



BELIZE



GANG SITUATION IN BELIZE



MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF PUBLIC SAFETY/HOME AFFAIRS
OF COUNTRIES IN
THE INTEGRATION SYSTEM OF CENTRAL AMERICA (SICA)

Guatemala City, Guatemala
15th October, 2007

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I. PANORAMA OF BELIZE



Belize

Formerly known as British Honduras is geographically located in Central America bounded in the west and south by Guatemala, and in the north by Mexico, and with the Caribbean Sea spanning the entire eastern coast. Belize land area is about 8,867 square miles with a population of 311,480 inhabitants (established mid 2007) with a multi ethnic society made up of Mestizo, Creole, Garifuna and others. The majority of the population is concentrated in the Belize District.

Independence

- 21st September, 1981 (England)

Six (6) Districts:

- Corozal, Orange Walk, Belize, Cayo, Stann Creek and Toledo

Language

- English is the official language with Spanish being the second.

Currency

- The Belize Dollar

II. HISTORY OF GANGS IN BELIZE

- Belize has a rich history of productive working Gangs which dates back to the 1930's when gangs provided the workforce needed for the mahogany and chicle industries.
- On 11th October, 1961 Hurricane Hattie made land fall in Belize, however the damage caused by this storm mostly affected Belize City. This disaster triggered a migration of Belizeans to North America who settled primarily in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York. This migration resulted in an exchange of cultural values which impacted the lifestyle of Belizeans.
- Eventually many of those young Belizeans joined the already existing street gangs in different parts of the US such as the Rolling 30's, Hoovers, 123rd and others affiliated to the CRIPS or the BLOODS two of the most notorious gangs.
- In the early 1970's influence by a movie called "The Wild Bunch", Belize had its first exposure to criminal street Gang activities. In this movie a group of young persons called the wild bunch portrayed a scene where a lawman was attacked and beaten. A group of young Belizeans calling themselves the wild bunch copied the behavior seen in the movie, which resulted in them attacking a law enforcement officer causing serious injuries. The group was prosecuted and a member was incarcerated, following this several members migrated to the US.

II. HISTORY OF GANGS IN BELIZE

This began a new era and by the mid 1970's the country was being influenced by social and cultural changes taking place in the US.

In the 1980's the introduction of television and the use of Belize as a point in the route used for drugs transshipment to the US, which brought affluence among the criminal elements involved in the drug trade, who got involved in the sale and use of hard drugs in Belize City. Along with this came a new breed of street drug dealers who quickly made connections to their Belizean counterparts in the US that were involved in criminal activities. This resulted in several of those Belizeans residing in the US returning for short visits during which time they brought ideas and shared experience of their criminal street gang involvement.

By the early 90's Belize had youths claiming to be members of the Crips and the Bloods who were fighting over colours and turf.

In October 1997, Police in the New York Area conducted an anti gang raids to curtail violence and illegal activities. During this operation 27 Belizean members of the Rolling 30's CRIPS were arrested and indicted on charges ranging from drug peddling, sexual assault to attempt murder. After those convicted spent their prison term, they were subsequently deported to Belize. Once in Belize they quickly established their bases and introduced new sub cultural behaviors among their associates.

II. HISTORY OF GANGS IN BELIZE

- Among those returning were individuals claiming affiliation to the CRIPS and BLOODS. Others claimed affiliation to Latin Gangs in the US. So far, limited numbers have been found to be associated with the MS 13 (Mara Salvatruchas) or the 18th Street Gang (EME).
- During the same period Belize was seeing the arrival of many Central Americans migrants who were seeking safety and opportunities as some were fleeing civil wars in their countries.
- Today a substantial amount of Central American migrants, primarily from El Salvador who came in as a part of the United Nations Resettlement Program for refugees have acquired Belizean citizenship and are living in communities around the country.
- Although they are limited in numbers, Belize is seeing mestizos and latinos who now claim to be members of the MS 13. Incidents where they are found to be involved in gang activities are limited in numbers.

