

Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment

Annex 1: El Salvador Profile¹



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¹ Note that this version of the USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment was edited for public distribution. Certain sections, including specific country-level recommendations for USAID Missions, were omitted from the Country Profile Annexes. These recommendations are summarized in the Conclusions and Recommendations Section of this assessment.

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Historical Context

After the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992, El Salvador has made significant strides in its post-conflict transition to a stable democracy. During the last ten years, however, violence in general has emerged as a potential threat to lasting stability and peace, and gang violence in particular has had serious impacts. In a survey conducted by Instituto Universitario de Opinion Publica (IUDOP), 91 percent of those interviewed stated that *maras* (gangs) were a big problem. Many academics and political analysts conclude that the problem of gangs is the second most important sociological phenomenon of violence, after the civil war.

The high number of homicides—approximately 40 per 100 thousand inhabitants—gives El Salvador the unenviable ranking as one of the most dangerous countries in Latin America. In addition to homicides, there are other violent crimes, including intra-familial violence, robbery, extortion, and kidnapping. Central American experts suggest that 40 percent of all homicides that occur today in El Salvador involve a gang member as the victim or the perpetrator.² Not surprisingly, both delinquency and citizen security have become predominant concerns for most Salvadorans.

The most violent departments in the country are San Salvador, Sonsonate, Santa Ana, La Paz, and La Libertad. The gang phenomenon is also most prevalent in these same departments. Interestingly, these departments with the highest homicides rates (per Instituto de Medicina Legal (IML) statistics) were those relatively less affected during the civil war conflict of the 1980s.

While violence is on the upswing, reported human rights violations have decreased. During 2004, the PDDH (public defender's office) accepted 634 complaints of human rights violations, compared with 2,479 in 2003. The rights most frequently alleged to have been violated included personal integrity, due process, and labor laws. According to the U.S. State Department, many complaints are also filed against the police for mistreatment.³

The challenges facing youths in El Salvador are numerous and further exacerbated by a high level of income inequality. In 1961, some the poorest quintile earned six percent of the total income, while the wealthiest quintile earned 61 percent of the national income, and conditions have not significantly changed since then. The poorest 20 percent earned only 2.4 percent of the total income, while the richest quintile maintained their hold of national income at 58.3 percent. With this degree of inequality, the majority of youths aged 14-25 years old face social exclusion characterized by the lack of basic services (e.g., water, energy, electricity, and education) that could improve their lives.⁴

² Discussions in August and September 2005, with founding members of the Central American Coalition for the Prevention of Youth Violence.

³ El Salvador, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2004, released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department, February 28, 2005.

⁴ UNDP, *Cuanto Cuesta la Violencia a El Salvador*, pg. 33.

El Salvador's population is fairly young: 37 percent are under 15, and 23 percent are 15-24 years old. Of these youths, 48 percent are in secondary school, and 17 percent have reached the university level. Approximately 11 percent of the youth population (15-24) is illiterate. Forty percent of children drop out of school before grade 5.⁵

Nature of the Gang Phenomenon

The origins of El Salvador's violent gangs can be traced to the Salvadorans and their children who fled their country during the brutal civil war of the 1980s. By 1990, over 700,000 Salvadorans had settled mainly in Los Angeles, California, and also in Washington D.C., suburbs of New York City, and in parts of Maryland, where they had formed their own gangs or joined existing gangs.⁶

In 1992, the Peace Accord between the government and the Marti Faribundo National Liberation Front (FMLN) marked an end of the twelve-year war and the beginning of the flow of Salvadorans back to their country. In 1996, the number of returnees increased, as immigration policies changed and the United States deported thousands of people to El Salvador and other Central American countries. Although these deported immigrants were not identified as criminals or gang members at the time of deportation, some had been incarcerated in the California prison system. Some of these deportees were gang members, including members of the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and 18th Street (Barrio 18) gangs, and took many aspects of U.S. gang culture back to El Salvador, including hand signals, insider language, styles of dress, and propensity for rebellion and violence. MS-13 and 18th Street members learned much of their craft from the established Mafia Mexicana, then the most influential gang in Southern California.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of gang members in El Salvador, rough estimates exist. The National Civilian Police, for example, estimate there are approximately 10,500 members, whereas the government's National Council on Public Security (Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Pública or CNSP in Spanish) calculates upwards of 39,000 members (22,000 in MS-13; 12,000 in 18th Street; and another 5,000 in other gangs). The variance depends perhaps on whether one is counting full-fledged members and sympathizers.

