

Summary:

Migration and drug trafficking from Latin America are increasingly important security issues for Canada. Evidence shows that responses based on securitization and militarization only serve to increase the violence in Latin America, which is already one of the most violent regions of the world. Despite the evidence, Canada seems to be in favour of a security-heavy approach: On March 27th 2012, Canadian Defense Minister Peter MacKay met with Mexican and U.S. Secretaries of Defence to discuss joint defence strategies in the war on drugs. Civil society believes that Canada should adopt policies that are based on evidence and that address the root causes of the problem.

Quick Facts:

- Latin America and the Caribbean are home to 8.5% of the world's population, yet account for 27% of the world's homicides.¹ Honduras has the highest homicide rate, with 82.1 murders per 100,000 people.²
- In 2008, half the homicides in Mexico were directly linked to the drug trade.³
- Mexican president Felipe Calderón declared a "war on drugs" upon assuming office in December 2006. Since then, there has been an unprecedented rise in crime and violence in the country, with over 47,000 people violently killed in the past 5 years.⁴
- Lack of trust in judicial and police systems have led Latin Americans to invest heavily in private security firms, which now outnumber police forces in virtually every country of the region. In Guatemala and El Salvador, there are 4 private security guards for every police officer.⁵
- 64% of Latin Americans have little or no confidence in their judicial system and 63% feel the same way about the national police.⁶
- In Latin America, 15 to 30% of young people are unemployed, two to three times the rate of adult unemployment in the region.⁷ Young adult males between the ages of 15 and 25 are the most violent group and suffer from the highest homicide rates.⁸
- Femicide has become a method of retaliation against government crackdowns on drug trafficking, and a way of threatening rival gangs. The number of murdered women tripled between 2005 and 2009 in many parts of Mexico.⁹ In Guatemala, 631 women were violently killed in 2011, adding to the 5,700 women that have been killed in the past ten years.¹⁰

Key Issues:

Economic Disempowerment

One of the root causes of migration is economic disempowerment, which forces people to migrate across borders in search of better opportunities. Globalization and inequitable trade terms have contributed to this. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), for example, removed support systems for small farmers and increased competition from subsidized US products, pushing millions of rural inhabitants into poverty. The percentage of Mexico's rural population earning less than the minimum needed for the basic food basket grew by nearly 50% in the first 4 years of NAFTA alone.¹¹ This same economic disempowerment has pushed people into jobs with drug cartels, the military and the police, which are seen as some of the only sure sources of employment. Young people are

particularly vulnerable to recruitment by organized crime due to the absence of decent work. This has intensified militarization and violence.

Dysfunctional Judicial and Police Systems

Organized crime has exposed police, military, judicial and political institutions to unprecedented risks of corruption.¹² Close to two thirds of Latin Americans lack faith in their national police and judicial systems, which has led to an expansion of private military and security companies. These forces are dangerously unregulated and have negative impacts on real people in terms of human security and human rights.¹³

The War on Drugs

Since drug trafficking is linked to violence, it is often assumed that increasing drug law enforcement will reduce violence. However, increased enforcement also raises the stakes for criminals. Longer sentences and larger profits are incentives to engage in more violence.¹⁴ Evidence shows that the war on drugs in Mexico has actually intensified violence, human rights abuses and fear for civilians.¹⁵ The generalized violence is also often used as an excuse for impunity towards increasing violence towards women.

Recommendations:

- That Canada's security and development efforts in the Americas focus on the socio-economic issues that underlie criminality and illegal economies, and not support further securitization.
- That Canada analyze state security and community security together, given the close links between the two. State securitization policies that lead to greater human insecurity, such as those currently in place in Mexico, are not effective in protecting civilians or combating the drug trade. An approach that addresses the root causes of organized crime, illegal migration and violence has the potential to address both state security and community security in a sustainable way.
- That Canada support structural reforms to police and judicial systems in the Americas, and include full observance of human rights and civil society participation in the process.
- That Canada take measures to curb domestic demand for drugs by investing in drug prevention and rehabilitation programs in Canada.
- That actions in the area of security focus on the specific goal of preventing the deaths of women. A gender neutral security approach deprives society of appropriate legal instruments to prevent femicide.
- That Canada support the efforts of national and international feminist and women's organizations to draw attention to, and denounce, femicide, as well as the efforts of other important human security and peace-building agents.

¹ [UNDP Caribbean Human Development Report \(2012\)](#)

² [UNDP Caribbean Human Development Report \(2012\)](#)

³ [Woodrow Wilson Centre Update on the Americas: Chronic Violence and its Reproduction \(2011\)](#)

⁴ [Woodrow Wilson Centre Update on the Americas: Chronic Violence and its Reproduction \(2011\)](#)

⁵ [Woodrow Wilson Centre Update on the Americas: Chronic Violence and its Reproduction \(2011\)](#)

⁶ [Woodrow Wilson Centre Update on the Americas: Chronic Violence and its Reproduction \(2011\)](#)

⁷ [Inter-American Dialogue: How has Youth Unemployment Affected Latin America? \(2011\)](#)

⁸ [Inter-American Development Bank: Social Exclusion and Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean \(2007\)](#)

⁹ [Council on Hemispheric Affairs: The rise of Femicide and Women in Drug-Trafficking \(2011\)](#)

¹⁰ [Amnesty International: Human rights in Guatemala under scrutiny by UN \(2012\)](#)

¹¹ [World Bank: Poverty in Mexico: An Assessment of Conditions, Trends and Government Strategy \(2004\)](#)

¹² [Woodrow Wilson Centre Update on the Americas: Chronic Violence and its Reproduction \(2011\)](#)

¹³ University of Wisconsin-Madison Havens Center: The Privatization of Security and Human Rights in the Americas (2008)

¹⁴ Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Confronting Organized Crime in Mexico (2012)

¹⁵ Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Confronting Organized Crime in Mexico (2012)