

# The guatemala civil war history essay



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This mission is considered the larger civilian and humanitarian MINUGUA mission was established in January 1997 to verify the Agreement on the Definitive Ceasefire between the Government of Guatemala and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca.

## **History**

The Guatemalan Civil War, the longest civil war in Continental American history, ran from 1960 to 1996. It had a profound impact on Guatemala, according to the data found approximately 40, 000 to 50, 000 people disappeared during the war and around 200, 000 were killed. The aim of the operation was to conclude the 36-year Civil War which had ravaged the country. It was the international community's response to the decision by both government and guerrillas to return to the negotiating table in 1994 and the subsequent signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights on 29 March, 1994, one of several documents adopted in the run-up to the final peace agreement. To proceed and make solutions to this social issue, the Human Rights Verification Mission was launched in September 1994 by a decision of the United Nations General Assembly, with personnel arriving on the ground in Guatemala the following November. More than 250 experts in human rights, legal matters, indigenous affairs and policing were deployed across the country, with a mandate for institution and confidence building and to verify compliance with the terms of the Comprehensive Agreement.

On December 1996, following the signing of the Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace between the government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) the United Nations Security Council authorized,

by means of Resolution 1094 of 20 January 1997, the deployment of a peacekeeping force to support the MINUGUA personnel already in place and to verify the ceasefire, the demobilization of the URNG, and the surrender of their materials. At the beginning on 3 March 1997, under the auspices of the department of Peacekeeping Operations, a total of 145 troops and 43 civilian police from 18 countries were sent to Guatemala to prevent, support and stop the civil war. But that was not all, by 18 April same year, 378 mines and explosive devices had been lifted and destroyed, 2, 928 URNG fighters had been demobilized, and 535, 102 weapons and live rounds of ammunition had been handed over observer group, what that means peace finally was starting around the area.

The United Nations and the Guatemalan government agreed to establish a field office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Guatemala City for a period of three years, renewable at the government's request for an additional three.

## Background

To explain better this peacekeeping mission, we have to understand the causes of this civil war. The war was predominantly fought between the government of Guatemala and insurgents between 1960 and 1996. The war was initiated as a grassroots response to the rightist and military takeover of the Guatemalan state institutions and the lack of respect of the dictatorship for the human and civil rights of the majority of the population. In 1944, a group known as the "October Revolutionaries" in an unlucky way, won power and instituted liberal reforms, strengthening urban workers and the

peasantry. Another reason for the civil war was the economic and social discrimination against Guatemala's indigenous peoples, many of them Maya what in my opinion has been a social problem since decades and actually the problem exist in our society. Though indigenous people made up more than half of Guatemala's total population, European-descended wealthy landowners controlled most of the land during the conflict.

According to the historical clarification commission writes that " Guatemalan military influence over the government passed through different stages during the years of the armed confrontation". Like I mentioned before it began during the 1960s and 1970s with the army's domination of the structures of the executive branch. The Guatemalan military intelligence system became the driving force, to control the population, the society, the state and the army itself.

In the first phase of the conflict, mainly the 1960s, the " insurrection" was led by middle-class intellectuals and students, most of them from the San Carlos University, that had a mostly urban base and who were easily defeated militarily by an army that was trained by US soldiers and the CIA.

One of the negative impacts of civil war part was when, on the morning of 31 January 1980, a group of K'iche' and Ixil peasant farmers occupied the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City to protest the kidnapping and murder of peasants in Uspantán by elements of the Guatemalan Army. The subsequent police raid, over the protests of the Spanish ambassador, resulted in a fire which destroyed the embassy and left 36 people dead. Spain severed its diplomatic relations with Guatemala for four years.

## **Renewed peace process (1994 to 1996)**

The peace process, took on new life when the government and the URNG signed agreements on human rights (March 1994), resettlement of displaced persons (June 1994), historical clarification (June 1994), and indigenous rights (March 1995). They also made significant progress on a socioeconomic and agrarian agreement. When in my opinion, I think finally happened but the question is, why took them so long?

Under the President Alvaro Arzú administration in that period of time, peace negotiations were concluded, and the government and the guerrilla umbrella organization URNG (political movement), which become a legal party, signed peace accords ending the 36-year internal conflict in December 1996.

### Analysis of outcomes

By the end of the war, the statistics shows that around 200, 000 people had been killed. In a report in 1999, the UN-sponsored Historical Clarification Commission (CEH) stated that the State was responsible for 93% of the human rights violations committed during the war, what in my opinion the State didn't properly management their government at all, because we can see how the guerrillas, for 3% they peaked in 1982 and 83% of the victims were Mayas. Both sides used terror as a deliberate policy. Expenditures of the MINUGUA military observer group \$3. 9 million (gross).