Gang structure in El Salvador is difficult to determine. As explained in the overview of this report, the two main gangs—MS-13 and 18th Street—have a series of decentralized *clickas*, or smaller units, that cover specific neighborhoods. Gang infiltrators report that some *clickas* convene periodically with national-level gang leadership who determine the criminal and delinquent actions for the entire gang.⁷ Most gang experts acknowledge that it is difficult to identify gang leaders. People interviewed by the field team indicated that

⁵ UNESCO statistics. www.uis.unesco.org

⁶ Hayden, T. *Street Wars Gangs and the Future of Violence*. The New Press. 2004. Page 202.

⁷ Interview with National Civilian Police. El Salvador. September 2005.

there is a national-level leader for MS-13 who calls the shots from prison, but the field team could not confirm this information.

However, there are some in the Government of El Salvador who claim that they have been able to infiltrate these gangs and decipher their language and codes. According to information provided by the CNSP, in response to hard-line Mano Dura and Super Mano Dura law enforcement initiatives (discussed later in this profile), 18th Street has established the following new rules and goals:

- Take over drug trade
- Purchase more weapons
- Eliminate members who are traitors
- Prohibit new tattoos
- Do not recruit women as new gang recruits
- Execute members consuming crack and cocaine (using marijuana, including marijuana laced with coke, is allowed)
- Take over drug trafficking corridors in two to three years
- Take over small cartels

The hard-line law enforcement approach has not had the desired effect of curbing gang violence or reducing recruitment. Gang membership seems to be rising, despite frequent roundups of gang members. Additionally, media obsession with gang violence in effect helps gangs to publicize their criminal acts and build the status of gang members portrayed in the media. The constant showcasing of gangs on the front pages of Salvadoran newspapers serves as a recruiting tool for gangs to increase their rank and file.

The high profiling of gang violence also has served to link gang members with narco-trafficking activities. There are many reports that MS-13 and 18th Street gangs are trying to establish their own drug corridors through Central America and Mexico and in some cases have made contact with Colombian narco-traffickers. This speculation has been fueled by reports that MS-13 members in Tapachula, Mexico, are working with the Mexican drug cartel run by Chapo Guzman.⁸

Some of the people interviewed by the field team believe that gang problems in El Salvador are growing faster than gang problems in other countries in the region. Ricardo Meneses, former Director of Police, observed that some *clickas* and some gang members are becoming more sophisticated.⁹ The increased sophistication of El Salvadoran gangs is exemplified by the following characteristics:¹⁰

- Use of minors to commit crimes, since they cannot be convicted as adults.

⁸ Joaquin Guzman-Loera, a.k.a. "Chapo" Guzman, heads a notorious Mexican drug cartel and is wanted in California on conspiracy, drug, money laundering and criminal forfeiture charges.

⁹ Interview with Miguel Cruz, IUDOP.

¹⁰ Interviews with CNSP, Rodrigo Ayala, Vice Minister of Public Security (at the time) and Pepe Morataya, Polígono.

- Family support of gangs, as some gang members support their families financially through gang activities.
- Widespread, national visibility, with incarcerated gang members expanding their networks through jails.
- “Fees” demanded (extortion) from bus drivers and business owners.
- Stronger links with organized crime.
- Competition for drug trafficking replacing competition for territories.
- Some members are to pay for costly defense attorneys indicating substantial profits through criminal activity.
- Fluid communication between gangs in El Salvador and in the United States. Members have a sophisticated communication networks between prisons and the street, using coded language and paper messages folded in a precise manner, which is also coded. Gangs may also communicate through Web sites.
- Autonomy and organization. It is believed that in El Salvador, 18th Street has a structure made up of *ranfla* (national leaders), *runers* (leaders with no tattoos, strong discipline, and the responsibility for committing homicides, and trafficking drugs and weapons), and *missionaries* (*clickas* gang members).
- Gang members displacing “*coyotes*”¹¹ and narcotraffickers.

