



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation  
Respecting the Bilateral Visit to Guatemala City, Guatemala  
and San Salvador, El Salvador**

**Canadian Section of ParlAmericas**

**Guatemala City, Guatemala and San Salvador, El Salvador  
January 19th to 26th, 2013**

# Report

## Introduction

A delegation of five parliamentarians representing the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas travelled to Guatemala City, Guatemala from 19 to 23 January 2013, and then on to San Salvador, El Salvador from 23 to 26 January 2013. The delegation was led by Mr. Earl Dreeshen, M.P.; also participating were the Honourable Jim Munson, Senator, Mr. François Pilon, M.P., Mr. Scott Simms, M.P., and Mr. Bernard Trottier, M.P. The parliamentarians were assisted by Ms. Guyanne Desforges, Association Secretary to the Canadian Section, and Mr. Andre Barnes, the association analyst from the Library of Parliament.

The purpose of this bilateral visit was to strengthen the parliamentary ties between Canada, and Guatemala and El Salvador; promote ParlAmericas as a liaison between the Parliaments of the Americas; and further hemispheric dialogue concerning issues of mutual importance, such as trade and investment opportunities, human rights, and social and economic conditions.

Guatemala, Central America's largest country and the region's largest economy, is an important partner for Canada and is the key country of focus for Canada's engagement on Central American security. Canada maintains strong diplomatic ties and growing trade relations with Guatemala and is actively engaged in the country on a wide range of issues, including human rights protection, trade and investment, corporate responsibility, and efforts to improve the delivery of security and justice in the country. In recent years, deepening ties have been underscored by high-level contact, including visits to Guatemala by the Governor General in 2009 and 2012, and four visits by the Minister of State Foreign Affairs (Americas) since 2009.

El Salvador is also an important partner for Canada in Central America and a key country in Canada's engagement in the Americas. 2011 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between Canada and El Salvador. The two countries have enjoyed growing trade relations, with two-way merchandise totalling \$165.6 million in 2011 (a 34.3% increase from 2010). In 2010, Canada concluded an open skies-type air transport agreement with El Salvador and is currently working with El Salvador to ensure that this agreement is signed and ratified as quickly as possible. ParlAmericas performs an important role in the hemisphere, seeking to encourage the sharing of experiences and best practices amongst its members. It works to strengthen the role of legislatures in democratic development; promote harmonization of legislation; and increase hemispheric integration and sustainable, harmonious development in the region. This bilateral visit provided the Canadian delegation with an invaluable opportunity to cultivate positive inter-parliamentary relations between Canadian, and Guatemalan and El Salvadorian parliamentarians. It also allowed the Canadian delegation to engage in frank and focussed discussions with decision-makers in the region, to gain a clearer picture of the status of Canadian interests, to advance Canadian interests and values, and to acquire a more complete comprehension of the issues and challenges faced by citizens in Guatemala and El Salvador.

## **BILATERAL VISIT TO GUATEMALA**

### **A. Meeting with the Canadian Ambassador to Guatemala**

On 21 January 2013, the Canadian delegation met with Mr. Hugues R. Rousseau, Ambassador of Canada to Guatemala, his political program manager, as well as the Embassy's security manager, at the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala City. Delegates were provided with a substantive briefing on Canadian-Guatemalan relations, as well as an overview of the issues of importance in Guatemala.

It was noted that Canada and Guatemala celebrated 50 years of formal diplomatic relations in 2011. The Embassy's role is to strengthen these relations. The Embassy issues over 5,000 work permits each year, which allowed temporary workers to enter Canada. Guatemala's role as an important regional partner has been highlighted by a series of recent visits by the Hon. Diane Ablonczy, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs and the planned visit of Major-General R.D. Foster.

Two-way trade between Canada and Guatemala totalled \$512 million in 2012 (\$110 million in exports from Canada). Canada's interest in securing a free trade agreement with Guatemala to further bolster trade between the two countries was noted. Direct Canadian investment in Guatemala totalled approximately \$1 billion in 2012. The delegation was provided with information concerning Goldcorp Inc.'s Marlin Mine, a large, well-established mining project in Guatemala.

It was noted that Guatemala was the recipient of approximately \$5 million per year from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for programs which focus primarily on food security and justice issues. Canadian federal funds amounting to \$9.8 million since 2009 have also been provided through the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) in order to strengthen justice institutions, and contribute to transitional justice. The Canadian government is also looking at ways to expand defence relations and training co-operation with Guatemala on security issues. The Anti-Crime Capacity Building Program (ACCBP) also funds initiatives in the security sector reform; the International Commission Against Impunity (CICIG), an international commission working to build the capacity of state institutions to deal with cases of impunity, which has received \$11.5 million over six years through CIDA; and food security and rural development programs, which have received \$22 million to date from CIDA.

