

Voluntary Weapons Collection in Panama

The Arms Exchange Program in San Miguelito

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I. Introduction

The United Nations, local and national governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are increasingly considering voluntary weapons collection and destruction programs (VWCP) as a policy option for post-conflict societies where military style weapons continue to proliferate. Many VWCPs are implemented several years after "peace" has been achieved and societies realize that high rates of crime and violence are related to the incomplete disarmament of warring factions that has left large quantities of high-powered weaponry in the hands of criminals and civilians. These programs go beyond the traditional military disarmament approach by integrating approaches from the fields of development, public health, education, crime prevention and community peace-building. The objectives of any particular VWCP may vary. However, the thematic focus on the tools of violence as a vehicle for dealing with larger societal ills appears to be constant. There are several resources accessible via the Internet that provide concise, general background discussion on VWCPs.

The present report on weapons collection in Panama, along with a July 1998 report on El Salvador, represent the Program for Arms Control, Disarmament and Conversion's (PACDC) second generation of research, documentation and analysis of VWCP (See comparative information in Appendix 2.). PACDC researcher Neil O'Connor carried out the first generation of research on VWCP in Nicaragua, Haiti and the Dominican Republic in 1996. During this initial period PACDC research was limited to finding people who could talk about what had taken place and reporting on it. The second generation includes actual observation and process analysis of VWCPs in action. Currently, PACDC is involved to varying degrees with a third potential generation of VWCP experiences in Guatemala, Cambodia and Albania. In this emerging third generation, PACDC will be able to follow the planning stages along with process and impact evaluations. There is a wide consensus among supporters of VWCP that the symbolism of collecting and destroying the tools of violence publicly provides enormous intangible benefits to post-war society. The challenge for emerging VWCPs is to find tangible and quantifiable evidence that these programs improve social wellbeing.

The Panamanian VWCP described in this report, *Intercambio de Armas por Mejores Condiciones de Vida*, hereafter referred to as Arms Exchange, is a program created by the Alcaldía (Mayor's office) of San Miguelito, Panama. While it might be a bit unfair because of differences in size, scope and circumstance, I will occasionally draw comparisons between the Arms Exchange program with the Goods for Guns program in El Salvador.

Special thanks must be extended to several organizations and individuals. Firstly, to the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) for funding PACDC travel and research through a grant from the Ford Foundation. Secondly, I would like to express my gratitude to the Mayor of San Miguelito, Felipe Cano Gonzalez, and his chief of staff, Raul Cedeño, for their willingness to share their experience with the international community. Finally, I want to thank the British American Security Information Council (BASIC) for their electronic news service that brought the VWCP in Panama to our attention.

II. Background

The Arms Exchange program functions in the city of San Miguelito under the auspices of the Alcaldía. San Miguelito is an autonomous municipality with a population of approximately 300,000 located on the periphery of Panama City. It was one of the areas within Panama where the greatest quantities of arms were distributed leading up to the United States military invasion of Panama in 1989 (Operation Just Cause). Most of the illegal military arms currently in circulation are believed to be remnants of the obsolete Panamanian Defense Forces. [This does not mean that] the US military, drug traffickers and regional conflicts have not also contributed to the proliferation of weapons in Panama.

Many of San Miguelito's citizens are very poor and live in shantytowns,

often arriving as squatters from other parts of the country. Youth gangs are common. Many of these gangs use firearms in addition to knives and machetes. Municipal statistics point out that 60% of the crimes reported in San Miguelito are committed by minors. It is not clear what percent of violent crime minors commit. Police presence is minimal in the area due to difficult road access and dangerous conditions. The municipal crime figures also determine which districts within San Miguelito are most involved in illicit arms trafficking and use.

San Miguelito's mayor, Felipe Cano Gonzalez, from the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD), initiated the Arms Exchange program. This is the political party of the current Panamanian president, Ernesto Balladares. The idea for an exchange program in San Miguelito came from a similar program implemented in Panama City several years earlier. The Alcaldía of San Miguelito tried to implement an exchange program in August 1997, but had to suspend it because the quantity of high-powered weapons turned in quickly exhausted all resources.