However, most gang members in-country do not appear to have a high level of sophistication.

Costs and Impacts of Gang Activity

Rampant gang activity in El Salvador obstructs economic progress and democratic social development. The deterioration of security, state-citizen relationships, and the health and livelihood of citizens is increasingly at risk. This next section will delve into the numerous detrimental impacts of gang activity in this country.

Impacts on Economic and Social Development

A recent study done by the UNDP calculates that violence costs El Salvador approximately US\$1.7 billion annually, which is roughly 11.5 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). These costs are attributed to health-related issues (e.g., lost lives, emotional distress, and medical attention); institutional costs (e.g., public security and administration of justice); private security costs for protection of businesses and private residences; negative impacts on financial investment, and loss of work opportunities; and material losses. In addition, intangible costs also have higher negative impacts. For 2003, the total amount of resources lost as a result of violence was more than double that of the budgets for both education and health, which amounted to approximately US\$720 million.¹² For most industrialized countries, the total GDP lost to

¹¹ A person who arranges illegal passages for people from Central America to the United States.

¹² UNDP, *Cuanto Cuesta la Violencia a El Salvador*, San Salvador, 2005, pg 8.

violence-related costs amounts to about 5 percent. However, in less developed countries it amounts to approximately 14 percent.¹³

Gang activity also contributes to deterred trade and investment. Almost 41 percent of the Salvadoran firms interviewed reported having been victims of crime, while nearly 50 percent reported that crime and violence are major constraints to business. The World Bank report “El Salvador’s Investment Climate” (July 2005) states that micro- and small firms are more likely to be affected by gang-related crime than are larger firms. On average, the statistics from firms surveyed show that gangs were responsible for 27 percent of the crimes committed, while micro- and small firms reported that gangs were responsible for 46 percent and 37 percent, respectively, of the crimes committed against them.

Gang activity has encouraged the expansion of some services, however. Private security companies, for example, have grown exponentially in the last several years. As of September 2004, there were 158 private security companies with 18,244 active guards. The National Police, in contrast, has a total of 16,800 officers, with approximately 5,000 on active duty at any given time.

As a result of a sense of insecurity and the proliferation of weapons, many people want to leave the country. The images of gang violence create a sensation of chaos, leaving many to doubt that they can prosper in the country. Indirectly, the gang phenomenon has actually encouraged people to leave El Salvador in search of a more stable environment, taking their economic potential with them. On the other hand, deportations from the United States have increased over the last several years. Many of those deportees are gang members who reinforce the gang lifestyle when they return to El Salvador. In FY 2004, of the nearly 6,000 Salvadoran deportees, over 2,600 were criminal deportees.¹⁴ Thus, while many youths leave El Salvador looking for a better life, many are forced to return, and have been or become involved in criminal activity.¹⁵

The majority of those in gangs are youths. The stigmatization of poor urban youths as potential or actual gang members has negative social consequences for the country. These youths are often discriminated against for their appearance or simply avoided, as they are considered dangerous.¹⁶

The media has tended to over-exaggerate the problem of the gangs while not focusing on other important social issues. While the media bombards the public with news accounts of gangs involved in criminal activity, there is little analysis of the origins and proliferation of the gang phenomenon. Instead, gangs are often the scapegoat for all social ills, which limits the public’s deeper understanding of gangs and other issues affecting the country.

¹³ IBID, pg. 37.

¹⁴ DHS, ICE. Removal By Nationality – Deportations.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Interviews conducted in El Salvador during September 2005.

Impacts on Democratic and Political Development

Gang activity may affect democratic stability. A 2004 study “The Political Culture of Democracy in El Salvador” prepared by Mitch Seligson documents that when a high degree of victimization exists within a country, its political culture is negatively affected.

Gang activity may also influence policy decisions. Many analysts suggest that the hard-line approach taken by the government is politically motivated. It is much easier to crack down on gang members than to deal with more complicated social issues that support gang activity, such as income inequality and poverty. When deciding how resources are to be spent, politicians may make tough decisions about diverting resources to fight gang activity from other development areas.

