



A Glimmer of Hope in Central America

By Eric L. Olson

Despite decades of United States assistance to strengthen the administration of justice and promote the rule of law in Central America's Northern Triangle—Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras—the region continues to lag in reducing corruption and impunity. According to Iván Velásquez,¹ head of the International Commission on Interoceanic Crime, only 426 cases in the country were opened in 2014, even if no new cases were opened. Roughly 85 percent² of Guatemalan municipalities have no resident prosecutor.

In El Salvador, prisons are at 330 percent of capacity, and to survive they join prison gangs, perpetuating crime and violence. Last year El Salvador had the world's highest homicide rate at 38.0 per 100,000 inhabitants, per 100,000 inhabitants.

⁴. In Guatemala and Honduras, as well, backlogged justice systems have led to prison overcrowding.

In Honduras, political and economic elites have stolen an estimated \$300 million⁵ from the country's public health system, causing a shortage of medicines and allegedly contributing to

the death of a dozen or more patients. A former president of Honduras was recently extradited to the U.S. for his role in the World Soccer Federation (FIFA) scandal, which allegedly netted him millions. A former vice president of Honduras and members of his family have been designated by the US Treasury as "specially designated narcotics traffickers" ⁶ for their role in laundering money for Central American drug trafficking organizations.

Corruption and weak rule of law in A ga 3 d () Trjn0 Tc 0 -3(r)]TJ 0 Tc 0 2(z)-6(a)4(t)-2(i)-2(ons

donors poured millions of dollars⁹ into modernizing legal systems rewriting laws and writing new ones, and, in some cases, improving courts' physical infrastructure and administration. International assistance trained thousands of prosecutors, police, investigators, forensic experts, and judges. Foreign assistance also helped countries to

reported, but the message is clear: the fight against corruption is gaining

¹ Byron Rolando Vásquez, “CICIG: Impunidad Actual Tardaría 15 Años en Erradicarse,” Prensa Libre, February 4, 2016, J0MCI74,