The Guatemalan economy remains the largest in Central America. It features, however, high levels of poverty, corruption, and income inequality, coupled with a large informal economy, the lowest tax collection rate in the Americas, and an inadequate social safety net. It was noted that remittances play an important role in the economy, accounting for between \$4 and 5 billion annually.

Violence and armed conflict are also major issues in Guatemala. Guatemala is part of the main drug route to North America, and organized crime and its concomitant violence run rampant. In addition to narcotics, Guatemala faces problems with the smuggling of arms and humans, along with money laundering, kidnapping, gangs and extortion. Another source of civil unrest relates to the social conflict concerning workers and land rights. The rates of domestic violence against women and children are also high.

It was noted also that certain social issues confront Guatemala, including lack of proper education, which has led to high illiteracy rates, and which stems, in part, from inadequate training for teachers. Malnutrition rates in Guatemala are the highest in the region, and are

among the top three or four in the world. It was noted that nutritional deficiencies affect cognitive development.

Lastly, it was noted that Guatemala's President Otto Perez Molina has indicated that the focus of his administration would be on economic matters (i.e. tax collection), security (i.e. bolstering the justice system) and social issues (i.e. improving education standards, and lowering malnutrition rates).

### **B. Meeting with the Canada–Guatemala Chamber of Commerce**

On 21 January 2013, the delegation met with members of the Canada–Guatemala Chamber of Commerce at the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala City.

Founded five years ago, the membership of the Chamber of Commerce has expanded from 9 to 50 in the past two years. The purpose of the Chamber of Commerce is to promote profitable and productive relations between Canada and Guatemala, and to act as a partner in the development of bilateral trade activity between the two countries. The membership of the Chamber of Commerce is diverse, and included, for example, mining operations, suppliers, and hydro-electric companies. Members noted that, at present, a trade imbalance described as lopsided exists between Guatemala and Canada, with Guatemalan exports to Canada far exceeding imports. He also noted that, in general, the trade relations between the two countries are on the right track and growing

A possible free trade agreement between Canada and Guatemala arose as a topic of interest among the delegates and the members of the Chamber of Commerce. It was noted by members of the Chamber of Commerce that a free trade agreement remains a high priority for them, as it would provide security to investments by Canadians. Members noted that open market access would greatly assist Canadian businesses, in particular Canada's beef and pork producers, who at present incur a 15% additional tax when entering the Guatemalan market. Other options were raised such as a foreign investment protection agreement to provide greater security to Canadian investments, or a tax information exchange to facilitate the moving of investment capital between the two countries.

Questions arose from delegates as to the mining situation in Guatemala. Representatives from the mining industry explained their operations, including details on investments that have been made in day-to-day infrastructure and services in the communities in which their mines are located, as well as information on certain long term programs that have been put in place for such communities. An example was given of a mining firm that had funded a silversmith program in which citizens residing near a mine received training in silversmithing. Upon the future closure of the mine, the area could become a tourist destination for its silver. It was also noted that mining operations in Guatemala have been working with agricultural associations to improve the agricultural techniques and yields of local farmers.

The Canadian delegates also raised questions concerning the hydroelectricity industry in Guatemala. It was indicated by members of the Chamber of Commerce that potential abounded in Guatemala for low impact, small- to medium-sized hydroelectric operations throughout the country. Such projects, in their view, did not require subsidies, and could tap into a demand for megawatts which continues to grow each year. Generally, energy in the country is expensive as it is produced predominantly by oil.

The issue of personal security in Guatemala arose, and members of the Chamber of Commerce indicated that it remains significant. The overall lack of personal security in the country acts to dissuade qualified candidates, especially those residing outside the country, making recruitment for vacant posts within their businesses challenging. Members noted that many opportunities exist for long term investments by Canadian companies in Guatemala. While much progress still needs to be made in education and human capital, the climate for investment continues to improve. The meeting concluded with Mr. Dreeshen thanking the members of the Chamber of Commerce for their viewpoints.