Gang activity often contributes to weakened state-citizen relationships in poor, urban areas. Many youths in El Salvador seem to lack of respect for authority and rule of law. In 2000 and 2001, 50 percent of crimes were committed by youths 15-24 years old.¹⁷ The poor state-citizen relations may be linked to a more general rejection of democratic legal processes. According to Fishel and Grizzard, gang members may be under close scrutiny by law enforcement officials or may have been unjustly booked, incarcerated, or deported from the United States merely because of their identity with a gang.¹⁸ One potential danger is that the resulting feelings of exclusion and resentment could lead gang members to reject U.S. democratic values.

Finally, the presence of gangs may contribute to an enabling environment for institutional and extra-judicial violence against certain groups of people. Most gangs in El Salvador are involved in economic, social, and institutional violence. These categories explain the type of street violence that is common to gangs, which include street theft, robbery, kidnapping, drug trafficking, small arms dealing, and car theft.¹⁹ These interrelated categories fall along a continuum in which institutional violence begins to involve social cleansing and extra-judicial killings—two phenomenon that El Salvador has experienced recently in reaction to the gang problem. The specter of death squads from the 1980s has raised concern that the country could be heading down this dangerous path, as overzealous civilians and state agents respond with deadly force toward gang members.

Causes and Risk Factors of Gang Activity

The varied causes and risk factors that lead at-risk youths in El Salvador to join gangs are described below.

¹⁷ Discussions in August and September 2005, with founding members of the Central American Coalition for the Prevention of Youth Violence.

¹⁸ Fishel and Grizzard, “Counteracting Ideological Support to Terrorism in the Circum-Caribbean,” C/SRC Discussion Paper 05/52, September 2005

¹⁹ IBD Report on Violence in Latin America, chapter five, pg 2.

Marginal urban enclaves. Gangs often dominate the most marginalized urban areas. In some cases, poverty levels in these areas contribute to the ongoing activity of gangs. Other factors that contribute to gang domination are breakdown of the family, social and community structures, lack of basic services, and lack of opportunities for jobs or recreational activities. Gangs are able to control these territories, which are mostly isolated areas, with relatively little challenge from law enforcement.

Large numbers of unemployed youths. In many areas with gang activity, the majority of youths are unemployed. Gangs offer an alternative means to acquire goods, and they offer social acceptance to these otherwise marginalized youths. Forced recruitment is unnecessary.

Education system unable to retain youths. Various studies conducted throughout Central America indicate a direct correlation between dropout rates and gang activity. In many cases, youths have poor attendance records and dismal grades, which make their retention even harder. Forty percent of Salvadoran children drop out of school before grade 5. Interviewees reported that some gang members completed at least the ninth grade.

Reactive state government. Most gangs did not start out as criminal organizations, but tended to move in that direction over time. The state has responded to gang activity with hard-line law enforcement tactics. In the worst cases, there are arbitrary detentions, torture, and extra-judicial executions.²⁰ For the most part, these repressive tactics have not deterred gangs from forming and operating, but rather have spurred gangs to consolidate, sometimes coming into direct confrontation with the state.

Access to the illicit economy. In most cases, the gangs finance themselves through criminal activities and drug trafficking.²¹ Without access to the illegal economy, these groups would have little or no other sources of income.

Parents living and working in the United States. With parents working elsewhere, there are numerous cases of children raised by relatives who abuse and/or neglect them, do not fully accept them as family members, and treat them as outsiders. This can cause fear or rebellion, which may drive some children to the streets to seek relief.

Legacy of conflict and violence. El Salvador's civil war (1980-1992), one of the most devastating armed conflicts in Latin America, resulted in the deaths of more than 75,000 people. Following the war, there was an increase in violence and crime. This increase was partially attributed to the fact that nearly all crime that occurred during the conflict was considered war-related.

²⁰ El Salvador, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2004, Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department, February 28, 2005.

²¹ Interviews conducted in El Salvador, September 2005.