In early 1998, Mayor Cano Gonzalez set out to restart the program with the goal of recovering 1,000 illegal firearms before the year 2000. One of the key motivating factors for restarting the Arms Exchange program was making San Miguelito a safer place in anticipation of the 1998 national referendum. In late 1998, the Panamanian people voted to not allow President Balladares the constitutional right to run for a second term in 1999. On the day of the referendum the consumption of alcohol and carrying firearms were prohibited. To my best knowledge, no significant violent outbreaks occurred in San Miguelito on the day of the referendum.

The Alcaldía succeeded in recovering 108 firearms voluntarily during three rounds of collection in 1998. Additionally, the police recovered another ninety-seven firearms through planned raids and increased enforcement. This strategy is part of a "carrot and stick" approach to local gun control. People are given the opportunity to turn in illegally held firearms voluntarily prior to an increase in police raids in the same area. The next sections of this report are dedicated to describing and analyzing the carrot approach known as Arms Exchange. This will be followed by a discussion of how the lessons learned in Panama can be applied elsewhere.

III. Arms Exchange in San Miguelito

Program Objectives

According to San Miguelito's Secretary General, Raul Cedeño, the main objectives of the Arms Exchange program are:

- 1) Improve public safety by reducing the quantities of illegal arms in circulation.
- 2) Prevent outbreaks of violence during the 1998 referendum and 1999 elections.
- 3) Take weapons out of the hands of youth.

- 4) Collect 1,000 illegal arms by the year 2000.

The Alcaldía does not depend solely on the Arms Exchange program to meet these objectives. Increased enforcement by police and random weapons raids are seen as complementary and necessary.

Legal Framework

In order to go about reducing illegal arms in circulation, an inter-institutional agreement was signed to make the voluntary weapons collection and increased police enforcement realistic and implementable policies. On October 17, 1997, the Ministry of Interior and Justice along with the Municipality of San Miguelito agreed to do the following to make the Arms Exchange Program a reality:

The Municipality of San Miguelito will:

- 1) Provide the National Police (PN) with information and cooperation that will assist in the enforcement of the law.
- 2) Train public servants on issues related to public security and community building.
- 3) Implement the Arms Exchange program with the collaboration of the local private sector. The private sector will donate and/or sell at a discount construction materials, appliances, foodstuffs and other items to be given to individuals in exchange for firearms.
- 4) Provide personnel and the physical installations where the arms will be received.
- 5) Coordinate with the Ministry of Interior and Justice, through the National Police, the assignment of qualified personnel to receive, store and destroy weapons.
- 6) Sign agreements of cooperation with private sector sponsors to develop a voucher system for the transfer of goods to individuals surrendering weapons. Both the Municipality and the private sector sponsors are responsible for ensuring the transparent management of vouchers via parallel documentation.
- 7) Install collection centers in the city. At the end of each round of weapons collection a detailed report will be prepared containing the description of each firearm surrendered (model, serial number, type, color, weight, caliber and other relevant information). The Municipal Auditor and the officials responsible for weapons destruction will countersign the report.
- 8) Include employment opportunities with the Municipality as an incentive for turning in weapons.

The Ministry of Interior and Justice will:

- 1) Provide the Municipality of San Miguelito with the information and statistics that will assist in the development of the Arms Exchange program.
- 2) Provide the necessary security for municipal employees and individuals turning in weapons.
- 3) Provide qualified personnel to handle firearms.
- 4) Remove any obstacles that might impede persons from turning in

illegal firearms.

Implementation Process

Arms Exchange is a collaborative effort of several segments of Panamanian society including the central government, municipal government, private sector, Catholic Church and the citizens of San Miguelito. However, the Municipal Government is the actual implementing agency responsible for the Arms Exchange program. For this reason a Special Commission was created within the municipal bureaucracy incorporating the following civil servants:

- Mayor
- Secretary General (similar to a Chief of Staff)
- Notary
- Internal Auditor
- Social Worker
- Legal Counsel
- Representative- Department of Information
- Representative- Municipal Security
- Representative- Public Works
- Administrative Director

This special commission raises the funds and establishes the procedures that make the Arms Exchange program possible. For 1998, the funds were raised through a combination of cash and merchandise donations. Local supermarkets, department stores and hardware stores were among the private sector supporters. The Municipality and Ministry of Labor and Social Security also contributed financial resources. After the first round of weapons collection the Panamanian president contributed US\$ 15,000 to ensure continued program implementation. In addition, the Catholic Church made soccer fields and baseball diamonds available for use as collection centers.