### **C. Working Lunch with Guatemalan Congresspersons**

On 21 January 2013, the delegation met with Congresspersons from the Congress of the Republic of Guatemala for a working lunch at the Hotel Panamerican in Guatemala City. In attendance at this meeting was Mr. Christian Boussinot, Second-Vice President of Congress; Mr. Felipe Alejos, President of Migrants Commission, and Mr. Manuel Villacorta, President of the Foreign Affairs Commission.

Mr. Boussinot began the working lunch by welcoming the Canadian delegation on behalf of President of Congress. He indicated that such meetings were great opportunities to exchange ideas and for finding ways for mutual co-operation. Mr. Alejos, too, greeted the delegation and indicated his interest in hearing about the Canadian parliamentary system. Mr. Dreeshen noted how thankful the delegation was for the opportunity to meet with the Congresspersons and expressed the delegation's interest in having an open discussion on topics of mutual interest.

The topic of public service turnover following each change of government arose. The Congresspersons indicated that the present system was put in place following the peace accords in 1996. The law at present is such that, following each change of government (at four year intervals), the majority of upper-level positions in the public service are vacated and replacements brought in. In effect, Mr. Boussinot noted that Guatemala is a new democracy, and a precedent has been set of utilizing high-level public service positions for patronage appointments in order to service political debts. He noted, though, that a bill is presently before Congress which seeks to guarantee better security and continuity of public service positions.

The education system was also discussed. The Congresspersons stated that changes are needed, especially in terms of training for teachers. The challenge which exists in Guatemala, as a poor country, is that the average Guatemalan is more concerned with finding work to satisfy basic needs than in continuing on with higher levels of education.

The human rights situation in Guatemala was also addressed. The Congresspersons indicated that the situation was improving. They noted that the country emerged from a civil confrontation in 1996 which had lasted over thirty years, during which time the human rights situation had deteriorated to practical non-existence. At present, state institutions are fostering greater participation from civil society, and the country is moving towards greater openness and transparency on the part of its institutions. It was noted, though, that this is an on-going process and that it will take time to build public confidence.

The inclusion of indigenous groups in the decision-making process was raised. The Congresspersons indicated that 18 of 158 Congresspersons are of indigenous descent. It was noted that the Congress has been working to promote equal social participation across ethnicities and to also promote the participation of women in political life.

Mr. Villacorta commented that, in his view, the temporary worker program with Canada has been a great success and he wanted to express his appreciation to the delegation. Mr. Dreeshen concluded the meeting by thanking the Congresspersons for their time and viewpoints.

#### **D. Meeting with NGOS (Citizen Security)**

In the afternoon of 21 January 2013, the Canadian delegation met with individuals representing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that, in conjunction with state institutions, work to strengthen citizen security in Guatemala. The meeting took place at the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala City. The meeting began with Mr. Dreeshen offering welcoming remarks and thanking the participants for the opportunity to learn about their organizations and the work they do to assist Guatemalans.

The opportunities offered to youth in Guatemala arose as a topic of discussion. It was noted that limited support from the state exists, in terms of education and other youth programs. Participants stated that it is easier for a youth to get a hold of an AK-47 than a high school degree. It was noted that the drop-out rate in high school is approximately 80%. In these circumstances, many youths view their best options to be either migration or to get involved with a gang in order to earn an income. It was further noted that remittances are the highest form of income for Guatemalan families, and that this, by definition, also causes disintegration of the family unit, creating a void in terms of parental guidance which leaves youths susceptible to gang participation. In addition, there is a lack of state programs to keep at risk youths occupied during non-school hours, again contributing to gang participation. A final issue mentioned was that youth feel a lack of sense of citizenry.

The mining industry in Guatemala was also discussed. It was noted that the country continues to operate under a lax and outdated mining law, whose original purpose was to attract foreign investment, and as such is disproportionately advantageous to mining companies. The Minister of the Economy is reportedly, however, working to bring improvements to Guatemala's mining law. The low public opinion approval for mining in Guatemala was also discussed. It was noted that mining companies need to communicate the benefits of mining more effectively, by, for instance, engaging in a consultation and communication phase with local communities prior to opening their facilities. Also of importance was the need for local communities to retain a portion of the profits generated by mining companies. In this respect, it was indicated that NGOs who oppose any and all development should not be confused with a community's right to oppose economic proposals. It was again also noted that in rural areas, mining companies are expected to take on the role ordinarily served by the state.

Other topics of discussion included the need for Guatemala to create a national development plan. Also mentioned were the benefits of Canadian federal funds aimed at providing access to credit for small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs. The latter were especially noteworthy as women earning an income can shift the balance of power in households.