Approximately 30,000 El Salvador Armed Forces soldiers, over 6,400 National Police and other security forces, and over 8,500 FMLN combatants were demobilized as a result of the terms of the Peace Accords. Thousands of trained fighters were without jobs and struggling to exist, and thousands of firearms were available. Violence had become socialized, and populations often used violence as the first line of response to settle conflicts.

Weak, ineffective, corrupt police, criminal, and judicial systems. Areas lacking in social services and security, gangs become bolder, and may take on roles normally reserved for the state. This might include extorting “taxes” from businesses, bus drivers, and others who want to do business in the neighborhood. In extreme cases, the gangs begin to exercise their own justice, demanding certain behavior from the citizens and sanctioning those who do not obey.²²

Gangs are able to access weapons, conduct illegal activities, and dominate territories in part because some state functionaries are corrupt.²³ There are unsupported claims that the police are directly involved in illegal activities with gang members.

Access to small arms. Small-caliber arms are the weapon of choice for controlling territories—including local inhabitants—and trafficking of goods and drugs. In most cases, gangs have easy access to all kinds of weaponry, even those meant for use in war. Weapons proliferation is made easier by little or no controls on weapons by the state, easy access to trafficking routes, and the availability of weapons cached from the civil conflicts of the 1980s.

Narco-Activity. The international drug trade is connected to the gang problem in El Salvador on several levels. El Salvador serves as a critical point of trans-shipment of drugs originating in Colombia and destined for United States markets, which has created thriving narco-trafficking and organized crime networks in the country. The resulting flow of drugs into El Salvador also may contribute to higher levels of drug consumption and addiction in the country, which in turn may lead to more gang violence.

Media Coverage. As previously mentioned, the media’s tendency to regularly highlight gang violence has served in some ways to glamorize this lifestyle to many disenfranchised youths who feel abandoned on many fronts.

Current Responses to Gangs

The problem of gangs is a societal problem. Yet, public fear and stereotyping, exacerbated by the media and government, enable the government to use suppression and enforcement approaches without addressing the root causes of youth violence.

²² Interview with the *Jefe del Comité de Política Militar, Estado Mayor Conjunto*. He reported a market vendor woman was recently killed in San Salvador by a gang member for refusing to pay a gang tax of about US \$1. January 2006.

²³ Interviews conducted in El Salvador, September 2005.

Unfortunately, the hard-line approach sends the message to the public that law enforcement is the only way to deal with the gang problem, and prevention and intervention programs have received much less attention and fewer resources. More recent efforts have reflected a move towards a more holistic approach.

Government Response:

One of the main government strategies for dealing with gangs has been hard-line law enforcement. *Mano Dura* (firm hand) and *Super Mano Dura* (super firm hand) are law-enforcement approaches aimed at incarcerating gang members involved in criminal activity.²⁴ *Mano Dura* was made law in 2003 under the Flores administration. Its sequel, *Super Mano Dura*, launched on August 30, 2004, was defined as an integral plan to deal aggressively with delinquents through law enforcement, as well as to provide for prevention and intervention initiatives. *Super Mano Dura* resulted in the arrest of 11,000 gang members in just one year.

The emphasis on law enforcement has produced unexpected results. The existing legislation allows officers to randomly apprehend and book gang members, a procedure that has flooded the system. There is a lack of national coordination among the country's enforcement institutions in El Salvador (Attorney General's Office, Judges, and National Civilian Police). The judiciary and police systems are saturated, and there are not enough personnel in these systems to manage the problem of gangs.

In addition, the hard-line law enforcement approach has put a particular strain on the prison system in El Salvador. In 2002, even before the *anti-mara* laws, the prisons in El Salvador were considered the most overcrowded in the region. This made rehabilitation and surveillance programs much more difficult to achieve and implement in order to attain successful results. From 2003 to 2005, the situation deteriorated significantly, with some 4,000 gang members in various prisons throughout the country. According to the International Centre for Prison Studies, the total prison population in 2004 was 12,117. This is a small prison population, but heavily weighted with gang members. Furthermore, Salvadoran officials indicate that about 60 percent of the gang members in prison are U.S. deportees or are facing criminal charges in the United States. About 1,800 MS-13 members are inmates in Salvadoran prisons.²⁵ As in neighboring Honduras and Guatemala, there have been massacres in the Salvadoran prison system. For example, on August 18, 2004, some 31 prisoners were killed in the Centro Penal La Esperanza known as "Mariona").