A. PROFILE OF GANGS

- Groups of 10 to 15 members
- Youths ranging between 14 years and 30 years predominantly males
- Emanating from underprivileged or dysfunctional homes
- Single parent families
- School drop outs
- Concentrated in Belize City (the largest urban area of Belize)
- Some were deportees or influenced by deportees

B. FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED GANG INITIATION

- Lack of Education
- Peer Pressure
- Sibling involvement
- Gang infested neighbourhoods
- Family Disintegration
- Poor Values and Principles
- Limited Job Knowledge
- Un-employment
- Gangs become Family Substitute
- Deported gang member

III. CURRENT GANG SITUATION

- Gangs are a National Security concern. Gun violence and related street crimes are a serious threat. Gang related shootings has accounted for most of the murders that involved the use of firearms in the country.
- Belize City the old capital sits on the coastline in the middle of the country its population is approximately 63.7 thousand and has a predominantly Afro-Belizean make up with Creole and Garifuna being the highest numbers. This city is divided into the North and South side by the Belize River, likewise it is confronted with the main problem of gang violence, of late there has been a spate of shootings and murders, mostly on the Southside.
- Analysis of the situation indicate that it is a fight for dominance by rival gangs involved in the sale of drugs. These incidents have resulted in a number of retaliatory actions that has contributed significantly to the national crime rate which shows that 80% of persons killed are Afro-Belizeans.
- The population in other districts of the country are smaller. Gangs in these districts are mainly formed by youths with criminal motives, the number of incidents of gun related crimes in these parts are minimal.

A. CAUSE OF GANG ACTIVITY

- Gang members continue to be recruited by major drug traffickers as security in the drug trade . Their involvement has given rise to the illegal importation of high powered rifles and short arms by Drug Traffickers who from time to time receive these weapons as part payment for work done in Belize in support of the Drug Trade. These firearms end up in the streets and are used by the street gangs to support their criminal activities.
- The gangs members are known to be used by drug dealers in their fight to control markets this has resulted in clashes with those who appear to be moving into other territories. They are also involve in the street sale and use of drugs.
- The killing of known gang leaders from around the city has sparked a rise in rival killings which has cause public outcry for action to be taken by the authorities.

IV. IMPACT TO NATIONAL SECURITY

- The present situation is considered a threat to National Security because of:
 - The general safety of citizenry and the widespread fear of crime and public outcry
 - proliferation of illegal firearms and their use in the commission of violent crimes, particularly the incidences of murder.
 - gang violence pose a threat to national security and can create a negative economic impact to the rapidly growing tourism industry
 - The human and logistical resources to address the threat posed by street gang places heavy demand on limited financial resources.

V. NATIONAL INITIATIVES

The Government of Belize has initiated and co sponsored a number of programs to address the gang situation.

- Youth for the Future (Min of Human Development)
- Youth Enhancement Centers (Min of Human Development)
- Skills Advocacy Programs (Min of Human Development)
- Centre For Employment Training (Min of Education)
- District Resource Centers (Min of Education)
- Vocational Institutions (Min of Education)
- Police Programs (Min of Home Affairs)
 - Do the Right Thing
 - Police Youth Cadet Corp
 - First time offenders Program
 - Drop in Centers for youth at risk
- Youth Advocacy Movement (NGO)
- Life Skills programs (NGO)
- Gang mediation conferences

VI. PROSECUTION

To enhance prosecution the following measures have been taken:

- New legislation passed to address deportees and gangs
- Amendments to the firearms legislation
- Amendments to the inferior court act
- Amendment to prison legislation to deal with parole and parolees

Recommendations have been made for additional amendments to the above legislations to include sentencing and bail guidelines.

VII. REHABILITATION

The rehabilitation of youth offenders involved in gang activities require structured programs that are well funded and evaluated.

The Kolbe Foundation:

- a private entity managing the Belize prison
- collaboration with other non Governmental organizations have introduced a number of programs aimed at rehabilitating inmates
- These programs which deals with basic education, drug and other form of addiction rehabilitation has so far achieved some degree of success.

VII. REHABILITATION

- The National Youth Cadet Service Corp:
- established in 2002 to address problems with youth at risk.
- this program provides literacy training along with a degree of semi-military discipline.
- Youths at this facility range between the age of 10 – 17 years
- exposed to academic and life skill training

The Princess Royal Youth Hostel:

- A juvenile facility managed and financed by the Ministry of Human Development and has been in operation since the 1960's.
- Serves both as a safe haven for youths needing social assistance
- Serves as a detention center for those in conflict with the law.
- Residents are allowed to attend academic classes away from the institution
- No resident are allowed to stay at the hostel after completing the age of 18 years.

¿¿¿ PREGUNTAS ???