Promotion

The Alcaldía used television, radio and print media to promote the Arms Exchange program. In their advertisements they made the public aware of the opportunity to exchange firearms for foodstuffs, construction materials, domestic appliances or employment. The no questions asked nature of the exchange was also emphasized.

Another important tool for promoting the program was the use of fliers to spread the word. Given that each round of the program was carried out in a different sector of San Miguelito it was important to emphasize the place of collection in addition to the date and time. The values of exchange were also incorporated into promotional materials. Below is the table of values for weapons turned in:

Type of weapon	Exchange value (in US dollars)
Grenade	\$50-75
Shotgun	\$75-150
Firearms caliber 22, 25, 32, 38	\$150-250
Firearms caliber 357, 380, 9mm, 44, 45	\$250-350
Military assault rifles	\$350-500

The public was made aware that they could turn in arms in exchange for vouchers for merchandise at participating establishments. Participating supermarkets prohibited the use of vouchers for the purchase of tobacco or alcohol. Employment was also offered as an incentive through the sponsorship of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. Participants choosing the employment option were put to work on community projects. Individuals with pending misdemeanor crimes could turn in a weapon and exchange a day of community service for two days of jail time.

Implementation Commission

The Special Commission, which was in charge of the strategic development of the Arms Exchange program, organized another commission consisting of municipal employees that would implement the program. These seven individuals represent the Implementation Commission that remained at the three different collection centers from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on the three dates of the Arms Exchange program. The Implementation Commission consists of a Coordinator, Administrator, Social Worker, Legal Counsel, Municipal Security Officer and Arms Expert (from the PN). In order to ensure success, the Implementation Commission had to delegate responsibilities according to their positions while operating under the following assumptions:

- 1) The Arms Exchange program provided the opportunity for citizens to turn in arms of questionable origin.
- 2) Family members may turn in arms belonging to persons in jail.
- 3) The environment has to encourage and provide assurances to people that know the location of illegal firearms but are afraid to report this information.
- 4) Family members of youth in gangs may turn in arms.
- 5) Amnesty must be guaranteed to all persons exchanging arms and the police will not detain known criminals on site.

Each member of the Implementation Commission has specific responsibilities according the Alcaldía's set of administrative procedures for the Arms Exchange program:

Coordinator

- a) Receives and welcomes individual exchanging weapon.
- b) Reassures individual of amnesty involved.
- c) Directs individual to the Arms Expert and Municipal

Security Officer.

Arms Expert (from the National Police)

- a) Receives, examines and places an exchange value on the firearm turned in.
- b) Writes down the weapons description, physical state and value of the weapon on the Proof of Receipt of Weapon form and signs it.
- c) Writes down the description once more on a tag that is attached to the weapon. The weapon is handed to the Municipal Security Officer.
- d) The Proof of Receipt of Weapon form is given to the Social Worker.

Municipal Security Officer

- a) Stores and guards weapons received.
- b) At the end of the day, participates in the transfer of weapons to that PN. Signs the Act of Transfer.

Social Worker

- a) Receives the person surrendering arms and their request for compensation. Verifies the equal value of the vouchers with the surrendered weapon. Advises the individual on the different options for compensation.
- b) Directs individual to the Administrator and hands over receipt.