Some have opposed the enforcement activities stemming from these *anti-mara* laws. Aida Luz Santos de Escobar, Judge for the *Juzgado Primero de Ejecucion de Medidas al*

²⁴ The Ministry of Governance–Public Security has an annual budget of 134.5 million dollars to maintain the police force, and an additional 7.5 million for strengthening the policing infrastructure. The criminal system has an annual budget of 18.5 million to improve the prison system, especially regarding its ability to deal with incarcerated gang members. An additional 7.3 million has been designated for improving prison infrastructure.

²⁵ Lopez, Connell and Kraul. "MS-13: International Franchise." *Los Angeles Times*. October 30, 2005.

Menor Infractor (First Court of Execution of Measures of Minor Infraction) of San Salvador, stated that after *Mano Dura* took effect, the number of homicides increased. She said that the anti-*mara* laws violated constitutional norms and international treaties in several ways: (1) youths were tried as adults; (2) homicide cases not committed by gang members had advantages over those committed by gang members; (3) the law violated the equity principle, (4) the law violated the presumption of innocence until the contrary is proved; and (5) the law was enforced retroactively.

Former President Flores asked the Supreme Court to pressure judges to support this law, but the judges continued to oppose it. They did not agree with the arrest of gang members simply for illicit association and felt this was unconstitutional, as anyone could be rounded up for illicit association or for being tattooed.²⁶ The judges also did not agree with the practice of sentencing youths as adults. To date, no one has been convicted for illicit association. The Fiscalia (Attorney General's office) cannot prove illicit association unless it infiltrates the gang, and this has not been done. On the other hand, Miguel Cruz from IUDOP states that *Mano Dura*, which ended in 2005, resulted in gangs creating more national networks because many ended up in jail, where they coordinated activities and established contacts.

Some claim that Super *Mano Dura* has been successful in reducing gang recruitment. In fact, recruitment has declined among gangs, although activities have become more violent, moving towards homicide and trafficking in drugs and arms. Many express concern both about the negative impact on the rule of law if due process concerns are not respected and about the weakening of the long-term legitimacy of the police if they are increasingly pressured to improve public security in a suppressive fashion. There also exists a healthy amount of cynicism in El Salvador and in the region about these law enforcement approaches, which some cite as simply a means to win votes in upcoming elections.

Despite disagreements about anti-*mara* laws, most persons consulted during interviews agree that U.S. deportation policies, together with the perceived lack of sharing information among countries about deportees with criminal records, have exacerbated the problem.²⁷ In FY 2004, the DHS Immigration and Customs Enforcement deported 2,667 criminal and 3,310 administrative deportees to El Salvador. As stated by Rodrigo Ayala while Vice Minister of Public Security and now the new Director of the National Civilian Police (PNC), "The problem is those gang members coming from the United States. They arrive with no paper work, so their criminal status is supposedly unknown. These are the gang members that are often admired, as they are more sophisticated, speak English, and have links to gangs in the U.S."

The average Salvadoran is anxious to see these "menaces to society" rounded up and thrown in jail. With 91 percent surveyed by IUDOP stating that the *maras* are a big

²⁶ Illicit association is a group of three or more gang members meeting, which can also be described as "loitering". It serves as the justification for police to apprehend and detain gang members. To date, no one has been convicted of illicit association.

²⁷ Interviews conducted in El Salvador, September 2005

problem, it is not a surprise that the law-and-order approach is popular. Interestingly, in this same survey, only 20.8 percent considered the *maras* a problem in their own neighborhoods. Nevertheless, sympathy towards these youths is generally lacking. This is further exacerbated by the media's tendency to sensationalize the phenomenon of gang violence. Ironically, the Mano Dura approaches seem to have actually strengthened the gangs as they band together to resist policing efforts.

