



# Guatemala

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OPEN DEBATE OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON WOMEN,  
PEACE AND SECURITY

STATEMENT  
OF THE DELEGATION OF GUATEMALA

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**STATEMENT OF THE DELEGATION OF  
GUATEMALA IN THE OPEN DEBATE OF  
THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON WOMEN  
AND PEACE AND SECURITY**

(October 24, 2000)

Mr. President,  
Esteemed delegates:

Guatemala could not refrain from participating in a debate on women, peace and security. In fact, an important exponent of my country's NGO community, Mrs. Luz Méndez, participated in yesterday's closed session, in which the Security Council listened to diverse NGO representatives on the subject.

Indeed, as all of you know, in December of 1996 the two parties that had faced each other during four decades of fratricidal conflict put an end to same, through the signing of a cluster of peace accords, under the aegis of the United Nations and a group of friendly countries. These accords purport to address the major problems that were at the root of the conflict, which include poverty, marginalization, discrimination, and a lack of participation. The role of women in economic and social development of the country appears throughout the accords, as an aspiration, and as a commitment.

As a precedent, one can mention the tremendous handicaps that affect Guatemalan women since time immemorial. The majority of the population lives in poverty. Women, and especially single women who are heads of households, are among the most vulnerable population. It is within these groups that we find the highest levels of illiteracy, especially among indigenous and rural women. Women have had to face peculiar obstacles, which include marginalization, a lack of opportunities, discrimination and violence. This situation was aggravated by the consequences of the armed internal conflict, which sowed death, disappearances, banishment and all types of hardships. Many families were forced to leave their place of residence to seek refuge in neighboring countries or regions of the country removed from the combat zones. The number of widows and women at the head of households increased enormously.

Due to all of the above, when peace was signed many Guatemalan women found themselves in a situation of grave economic hardship and social vulnerability. What was called for was an ample and agreed-to process of conciliation, resettlement, cooperation and healing of the profound physical and moral wounds that war brought with it.

During the almost five years that have transpired since the peace accords were signed, there have been achievements. This conspicuously includes the return and resettlement of displaced populations, the downsizing of the Army, and progress in the reform of the judicial system, the educational system, and the establishment of instruments to facilitate access to land. Further, specific measures were adopted to deal specifically with the analysis of the situation of women, and the design of strategies to improve same. This has been the role of the Women's

Forum, and the creation of the Defender's Office of the Indigenous Woman. In more general terms, Guatemala today is a more open, plural and participatory society than it was five years ago. At the same time, there is much greater public awareness than before about the imperative of dealing with injustice and inequity, and in achieving deep structural reforms, both in economic and social spheres, as indispensable elements to maintain peace.

In real terms, in the last years women's participation has increased in many fields. The number of women involved in training programs and in community affairs is growing. There is greater access to leadership positions, and female participation has increased in the electoral process, in political and entrepreneurial activities. A not inconsequential number of women occupy relevant roles in the country.

At the same time, there is much still to be done. As Mrs. Méndez pointed out yesterday, many of the commitments contained in the Peace Accords have not been complied with in a timely and opportune manner, as originally envisioned. It is obvious that we are still far from realizing the goals contained in the Accords: to promote and effectively facilitate the presence of women in all areas of activity, at all levels, without discrimination of any type. Perhaps the complexity of the effort was not adequately foreseen, especially because the original time-table of four years seems insufficient to deal with the accumulated difficulties faced. For this reason, the Oversight Commission of the Peace Process has re-scheduled the compliance of the commitments. It is for this reason, too, that we aspire that the United Nations Verification Mission's mandate be extended to the end of 2003.

In summary, Guatemala has had important experiences to contribute to this debate. I share, to a very high degree, the recommendations that Mrs. Méndez presented yesterday, based on the lessons learned, which can be useful to other countries of this Organization.

Thank you.