#### **E. Dinner at the Official Residence of the Canadian Ambassador**

In the evening of 21 January 2013, the delegation was received for a dinner at the official residence of the Canadian Ambassador to Guatemala, in Guatemala City. Prior to the commencement of the meal, one guest offered comments to the Canadian delegation concerning human rights issues in Guatemala, especially in respect of indigenous peoples.

The work of the Transparency Commission was discussed, including its role in developing state policy to combat corruption; increasing the public's access to state information and operations in order to allow for social audit; increasing transparency of decision-making in order to reduce arbitrariness; modernizing the state through "e-government" initiatives; and developing legislation in policy areas such as mining, construction, stolen assets, health, and transportation. Both Ambassador Rousseau and Mr. Dreeshen thanked the discussants for their valuable interchange, and indicated that such issues were of great interest to the delegation.

#### **F. Meeting with like-minded foreign embassy Officials**

The morning of 22 January 2013, the delegation met with officials with like-minded foreign embassy officials to discuss the security situation in the region.

The delegation was provided with an overview of narcotic trafficking in the region. It was noted that Guatemala is located in a strategic position along the corridor which runs from Columbia to the U.S., with 90% of U.S.-bound narcotics passing through Guatemala

The delegation was apprised of the recent successful extradition of Guatemalan drug trafficker Walther Overdick to the U.S., the first such deportation in approximately a decade. It is hoped that the threat of deportation will increase co-operation on the part of Guatemalans charged with drug trafficking and facing extradition.

It was noted that the number one issue among Guatemalans is citizen security. Building the capacity of police is an important task, one in which Canada is assisting. In terms of bright spots in respect of the efforts to combat drug trafficking Guatemala, it was noted that the President and the Attorney General have indicated that it is their priority to establish a unified and safe Guatemalan society, and are taking steps to achieve this goal

#### **G. Working Lunch with NGOs**

On 22 January 2013, the Canadian delegation held a working lunch with individuals representing NGOs who work to strengthen transparency and accountability in Guatemala. Mr. Dreeshen began the meeting by thanking the participants for attending, and indicating that the delegation looked forward to learning about the issues of importance in their policy fields.

The delegation was provided with a briefing on the weak state of Guatemala's democracy. It was noted that taxation is a chronic problem, with only 10.8% of GDP derived from tax collection. In terms of social problems, approximately 50% of children under five years of age suffer from malnutrition. Participants noted that wealth inequality in Guatemala is the highest in the region, and that the rich do not pay adequate taxes and do not feel compelled to because the government is so corrupt. Other issues touched on included the fact that individuals tend only to run for political office out of self-interest and personal gain; and that the old business elite employs an exploitation model to create their wealth, including low wages and poor living conditions, for the most part exploiting the country's large indigenous population. Participants noted that high levels of corruption exist across all Central American countries. In Guatemala, corruption has infiltrated the police, the justice system, political parties, and state and municipal governments.

A discussion arose concerning the mining industry in Guatemala. Participants noted that mining is a legitimate and necessary economic activity. They indicated, however, that in Guatemala, the mining industry lacks transparency in their operations, is insufficiently regulated, the royalties they pay are too low compared to other countries, and that the tax

rate imposed by law is negligible. Indeed, they noted that the tax and royalty rates are so low that mining companies voluntarily pay income taxes and royalties as a gesture of goodwill. It was also noted that the new mining law before Congress has stalled. The poor public perception of mining in Guatemala was discussed, and it was noted that the faulty mining legislation with its insignificant tax and royalty obligations, is at least in part to blame for this poor perception. Participants acknowledged that a free trade agreement with Canada would improve benchmarks and standards, but also indicated that stability and rule of law in the country needed to be improved.

Participants indicated that improvements to state transparency have, in the recent past, stalled or even regressed. Each four years, he noted, a new government is elected and disassembles the work of the previous administration, including even positive advancements in access to information. He also acknowledged that the lack of a stable professional public service is very problematic.

#### **H. Meeting with NGO**

In the afternoon of 22 January 2013, the delegation met with an NGO working on corporate social responsibility issues. Participants provided the delegation with the overview of role and vision of their organization, which promotes corporate social responsibility (CSR) among businesses in the Central American region, instills a culture of compliance within these businesses to the rule of law, and assists in implementing best industry practices. It has also developed CSR benchmarks for self-assessment for local businesses relevant to the realities in Central America.