Some have countered with efforts to preserve some basic rights for Salvadoran youth. Currently, the Ley Penal Juvenil (Juvenile Offender Law) requires that minors between the ages 12-17 be tried only in juvenile courts and limits sentences for minors to a maximum of seven years. Alternatives to incarceration are required. In July 2004, the Legislative Assembly modified the Criminal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, Juvenile's Offender Law, and Penitentiary Law in response to an April Supreme Court decision that the October 2003 Anti-Mara law was unconstitutional. The maximum period allowed to investigate a crime when the defendant is a minor was reduced to 60 days. Also, when a child is arrested, police must inform their parents or guardians, the solicitor's office, the Attorney General, and the PDDH (Procuraduría para La Defensa de Los Derechos Humanos – Public Defenders Office for Human Rights).²⁸

In recent months, and as a consequence of ongoing criticism, the Salvadoran government has initiated two umbrella-type strategies designed to address the problem at its source: Plan *Mano Amiga* (Friendly Hand); and *Mano Extendida* (Extended Hand). *Mano Amiga* is defined as a prevention strategy for youths at risk. Its programs aim to keep them from joining gangs, participating in delinquent activities, leaving school, or becoming drug abusers. *Mano Amiga* has two main policies: the “Plan Nacional de Juventud” (National Plan for Youth) and the Política de Seguridad Ciudadana (Policy on Citizen Security), with participation from the Ministerio de Gobernación which focuses on prevention at the primary level.²⁹ *Mano Extendida* provides assistance to former gang members who want to be rehabilitated.

These programs are coordinated by the Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Pública (CNSP), a government agency established in 1996 to provide support to the presidency in the area of public security, with roles later expanded to include project implementation as well. The CNSP also developed a conceptual framework for social prevention of violence and delinquency with an emphasis on citizen participation. CNSP receives about \$731,000 annually to work on violence and crime prevention activities. Currently, CNSP is the government agency responsible for managing prevention and intervention programs for youths at risk with numerous government ministries and NGOs.

²⁸ El Salvador, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2004, Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department, February 28, 2005.

²⁹ The plan presented in January 2005 was formulated by the Saca government. As part of the design, the Secretaría Nacional de la Juventud consulted extensively with youth and adults nationwide, including the various public and private institutions, to better inform that programmatic content of the plan. The final Plan Nacional de Juventud has three main objectives: improve the quality of life for youth; promote youth development at all levels; and attend to at-risk and excluded youth.

The prevention and intervention policies of Mano Extendida and Mano Amiga are fairly new, and the impact is difficult to measure to date. However, the percentage allocated to prevention and intervention approaches to gangs makes up only 20 percent of the available government funding, while a larger percentage goes towards law enforcement (Super Mano Dura). The reality is that it is politically expedient—and less expensive—to incarcerate a gang member than to implement intervention efforts that have limited success and require a long-term commitment and resources.

However, as experience has demonstrated, incarceration alone is not working. Gangs continue to exercise influence within the prisons and judicial system, and they reportedly continued to run criminal activities from their cells. In May, the Director of Prisons found that members of MS-13 supervised criminal activity while incarcerated. Additionally, the Director discovered that gangs encouraged criminal activity by children. Moreover, gang violence, especially in the country's three largest and oldest penitentiaries and its juvenile holding facilities, continue to plague the prison system, despite government efforts to separate different gangs. At year's end, a total of 12,073 prisoners were held in 24 prison facilities with a combined design capacity of 7,312, and there were 31 men and 9 women in 2 secure hospital wards with a combined capacity of 75 people.³⁰ Alternative programming may need to be further explored.

Donor Response:

The largest donor working in El Salvador is the United States, with an FY 2004 program of \$74.3 million. Other major donors in El Salvador include international donors such as UNDP, the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, as well as Canada, Germany, Japan, Spain, and Sweden. Further investigation is needed to identify synergies between these programs and potential anti-gang work considered by USAID. Highlights are provided below.