Also showed by many reports of the results after the civil war ended, the abuses included burying some alive in the village well, killing infants by slamming their heads against walls, keeping young women alive to be raped over the course of three days. Rather it was one of over 400 massacres

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documented by the truth commission in some of which, according to the commission, constituted the famous “ acts of genocide” as we saw in the Rwanda case and related as the same with many cases in different countries around the world.

#### Conditions under which UN has been Successful

Personally I consider the peacekeeping mission from the UN successful with MINUGUA (United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala), a goal that was a ten-year United Nations humanitarian mission in Guatemala that involved, at the most critical point in the peace process, the duration was three-month peacekeeping mission. Another point to support why this mission was consider successful, according to U. N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, “ backed peacekeeping mission of the United Nations that has operated in Guatemala for the last 10 years that represents a model of success that can be emulated elsewhere around the world”. Annan mention in the same report that the U. N. Verification Mission in Guatemala, known by the Spanish acronym MINUGUA, which formally ended that same day, “ the peacekeeping mission stands as a successful example of peace-building, with valuable lessons for operations in other parts of the world.”

In other hand Annan explained in his report that Guatemalans should be proud of what they have accomplished in recent years, having made “ enormous progress in managing the country’s problems through dialogue and institutions”, what in my criteria I think there is a lot of work still to do to make progress, many people cannot forget how relatives had been killed and how the society is damaged since that happened.

The U. N. mission has been in Guatemala since November 1994, when it was deployed to monitor a human rights accord that later formed part of the comprehensive peace agreement signed in 1996 after the end of the last and longest of Central America's civil conflicts, one that cost more than 100,000 lives. Although MINUGUA has finished its work, personally I consider that the United Nations remains firmly committed to peace and development in Guatemala since they took part the control.

### Personal Analysis of Guatemala's Civil War and the UN

During the Civil War in Guatemala, the U. S. made a lot of support after the crisis; consider as a member of the " Friends of Guatemala" group of nations, they played an important role in the U. N. moderated peace accords in Guatemala. In my criteria the State Department argue that the United States strongly supports the six substantive and three procedural accords, which along with the signing of the 1996 final peace accord in Guatemala looking forward in the political, economic, and social change for the country.

The report that I mentioned before made by the U. S. human rights and democracy strategy for Guatemala aims to encourage and support the Guatemalan government's efforts to strengthen state institutions, civil society groups promoting human rights, and an innovative U. N. proposal to investigate clandestine groups believed to be involved in attacks on human rights workers.

To specify also why this mission has impact positive to Guatemala, it's because is consider successful in how the MINUGUA has been the hope that all Guatemalans will be guaranteed full access to this material so that they

can better understand their country's recent history and the positive steps taken since the peace accords were signed in 1996. The most important work made by MINUGUA, it was donating all documents pertaining to its 10-year efforts to establish peace in the country to the public University of San Carlos in Guatemala City.

To conclude why this mission has been so important in the case of Guatemala, is because the State Department was supporting Human Rights and Democracy, according to the U. S. Record 2003-2004, that although there have been showing "major advances" in human rights since the end of Guatemala's civil conflict and the signing of the 1996 peace accords, what makes me think, the state institutions charged with enforcing the rule of law remain weak and serious human rights problems persist in now days.

## **UN peacekeeping mission " El Salvador Civil War"**

### History

The Salvadoran Civil War took place from 1980 to 1992. This conflict was between the military-led government of El Salvador and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), type of organization made of five left-wing militias. The Salvadoran Civil War was the second longest civil war in Latin America after the Guatemalan Civil War (the one mentioned before in this paper). The United States supported the Salvadoran military government during the conflict. The civil war ended in the early 1990s. After my research, looking at the numbers around 75, 000 people were killed during this war. In the city of San Salvador, the hired thugs of the extreme-right, some of them well-trained Cuban and Nicaraguan terrorists, kill moderate-left leaders and



blow up government buildings. In the countryside, elements of the security forces torture and kill the farmers, shoot up their houses and burn their crops. At least two hundred refugees, from the countryside, arrive daily in the capital city to try to get save from the catastrophe.

During and after the war, one of the parts more affected was the rural areas, just as surely as Somoza's National Guard did in Nicaragua. Unfortunately, the command structure of the army and the security forces either tolerates or encourages this activity. In November 1989, the FMLN captured parts of San Salvador city, though they failed to take power. Eventually, by April 1991, negotiations resumed, resulting in a truce that successfully concluded in January 1992, bringing about the war's end.

