliaments to recognize that the War on Drugs has failed, and that a debate on new approaches to global drug policy is urgently needed.

President Pérez is the first incumbent Head of Government to sign the Public Letter, marking an important shift in global drug policy.

THOUGHTS ON GUATEMALA'S CURRENT SITUATION

Although violence, illicit trades and international organized crime groups have existed in Central American countries for decades, the last decade has witnessed a particular increase in all these elements. Criminal groups (including local gangs) have multiplied, and drug-related activities have diversified. Central America has exploded as the main corridor, with each country in the region being used for cocaine transportation.

Guatemala's peace process concluded in 1996 when Peace Agreements were signed. Nonetheless, for stability to be achieved and the democratization process to be successfully developed, favourable internal and external conditions are required. Guatemala's enormous opportunities and richness are threatened by national obstacles including corruption, inequality, the presence of gangs, the proliferation of unregulated

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private security groups and a scarcity of police, among other problems. But the country is also caught in the trap of a reality created and fostered outside its borders and which penetrates and shapes its national and local reality – the hegemonic system of drug prohibition.

If we ask ourselves whether Guatemala has a problem of drug consumption, the answer is probably ‘no’. Although the consumption of marihuana and crack cocaine are growing, the indices of consumption are much lower than those reported in the main markets such as the USA and Europe.

Even so, it is a country whose role in the drug market has been growing and changing rapidly. Guatemala forms part of what is known as the Northern Triangle, together with Honduras and El Salvador, which is one of the most violent regions in the world. These countries face particularly acute problems, mainly because of their proximity to Mexico.

The flows goes both ways, with drugs moving northwards and organized crime groups spreading south.

Guatemala has 250 miles (400 km) of coastline, most of it on the Pacific Ocean side, from which it receives and dispatches much of the contraband entering and leaving the country. The mountainous interior, combined with the vast, sparsely populated stretches of jungle in the north make the country an ideal storage and transit nation.

It has been estimated that 70 percent of the drugs passing through Guatemala arrive via its Pacific Coast. The seafaring traffic leaves Ecuador’s Pacific Coast and Colombia’s Pacific and Caribbean coasts in mostly ‘go-fast’ boats and semi-submersible vessels. Once the cargo arrives in Guatemala, smaller vehicles take it to depots, or waiting trucks, where it continues its journey north through Guatemala and Mexico. Most of the drugs that move by land go on large trucks in hidden compartments or camouflaged within legitimate cargo. The provinces of Alta Verapaz and Huehuetenango function as strategic corridors.

Guatemala is also a primary zone for private aircraft trafficking of cocaine, with hundreds of concealed airstrips.

Not only storage and trafficking take place in Guatemala, but also drug production. Laboratories for processing cocaine have also been found. Guatemala is thought to have supplanted Colombia as the second highest producer of poppy in Latin America, the first being Mexico. Poppy cultivation is said to be concentrated in the highlands of the San Marcos province, close to the Mexican border.

Seizures of pseudoephedrine might reflect the ‘balloon effect’ of the prohibition on importing this precursor which was enforced in Mexico in 2008, and the presence in Guatemala of Mexican organizations that dominate the production of methamphetamines (La Familia Michoacana and the Sinaloa Cartel).

Guatemala is a clear demonstration of how the prohibitionist focus of international approaches to drug control fails to consider the needs of countries that serve mainly as routes for the drug trade. Many aspects of Guatemala’s violence are a direct consequence of the international interdiction system and the unintended distortions arising from this repressive strategy.

The Beckley Foundation is honoured to have been invited by the President to produce reports that will inform the President and the Guatemalan Government of possible ways forward on these vital and complex issues, and that will raise public awareness, both within Guatemala and in the wider community, of the need for new approaches to controlling the problems of drug trafficking, in order to address the severe consequences currently facing Guatemala and other countries in the region.

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