USAID supports an Aid to Artisans program Proyecto MOJE (Movement of Young Discoverers), which works on eliminating violent gang rivalries and provides technical job training to local gang members with skills in pottery-making, welding, carpentry, and screen-printing. Targeting gangs in the community of Ilobosco, MOJE also provides workshops on self-esteem and personal development for the participating gang members. Proyecto MOJE is expecting to receive a grant from the IDB for \$300,000 for commercialization; and will receive another \$300,000 from the EU/AECI. To date, over 300 gang members have been reintegrated into society to date and it is estimated that there are less than 100 active gang members in Ilobosco at the time of this report. The program has been successful in bringing both the MS-13 and 18th Street gangs members together. MOJE issues participants an identity card to help police know that they are in a structured rehabilitation program.

³⁰ El Salvador, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2004, Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department, February 28, 2005.

The U.S. Embassy supports a program implemented by the educational NGO Culture of Lawfulness, which demonstrates to 8th and 9th grade students how the rule of law helps people be better citizens and respect the law. In Culture of Lawfulness education, the goal is to reach the next generation of students and, through them, their parents and communities. Project staff and consultants help teachers develop a lawfulness education program, integrate it into the curriculum, and involve parents and the community in complementary activities.

Civil Society Response:

Although UNDP has not worked directly with youth-at-risk since 1993, they have been implementing a Society Without Violence Program since 1998. The program, which expects to reduce violence and insecurity in the country through advocacy and other programs, involves three elements: (1) research on violence; (2) implementation of local initiatives; and (3) communication. They look for prevention initiatives, since causes of violence are complex and multi-faceted. Also, UNDP worked with UNICEF, PAHO, and the World Bank on a policy paper that was later given to the government to develop a comprehensive security policy.

The Canadian PVO CECI (Canadian Center for International Studies and Cooperation) had a prevention program in the Zaragoza and El Puerto municipalities. The field team visited the program with the mayor and other community leaders to see several recreation opportunities, such as a school for karate and a soccer field. Police officers also talked with youth about avoiding drugs and staying out of trouble. The community, led by the mayor, created the Network of Citizen Security. CECI funding was used to strengthen this network and initiate several community activities to get youths off the street and out of gangs. The municipality of Zaragoza is now continuing activities without CECI support. The program demonstrates how minimal funding, used effectively, can foster community activities preventing violence and how collaboration between sectors (i.e. police, civil society and local authorities) is key in prevention programs.

The EU provides some of the approximately \$US10 million of funding for CNSP's violence and crime prevention and gang rehabilitation activities. (Other funds are provided by the El Salvador government.) Launched in 10 municipalities of San Salvador, the activities will eventually expand to 25 locations. The EU-supported activities focus on youths ages 10-25.

Even though some donors are supporting prevention and intervention activities, Artur Guth of the *Secretaria de la Juventud* (Youth Secretariat) explains that in general, donors are not interested in intervention. The funding for this purpose is minimal. The Granja. A state-owned residential rehabilitation center, is one of the few intervention projects funded by the government. Nevertheless, he is not discouraged. According to Guth, "a youth with options will not choose the gang lifestyle."

Individuals and Organizations Consulted

United States Government

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Carlos Garcia, Political Officer, US Embassy
Brian Dugan, Director, INL, US Embassy
Daisy Alvarado, EGE, USAID
Kristen Rosekrans, Education and Health, USAID
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El Salvador Government

Rodrigo Avila, Vice Minister of Interior
Oscar Bonilla, Director, CNSP
Armando Jiménez, CNSP
Aida Santos de Escobar, Juvenile Court Chief Justice
Ricardo Meneses, Director, National Civilian Police, PNC
Pedro Gonzáles, Deputy Director, Nacional Civilian Police, PNC
Mesa de Pandillas
Arthur Guth, Coordinador Mano Extendida, Secretaria de la Juventud
Dany Wilfredo Rodríguez, Mayor of Zaragoza, Municipality of Zaragoza
Granja Escuela de Rehabilitacion CNSP

Civil Society

Dr. Marisela de Pérez, FUNDASALVA (Tattoo Removal Program)
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Cesar Garcia, General Manager, Aid to Artisans/MOJE
Pedro Roque, Consultant on Sustainability Strategies
Walter Elias, Community Leader from Antiguo Cuscatlan
Mauricio Mejia, Community Leader from Colonia El Pepeto

Church

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International Donor Community

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