A new Constitution was promulgated on 16 January 1992, when the Chapultepec Peace Accords were signed in Chapultepec, Mexico, to bring peace to El Salvador, the Armed Forces regulated, a civilian police force established, the FMLN metamorphosed from a guerrilla army to a political party, and an amnesty law was legislated in 1993.

After the civil war, most of the Salvadoran complaint that most violence done them was by the " National Guard and other military bodies, what reminds me the case of Rwanda; according the El Salvador post Civil War statistics and the Amnesty International's 1985 annual report: " around 40, 000 people killed in the preceding five years had been murdered, by government forces, who openly dumped mutilated corpses, in an apparent effort, to terrorize the population", what in my opinion sounds like the government forces didn't care about the situation and they besides helping were making

their society suffer. According to UN official web site, the outcomes from the El Salvador internal conflict was more than 70, 000 people were killed, many in the course of gross violation of their human rights and more than 25 per cent of the populace was displaced as refugees, what I can compare with my country this big number of people who die with put any reason

## **The UN responsibilities under the Chapultepec Peace Accords**

- To verify that the parties are complying with their obligations.
  
- To regulate military movements.
  
- Especially monitor the Salvadoran police force prior to transfer of authority to new national service.
  
- Conduct assistant in the provision of security in unstable areas.
  
- Assess national military doctrine and education.
  
- To investigate reports of human rights abuse.
  
- And verify implementation of the Truth Commission's recommendations.

## **2- UN Peacekeeping has been successful in El Salvador**

To explain better why this mission has been successful, the organization "ONUSAL", was established on 20 May 1991 by Security Council resolution 693 (1991). Its mandate was to verify the implementation of all agreements between the Government of El Salvador and the Frente Farabundo Martí (the organization that I explained before) for the national liberalities aimed at ending a decade-long civil war. So almost the same situation as Guatemala,

when they realized that too many people had been killed then both parties try to start making agreements involved a ceasefire and related measures, reform and reduction of the armed forces also creating of a new police force, and reform of the judicial and electoral systems, human rights, land tenure to solve other economic and social issues. But at the end I think after the armed conflict the ONUSAL verified elections they carried out successfully in March and April 1994 after all the damage caused in San Salvador.

To support why in my criteria this mission has been considered successful, first we need to take a look in the past, how the Secretary-General began assisting in talks aimed at ending the civil war in El Salvador. Later the first major accord was achieved in 1990, when the parties agreed to ensure respect for human rights what means finally they attacked the roots of the conflict. To verify this and future agreements, the Security Council established in 1991 the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL).

In my opinion this mission has been successful because is consider one of the most comprehensive operations in United Nations history, ONUSAL monitored the accords and verified the demobilization of combatants, their reintegration into society and the respect by both parties of their human rights commitments. Taking into consideration, the formal end of the 12-year conflict was proclaimed in December 1992, as FMLN troops completed their demobilization finally. I think this situation wouldn't have done if they didn't reduce the 50 per cent of the Salvadoran army and the departure of officers allegedly responsible for human rights violations. My criteria, ONUSAL also assisted in bringing about reforms needed to tackle the root causes of the

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civil war, in this case such as judicial reforms, the phasing out of the national police, the training of the new civilian police, and transfer of land to former combatants and landholders. At the request of the Government, ONUSAL observed the 1994 elections.

But we must take into consideration the expenditures after the civil war reflected a cost of \$107.7 million although it has been considered successfully. After analyzing how the peacekeeping mission and how brutal was the guerrilla in El Salvador, the ONUSAL's Electoral Division enjoyed considerable success, playing a vital part in verifying the validity of the results of what happened in March 1994 when the election result ensuring that the FMLN in particular would accept the outcome. Also some similar information was augmented by close cooperation with ONUSAL's military and police components during the tense run-up to the election.

El Salvador was dramatically and positively transformed in a relatively short space of time, there were four principal reasons for success in my opinion:

First, the peace process was based on a series of agreements concluded by the local parties. This allowed the process to progress through individual crises and granted ONUSAL a relatively high level of consent

Second, the peace process enjoyed broad international support. The US and the UN Secretary-General's provided diplomatic support when it was needed, particularly in relation to reform of the military and dismissal of officers and officials named by the Truth Commission.

Third, ONUSAL's mandate and composition changed over time in response to the changing demands of the peace process.

And fourth, the mission was well organized and took an activist approach. In particular, I think the ONUSAL interpreted its mandate broadly and developed what it called 'active verification,' intended to put pressure on the parties by making specific recommendations for action to them.

