Combating Corruption by Improving Identification Systems in Paraguay

Paraguayans now benefit from a modern, more secure national identification card and passport system. The New Identification System (NIS) was funded through Paraguay's $34.6 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Threshold Program, which was managed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This biometric ID system is designed to improve the quality of personal data, reduce opportunities for fraudulent use of government IDs, and streamline activities through increased automation, thus reducing the time spent by citizens in renewing their IDs.

Thanks to MCC's investment, the Police Department now adheres to international standards and uses biometric identifiers and an electronic filing system. The biometric identifier is expected to reduce the incidence of identity theft and the electronic filing system will improve data storage.

The NIS was part of MCC's first threshold program in Paraguay, which helped to reduce opportunities for corruption and improve the rule of law. Assistance to the Paraguayan government under the first threshold program included the creation of a forensics lab unit, technical assistance to customs officials seizing illegal goods, creation of an internal controls system in executive-level agencies, and assistance in streamlining business registration processes. Paraguay's second threshold program, signed in April 2009, similarly focuses on anti-corruption efforts in customs, law enforcement, and the judicial and healthcare sectors. The goal of the second threshold program is to increase successful prosecutions, create citizen feedback mechanisms, and reduce opportunities for corruption in government offices.

Prior to the NIS, the Police Department used a paper system where digital fingerprints were not filed electronically and took weeks to process. The new system complies with international standards and is expected to progressively eliminate duplicate cards and the issuance of fraudulent documents based on multiple or stolen identities, such as voter registration scams. Implementation of the NIS demanded a comprehensive renovation of the Police

Department's information technology infrastructure, and the training of relevant staff to ensure the proper collection of citizens' biometric data. Entries in the NIS database are now linked to biometric identifiers—fingerprint images—which are captured through live-scan technology; photographs and signatures are captured with digital cameras and electronic pads, and are automatically verified as they become part of the database, along with all related, scanned documentation.

The handling and transfer of physical ID documents has been replaced by a modern information system that applies enhanced security controls. Staff of the National Police's ID Department log into the system using their own registered fingerprints. Since all entries are tracked electronically, audits may be done on every transaction. Lastly, ID cards and passports have been redesigned and upgraded following the UN's International Civil Aviation Organization requirements, resulting in tamper-proof documents for the Paraguayan people.

Tomas Gutierrez, a citizen from Fernando de la Mora in Paraguay, recently renewed his national ID card, previously a weeks-long process that he has been through many times before. He shared his feedback about the newly-established Customer Service Identifications Department. "It is great to get a ticket with a number at the entrance and just wait, seated, for my turn," he said, regarding the recently launched first-come, first-serve system. He also praised the revised design and picture quality of his new ID card. Another customer, Mirna Medina, took her seven-year old daughter Brissa to get an ID card. She mentioned the efficiency of the new services, "We only waited for 25 minutes."

After using the new identification system, Tomas Gutierrez was pleased with the quicker process of renewing his ID. The Paraguayan government expects the system to reduce the prevalence of fraudulent IDs.

As part of Paraguay's threshold program, nearly 6 million paper ID files were scanned and digital fingerprint images were input into the database as biometric identifiers. This will facilitate the use of automated fingerprint recognition technology in the future. Thanks to this MCC investment, not only will the Paraguayan government and its law enforcement agencies have a more reliable ID and passport system, but also thousands of Paraguayans will benefit from more efficient services and the reduced threat of identity theft.