One initiative the organization is working on is an attempt to establish a map of positive and negative business leaders throughout the country, in order to track who is making money and having success, and which models to emulate or avoid. It was noted that the Guatemalan economy needs its younger generations to take an active interest in the betterment of their country, to bring new perspectives to old institutions and stimulate positive change. . As such, in the long term, the strengthening of institutions and anti-corruption policies are priorities. Mr. Dreeshen concluded the meeting by thanking the participants, on behalf of the delegation, for their frank and open views on the state of affairs in Guatemala.

### **BILATERAL VISIT TO EL SALVADOR**

#### **A. Meeting with the President of El Salvador's Assembly**

In the evening of 23 January 2012, the delegation attended a working dinner hosted by the Canadian Ambassador to El Salvador, Mr Pierre Giroux at the Ciao Bella restaurant in San Salvador, El Salvador. The guest of Honour was Mr. Sigfrido Reyes, the President of the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, Also in attendance at the dinner were; Ms. Blanca Noemi Coto Estrada, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA); Ms. Margarita Escobar, MLA; Mr. Guillermo Gallegos, MLA; Ms. Silvia Estela Ostorga, MLA; Ms. Mariella Pena Pinto, MLA; and Mr. Mario Antonio Ponce Lopez, MLA. The dinner provided Mr. Reyes with an opportunity to greet the delegation and allowed for informal discussions concerning topics of interest among the parliamentarians.

On the morning of 24 January 2013, the delegation, along with Ambassador Giroux, met with Mr. Reyes at the Legislative Assembly in San Salvador, El Salvador. In his opening remarks, Mr. Reyes offered his welcome to the Assembly, an institution which was created after El Salvador achieved independence in 1821. Mr. Dreeshen thanked Mr. Reyes for



taking the time to meet with the delegation and indicated the delegation's interest in learning more about their system of government, society and priorities.

Mr. Reyes provided the delegation with an overview of the El Salvador's political system. He noted that there were 84 members in the Assembly from 6 political parties. The issues of interest and focus in the legislature included climate change and the status of women (approximately 25% of the membership of the Assembly was female). Mr. Reyes added that two women had served in his role as President of the Assembly.

Mr. Reyes noted that El Salvador emerged in 1992 from 12 years of civil war that left 70,000 civilians dead. The Peace Accords of 1992 ushered in a new era of democratic reform, strengthening of human rights and state institutions, modernization of the electoral system, and an increase in pluralism. He highlighted the introduction of the right to vote for El Salvadorians living abroad (close to 150,000 to 160,000 in Canada and the U.S.; for every two El Salvadorians living in El Salvador, one El Salvadorian lives abroad). He also set out the challenges faced by El Salvador, including low levels of investment, high unemployment, poverty, a lack of housing, a lack of access to health services and education, and violence and insecurity brought on, in part, by the drug cartels.

A discussion ensued with the delegation in which women's rights issues in El Salvador was raised. The President of the Assembly indicated this is an issue of importance to the Assembly and steps are being taken to modernize people's mentality. A question arose as to the risks posed by allowing citizens to vote from abroad. Mr. Reyes indicated that the participation from citizens living abroad was low but that also, through their remittances, El Salvadorians living abroad contribute vitally to the domestic economy. Direct foreign investment was also raised as a point of discussion. The President indicated that a bill is before Congress to reduce barriers and provide incentives to investors, as well as to strengthen legal and physical security of their investments. Another bill is also before Congress that would provide for partnerships between domestic and foreign companies in strategic sectors of the economy. Mr. Reyes also raised with the delegation the issue of a Salvadoran citizen living in British Columbia threatened with deportation; Mr. Reyes' desire to see the temporary worker program expanded; and his desire to see access to visas to Canada made more accessible. He concluded by emphasizing the potential of his country, including its climate, bountiful resources, and skilled labour pool. Mr. Dreeshen thanked Mr. Reyes, on behalf of the delegation, for taking the time to meet with the delegation and for sharing his ideas on how to strengthen the relationship between Canada and El Salvador.

## **B. Meeting with Academics and Experts**

On 24 January 2013, the delegation met with academics, and security and democracy experts to discuss the state of democratic institutions; armed violence; and violence against women, children and youth. An academic began the roundtable by providing the delegates with an overview of the state of the El Salvadorian democracy. He indicated that the country has undergone a series of transformations to modernize its political system. He listed four major accomplishments in this regard:

1. They have established the principle that legitimate political action is the only means to access state power;
2. They have established who are the legitimate political actors (i.e. political parties);

3. They have established the legitimacy of the process of transition from one government to its successor without upheaval or overthrow; and
4. They have built institutions which provide for less uncertainty and arbitrariness in decision-making.

