

**Corina Giacomello**

**The Beckley Foundation Latin American**

**Multiple violences and drug policy**

**Reflecting upon the case of Guatemala**

Guatemala is the biggest Central American country. It lies in the middle of the producing areas of cocaine (Colombia, Peru and Bolivia) and the main consumer market, i.e. the United States. Its geographical location turns the whole region, together with the Caribbean, into a transit area for such product. Local and international nets operate in the country. Not only is Guatemala a storage and transit country for cocaine, but also a producing country of poppy and marihuana, a manufacturing country of methamphetamines and a port of arrival for chemical precursors deviated to illicit channels. Besides drugs, all sorts of goods are illicitly transited across the country: migrants, weapons and precious woods, among others.

One of the implications of illicit drug markets and interdiction policies in transit countries is the high levels of lethal violences. Guatemala has one of the highest homicides rates in the world, together with El Salvador and Honduras, the other two Central American countries that form what is known as “The Northern Triangle”.

The interdiction model compels Guatemala to divert its limited resources to fight drug traffic, thus further reducing the capacity of the State to attend the needs of the population. This causes decreasing levels of social and economic development and increases the levels of violence, by exacerbating social conflict. The current model of fight against transnational crime creates a vicious circle of violence and the penetration of crime into society. Simultaneously, Guatemala has not yet overcome internal structural problems that facilitate the penetration of criminal organization into the political apparatus. The levels of violence also depend on the weapons tenancy regime, the normalization of violence and the levels of impunity, which contribute to the adoption of lethal violence as a social praxis.

Despite drug policy reform is not the panacea that can erase all the difficulties that the country faces, more adequate policies can contribute to improve national development and

tackle violence. The process of developing and implementing better public policy should be built by the government and civil society, in a joint strife to bring about change within a wider scheme of public policy oriented at reducing violence.