

Firstly, the zero tolerance stance on organized crime has focused on a militarized law enforcement approach that does nothing to address the causes of the violence. The “Mano Dura” policy of the Mexican Government of recent years has only contributed to violence spiralling out of control. The country has seen dramatic increases in homicides; general impunity; widespread breaches of human rights; devastatingly high numbers of small arms and light weapons; and general weakening of judicial, education and health institutions. Additionally, in response to the crackdown by the government organized crime gangs in Mexico are no longer only involved in drug trafficking. They have branched out to other endeavours such as human, organ, and weapons trafficking. The costs of the war on drugs are startling. The yearly economic impact of the violence to the Mexican economy is estimated to be equal to 27.7 percentⁱ of its GDP.

All of this has resulted in the dramatic escalation of the war on drugs including brutal breaches of human rights and suppression of people. Indigenous communities that are struggling to hold on to their lands from being exploited by foreign multi-nationals also fall victim to Mano Dura. In response, groups of people have become so frustrated with the situation that they are creating their own self-defense groups. In trying to defend themselves they are contributing to a further militarisation of the country.

Secondly, the hard security approach has failed to counter organized crime groups from infiltrating all parts of society. From politicians, businesspeople, union members, judges to policemen, individuals on all levels are linked to the “sicarios”, causing political, economic and social dysfunction. They are part of a complex structure of the underworld affecting all functions of governance. What has resulted is a weak state that fails to protect its people, a breakdown in law and order, increased corruption and permeating censorship.

At the same time, the potential for peace in Mexico is high, in particular when compared to other countries which face similar levels of violence. In spite of the violence impacting the economy, Mexico has seen sustained economic growth over the last years and low levels of unemployment. The country has also benefitted from its neighbour. Not only is there a favourable trade relation with the USA, amongst others based on the North

American Free Trade Agreement, high remittances from Mexicans that have migrated to the USA have benefitted those that stayed behind. Combined with a relatively well-educated workforce, the potential for development is high. While the main institutions of the state – governmental, judicial, educational, economic, and social – are weak and in decay, they are in place and functioning, giving Mexico a head start in comparison to other countries facing high levels of insecurity. While the current Mano Dura policy continues however, this potential will never be harnessed.

Finally, the Mano Dura strategy fails to recognise the violence in Mexico within the regional context, both in Central America and towards the north. The conflicts of Mexico cannot be solved in Mexico alone. Whether it is the war on drugs or confrontations with indigenous communities protesting against multinational companies claiming their lands, hard security policies will not solve these issues.

The Mexican government should recognize the complexity of the challenges it is facing and adopt a human security strategy. The development of the country is undeniably connected with the violent conflict and the resulting human rights abuses. Mano Dura merely tries to battle the consequences of the conflict, being the violence. Only when development, security and human rights are addressed simultaneously can Mexico start moving towards a solution.

More so, it is time for the Mexican government to put its people front and centre of any strategies to address the violence. It is their needs and interests that should be prioritized. Central to all of this is the realization that there are no shortcuts. Key for any solution for Mexico is the need to both strengthen its institutions and capacitate its people. Impunity, corruption and human rights abuses all need to be countered by a turnaround in judicial, educational and health institutions. Checked and challenged by a vibrant civil society, they will become the long-term guarantee for sustainable peace.

It is a challenge that Mexico should not confront alone. The threat from organised crime is a threat to global human security, and the international community must confront it. It

cannot be solved by treating it as a war to be fought with military force. The solution to the violence and insecurity can only come from decreasing the inequality gap in society through health, education and social development.

While the violence continues in Mexico, only 2,000 miles north of Mexico City officials will be meeting to discuss what needs to be included in the Post-2015 Development Agenda to assure the progress of the Millennium Development Goals. They only need to think of the neighbouring country to see that central to this is human security.

↓ “Mexican Peace Index – Measuring the State of Peace in Mexico over the Last Decade”
by Institute for Economics & Peace, 2013:

<http://visionofhumanity.org/sites/default/files/Mexico%20Peace%20Index%202013.pdf>

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