### **3- Analysis of the Peacekeeping Missions between Guatemala and El Salvador Civil Wars**

Referring to the two civil wars in Guatemala and El Salvador took place in the second half of the twentieth century; both countries were the scene of bloody civil wars, both framed in the context of the Cold War internationally.

En ese contexto, en particular en los años setenta y principios de los ochenta, ambos sufrieron los embates de la represión de gobiernos militares que se embarcaron en una cruzada anti-comunista en el marco de la doctrina de seguridad nacional de Estados Unidos. En los dos países surgieron movimientos guerrilleros de inspiración marxista, apoyados por Cuba primariamente y secundariamente por la Unión Soviética. In this context, particularly in the seventies and early eighties, both suffered the brunt of the repression of military governments that have embarked on an anti-Communist crusade under the doctrine of U. S. national security. In two countries emerged Marxist guerrilla movements, supported by Cuba primarily and secondarily by the Soviet Union.

Hacia finales del siglo XX, El Salvador y Guatemala iniciaron procesos de liberalización y transición política que los llevaron a instaurar a mediados de

los años ochenta, democracias electorales, seguidas pocos años después por la enorme ayuda y soporte de las misiones de las Naciones Unidas elaborando procesos de negociaciones de paz que concluyeron en sendos Acuerdos de Paz. Towards the end of the twentieth century, El Salvador and Guatemala began liberalization and political transition that led to the establishment in the mid-eighties, electoral democracies, followed a few years later by the enormous help and support of United Nations missions developed processes of peace negotiations that ended in the Peace Agreements.

La comparación entre Guatemala y El Salvador en relación a como las Naciones Unidas y sus misiones de paz fueron consideradas satisfactorias, resulta ideal para el diseño que permite comparar resultados entre dos o más casos teniendo mayor control sobre las variables independientes o explicativas entre pérdidas humanas, pérdidas materiales y la intervención de países terceros para ablandar las situaciones negativas en cada país. The comparison between Guatemala and El Salvador in relation to how the United Nations and its peacekeeping operations was considered satisfactory, it is ideal for design that allows you to compare results between two or more cases having greater control over the independent or explanatory variables between human losses material losses and the involvement of third countries to soften the negative situations in each country. En otras palabras, dado que existen diversas similitudes, puede reducirse la posibilidad de encontrar variables exógenas que tengan incidencia en los resultados. In other words, since there are many similarities, may reduce the possibility of finding exogenous variables that are relevant for the results.

Desde el punto de vista de los actores internacionales interesados en la promoción de la democracia y la construcción de la, la comparación de los casos de Guatemala y El Salvador también resulta importante en vista de los esfuerzos que se continúan realizando por construir democracias firmes y duraderas en diversas regiones del mundo por parte de las Naciones Unidas, y en particular en sociedades posconflicto. From the standpoint of international actors interested in promoting democracy and building, the comparison of the cases of Guatemala and El Salvador also is important in view of the efforts that are being carried out to build strong and lasting democracies in various regions of the world by the United Nations, and particularly in post-conflict societies. Guatemala y El Salvador fueron casos paradigmáticos, en los cuales se establecieron operaciones de paz multidisciplinarias por primera vez en la historia de las Naciones Unidas. Guatemala and El Salvador were paradigmatic cases in which they were established multidisciplinary peacekeeping operations for the first time in the history of the United Nations. Así, más allá de las tradicionales acciones de mantenimiento de la paz-cuyo fin es asegurar el cese al fuego- en esos países la ONU coadyuvó en el logro de los Acuerdos de Paz entre las partes a través de la moderación activa, y también en la supervisión del cumplimiento de los compromisos adquiridos en dichos acuerdos So, beyond the traditional actions of peacekeepers, whose purpose is to ensure a ceasefire in these countries, the UN was instrumental in achieving the peace agreement between the parties through active moderation, and also monitoring the implementation of the commitments made in those agreements

To see the relation of both cases, in my criteria Guatemala and El Salvador, The ONUCA (United Nations Observer Group in Central America) vividly illustrated the complex demands made of the Organization's peacemaking and peacekeeping skills and the varied role it played in advancing the peace process in Central America (during and after civil wars). Although initially established with the limited mandate of verifying only one aspect of that process, the tasks entrusted to it evolved, and it was able to assist the parties concerned to control and resolve the conflicts in the region. Its role in the demobilization of the members of Guatemala and El Salvador resistance marked an important step forward in the process of national reconciliation in both countries. So in my point of view, I think the Secretary-Generals paid tribute to the military and civilian personnel who served in ONUCA for their great success in establishing the first large-scale peacekeeping operation of the United Nations in the Americas and for the contribution which they made to the restoration of peace and stability in Central America and how things had changed for the better life of the populations and their rights.