However, four challenges remain:

1. Bipartisan polarization;
2. The need for institutionalized space for dialogue;
3. The need to launch a new generation of political reforms (e.g. social auditing, fiscal responsibility, etc.); and
4. The need to establish a new socio-economic pact with the country.

A Human Rights expert provided the delegation with a summary of human rights issues in El Salvador. At present, she indicated that greater space exists in El Salvador for meaningful discussions about the state, whereas previously citizens would have feared persecution. The country has experienced an increase in diversity of views, and a greater overall democratization. The armed forces have been recognised as having a specific constitutional role, which acts as a brake on its historical propensity to vie for power. El Salvador has also created a new, professional civil police. Yet the country still faces a complex social violence situation, caused in large part by organized crime. She noted that the number of firearms in the country has reached the same levels today as during the civil war. She stated that greater social investment is needed to assist youth at risk. Investment is also needed to advance the fight against impunity, and strengthen institutions in order to rid them of the infiltration by organized crime.

A short discussion ensued in which the speakers provided additional information on the following topics: youth at risk and violence against women (the country direly needs better social policies and programs directed at those vulnerable groups); rights of gays and lesbians (cultural barriers continue to exist for awareness, tolerance and recognition); rights of the elderly (there exist a complete lack of social policies and programs; the elderly receive no benefits from the state); and the growth of the industry of security in El Salvador (violence and security measures against such violence have grown into an important business).

A security academic then provided the delegation with a briefing concerning firearm violence in El Salvador and Central America. He stated that there were approximately 2.5 to 3 million firearms in Central America, of which two out of three are illegal (i.e. not registered). He also stated that 85% of the victims of firearm-related violence are youth aged 14 to 20 years. A recent Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana (SICA) study found that it was easier for a youth in El Salvador to get a firearm than to get a job. He also noted that firearm possession has a gender bias in that it is men who tend to possess firearms and also commit violent acts. Part of the issue concerns weak border controls allowing firearms to be smuggled into the country along the same corridor as drugs and humans. In terms of ammunition being legally imported into the region, he indicated that the levels equal those of a time of war. The debate remains on-going in El Salvador about disarmament and how to do so.

A governance expert briefed the delegation about the climate of violence which exists in El Salvador. She noted that it has been one of the most violent countries in the world over the

past decade, especially in respect of youth violence. There are high rates of robbery, extortion, and “disappearances” (i.e. citizens who simply went missing). Violence in El Salvador disproportionately affects women and children. She also discussed the recent cease-fire declared between gangs in El Salvador, after which there occurred a decrease in homicides by about 60%. Improving the situation is an on-going challenge; institutions need to be allocated resources in order to respond in a co-ordinated and concerted way in terms of prevention of violence.

An expert on youth issues briefed the delegation concerning at-risk youth in El Salvador. He noted that 40% of the population of the country is aged 0 to 15 years, and that 50% of the poor in the country are children, while 50% of children are poor. Poor children tend to have higher mortality rates, attend less school and suffer from malnutrition. In respect of family, 913,000 children live in households without either a mother or a father; 400,000 children are part of a family in which a mother or father has migrated abroad; 7 out of 10 children report being victims of physical or emotional violence; and 73% of girls aged 0 to 18 have experienced gender-based, sexual violence. In terms of deaths, UNICEF estimated that approximately six youths (aged 0 to 18) were killed per week in 2011. He provided the delegation with UNICEF’s recommendations on this issue, which included: providing space for children in school and developing programs to keep them there; strengthening community-based prevention and detection of violence against children; and emphasizing early childhood development as a violence prevention strategy. He noted that there are laws in place already to protect children but far too little will and resources to see them properly applied.

A gender issues expert provided the delegation with information concerning the status of women in El Salvador. She indicated that the country has the highest levels of domestic violence in Central America. Generally, there exists a troubling cultural tolerance associated with violence against women and femicide. Indeed, there is very little awareness about the issue. Women are not included in decision-making processes in the household and are generally viewed as being responsible for traditional roles such as domestic caretakers. She noted that progress had been made in terms of legislative matters, including a law introduced in 1996 aimed at curbing family violence, but that much work on this front remains.

In the discussion which ensued among the delegation and the presenters, the following issues arose: lack of state support or programs for handicapped children in El Salvador; the high rate of malnutrition in the country as a direct cause of impaired cognitive abilities among the population; and the high drop-out rate at all levels in the education system.

### **C. Site Visit to Parroquia de Sierra Morena, Soyapango**

On 24 January 2013, the delegation undertook a site visit to Parroquia de Sierra Morena in Soyapango (a densely populated working-class city neighbouring San Salvador). Using the Our Lady of Guadalupe parish as a community meeting area, for the past four years project co-ordinators at the site have received funding from the Canadian federal government through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) as a volunteer-run violence prevention project. The project offers programs to both local women, most of whom are low-income single parents (their spouse having either left them or migrated abroad), and youth at risk (aged eight to 18). It was noted that the former project has become fully self-sustaining as a business, and it provides women with a productive skill.

The training programs offered to women includes cosmetology (at present, four women participants); bakery and confectionery training (at present six women participants); silk screening, graphic design and sewing (at present, three women participants); and production of “api-products” (or products using honey) (at present, four women participants). The equipment involved in these programs was purchased with Canadian federal funds. It was further noted that these women receive English language training while participating in these programs, and that they also teach the skills that they learn to their children.

The program for youth at risk involves teaching local children (who reside within five to ten minutes of the parish) a sport during non-school hours. The purpose of the program is to offer youth in a poor neighbourhood sport as an option to counter the potential allure of involvement in gangs and crime. At the time of the visit, 63 local children participated in learning ping pong. It was noted that ping pong was chosen as a sport, as opposed to, for example, football, because the latter is linked to gangs, as gang members often hang around during football matches.

#### **D. Meeting with NGO**

In the evening of 24 January 2013, the delegation met with an NGO working on security and justice systems.

The delegation was provided with a briefing concerning the organization’ background and purpose, along with information concerning the justice systems, generally, in Central America. The organization began work in Central America in 1999, applying the skills it had learned in the context of the Canadian justice system. In Guatemala, the justice system faced a number of substantial challenges. The justice system in place prior to the Peace Accords of 1996 was viewed to have operated principally as a tool of repression. Following the Peace Accords, Guatemala created a complex justice system, difficult to administer, as none of the institutions trusted one another. In addition, the country experienced approximately 35 times the amount of crime as Canada, with fewer resources at its disposal. The result was a dysfunctional justice system. It was noted that, until very recently, the conviction rate for murders in Guatemala was approximately 2% in cases where the accused was caught committing the act. In cases where investigation was required, however, the conviction rate was more or less 0%. These numbers have improved but many challenges remain.

The organization’s role in Central America has been to train about 5,000 to 6,000 individuals involved in the justice system. Phase one of their program involves teaching skills such as evidence collection and crime scene examination. Participants stated that good evidence is highly important in prosecuting cases, as witnesses need to feel confident that a conviction is likely in order for them to risk testifying. The organization has undertaken a phase two of training, supported by CIDA funding of \$5 million over four years. Phase two involves major case management and training of judges. The organization was looking to expand its operations to include training of special units (e.g. wiretap training), forensic video, and surveillance monitoring. CIDA funding was subject to renewal and the organization hoped that it would be renewed so that they may continue this important work.

Participants also noted that many challenges remain in the region, including: criminality in prisons; lynchings; no plea bargaining; and constant mistrials. Generally, he noted that the

lack of security in Central America is bad for business and creates a climate of instability that deters investment.

### **E. Meeting with private sector organizations**

In the morning of 25 January 2013, the delegation met with members of El Salvador private sector organisations, including the El Salvador–Canada Chamber of Commerce for a working breakfast at the Sheraton Presidente Hotel in San Salvador, El Salvador. In attendance at this meeting were Ambassador Giroux and members of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce as well as representatives of the National Association of Private Enterprises (ANEP); Agropecuarian and Agro-industry Chamber of El Salvador (CAMAGRO); Salvadorian Association of Industry (ASI); Salvadorian Chamber of Construction (CASALCO); President, Textile and Free Zones Chamber (CAMTEX, National Development Association (FUNDE); Sugar Association of El Salvador; and Cleaner Production Centre.

The business climate arose as a topic of discussion. It was noted that the main challenges presently facing the economy are political or ideological problems inherited from past decades. Participants indicated that when the war in the streets of El Salvador ended in 1992, it moved into, and carried on, in the political arena. In this respect, it was felt that the country's politicians are placing partisan interests ahead of greater national interests. The weakness of country's democratic institutions was of concern because it was noted that a strong link exists between democracy and growth. Comments were also made concerning the slow growth of the economy over the past half-decade; insufficient investment; and high rates of crime and violence, which have caused instability and uncertainty. In respect of the crime rate in the country, concerns were also expressed that organized crime has penetrated into, and is influencing, the political sphere.

A potential free trade agreement between Canada and El Salvador was discussed, with members of the Chamber of Commerce indicating that such an agreement would create more jobs in the country and increase much-needed investment. Some exhibited frustration with the present administration as it has pledged to promote trade. It was indicated that El Salvador desires to be the regional business hub, akin to the role presently occupied by Costa Rica.

Concerns were raised by a number of members of the Chamber of Commerce about the Trans-Pacific Partnership in terms of demands from certain countries for flexible rules of origin, and lax environmental and labour rules. It was noted that allowing these demands to pass would cause great harm to the El Salvadorian textile industry.

In terms of other matters, members of the Chamber of Commerce noted the difficulty in getting a visa and asked that this process be streamlined. Others indicated that it would be helpful for the country to receive assistance with institution building. Comments were made that it would be desirable to increase the university-level exchanges between the two countries. Generally, members of the Chamber indicated that they remained positive about the state of the country's economy, and noted that El Salvadorians are hardworking industrious people who take pride in making good products.

To conclude, Ambassador Giroux and Mr. Dreeshen thanked the members for their views and concerns, and noted that the delegation would return to Canada with a more balanced view to share with their parliamentary colleagues.

## **F. Site Visit to Ciudad Mujeres and San Juan Opico**

On 25 January 2013, the delegation undertook a site visit to the Ciudad Mujer, in Santa Ana. There, they were met by Dr. Vanda Pignato, First Lady of El Salvador and Secretary of Social Inclusion and Citizenship. The Ciudad Mujer is a centre which offers a comprehensive array of health, education, and wellness services in a single location to women from poor economic backgrounds who have suffered from gender-based violence. It has been estimated by the Inter-American Development Bank that in El Salvador, about half of all women fall victim to violence, physical or psychological, while only about one-third of those who suffer this abuse seek help. Called the Ciudad Mujer, meaning “City of Women,” male visitors are generally not permitted on site. At present, there are four such centres in El Salvador, with the goal being to open two additional locations. Each centre is located in high need areas, and offers comprehensive health services (with an emphasis on sexual and reproductive health); training and development of economic skills for women; group education; access to police and justice services; childcare services; and community outreach. These centres offered services to women and girls who live in municipalities that would not otherwise be able to adequately respond to the challenges involving violence against women and girls.

The Ciudad Mujer project receives Canadian federal funding through the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, as part of a broader project in El Salvador and Guatemala to promote the prevention of violence against women. This overall project received \$1.2 million in funding from 31 May 2012 to 31 May 2013, and benefitted approximately 1,800 women directly.

In the afternoon of 25 January 2013, the delegation visited several sites in the municipality of San Juan Opico. They were shown two separate women’s training community centres, aided by Canadian federal funding, where workshops are held to empower and educate local women. The delegation also visited the Office of Complaints in the municipality’s police station, used primarily by women who have been involved in violent situations. With Canadian federal funding, the office has been completely renovated and refurnished (paint, aromatherapy, air conditioning, addition of a child play area). These were important upgrades meant to lend a sense of comfort to women facing extremely difficult situations. It is in the Office of Complaints that police receive one-on-one reports and listened to victims of violent gender-based crimes. It was noted that in 2011, there were 16 women murdered in San Juan Opico, while in 2012, there were none. It was further noted that Canadian federal funding has been applied to the promotion of gender equality in training police personnel.

Respectfully submitted,

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Earl Dreeshen, M.P.  
Head of Delegation  
Canadian Section of ParIAmericas

## Travel Costs

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian Section of ParlAmericas
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	Bilateral Visit to Guatemala City, Guatemala and San Salvador, El Salvador
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Guatemala City, Guatemala and San Salvador, El Salvador
<b>DATES</b>	January 19 <sup>th</sup> to 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2013
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	Hon. Jim Munson, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Earl Dreeshen, M.P. Mr. Scott Simms, M.P. Mr. François Pilon, M.P. Mr. Bernard Trottier, M.P.
STAFF	Mrs. Guyanne L. Desforges, Association Secretary Mr. Andre Barnes, Analyst
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$33,369.55</b>
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	<b>\$6,925.46</b>
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	<b>\$962.53</b>
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	<b>\$1,560.50</b>
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	<b>\$665.95</b>
<b>MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES</b>	<b>\$3,221.88</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$46,705.87</b>