Administrator

- a) Guards the vouchers.
- b) Guards the Proof of Receipt of Weapon forms and provides them to the Arms Expert. Maintains numeric control of blank Proof of Weapons forms turned over to Arms Expert at the beginning of each day and those returned at the end of the day.
- c) Receives completed Proof of Receipt of Weapon forms from the Arms Expert. Verifies calculations and confirms that the value of the firearm turned in is equal to the total value of vouchers provided.
- d) Hands the vouchers over to the individual. Asks the person for their signature and identification as proof of receipt. If the person does not wish to sign, the Social Worker does so instead.
- e) Produces Daily Report of Weapons Received, one original with two copies.
- f) Maintains a control register of vouchers handed out which documents the value and the corresponding business name.

Internal Auditor

- a) Develops administrative procedures including employee tasks and paperwork.
- b) Also verifies that the value of arms received corresponds with the value of vouchers handed out.
- c) Carries out periodic voucher inventory counts.

- d) At the end of each day joins the Municipal Security Officer and Administrator to deliver the collected weapons to the PN.
- e) Coordinates with the participating businesses the total amount of vouchers used for the production of the Proof of Donation Report to the Ministry of the Treasury.

As mentioned previously, most of this activity takes place between 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. at designated collection centers. I did not have the opportunity to observe the delivery of weapons to the PN nor verify their final disposition. Based on interviews with municipal employees, most weapons are destroyed while others are incorporated into PN inventories. The Mayor gave a press conference in collaboration with the PN after each round of the program.

Results

Earlier in this report I stated that the Arms Exchange program took place three times in 1998 bringing in a total of 108 illegal firearms. Combine this figure to the number of firearms confiscated by the PN in raids during the same year and that total is 205. This number does not include munitions or other types of explosive devices. The total average program cost per weapon (includes voucher and administrative costs) for 1998 was US\$ 200. Again this does not take into consideration munitions, explosives nor the unquantifiable intangible benefits of the program. Below are summaries of the three rounds of the Arms Exchange program in San Miguelito.

Round 1: March 12, 1998, Don Bosco District

In this first round, 32 pistols and 3 rifles were turned in. The pistols were overwhelmingly .22 and .38 caliber. One hundred eighteen bullets were also turned in. For a list of arms turned in from all three rounds and the value of vouchers given in exchange see Appendix 1.

Round 2: July 16, 1998, Samara District

Twenty-six firearms were collected on this occasion including two AK-47 assault rifles.

Round 3: July 23, 1998, Near the Insituto Rubiano

The last round of the 1998 firearms exchange program brought in 47 firearms, mostly handguns. Both July rounds of the program brought in 289 bullets and 13 magazines combined.

Organizers commented on the frequency with which family members of adolescents in youth gangs came in and handed over their child or sibling's weapon. According to San Miguelito Mayor Cano Gonzalez the violent crime rate has been reduced by 75% since the implementation of Arms Exchange. In 1997, 5,124 cases of violent crime were reported in one sector of San Miguelito known as corregimiento Belisario Porras. Through August 1998 only 1,513 cases of violent crime were reported to

the police. In another sector, corregimiento de Mateo Iturralde the incidence of violence was reduced from 1,588 to 236 for the same time period.

IV. 1,000 Arms by the Year 2000

Given that a total of 205 illegal firearms were taken out of San Miguelito voluntarily and by force in 1998 it will be quite a challenge to reach the goal of 1,000 firearms by the end of 1999. Mayor Cano Gonzalez estimates that eight more rounds of weapons collection need to take place along with continued police raids in order to reach that goal. In financial terms this translates to US\$ 45,000 based on the following:

Vouchers for eight more rounds US\$40,000
Promotion and public information \$5,000
Logistical support \$500
Total US\$45,500

V. Observations and Analysis of the Arms Exchange Program

In many ways the Arms Exchange program in San Miguelito resembles a gun buy back program in the inner cities of the United States. First of all because the program focuses on a small well-defined geographic area unlike the national scope of the voluntary weapons collection program undertaken in El Salvador. Secondly, most of the weapons collected in San Miguelito were handguns, not military assault rifles. In El Salvador more than 70% of the weapons, munitions and explosives turned in were of military design.

The purpose of the following process evaluation is to highlight some of the positive aspects and shortcomings of the Arms Exchange program based on the Program for Arms Control, Disarmament and Conversion's institutional criteria for the successful planning and implementation of voluntary weapons collection programs. They are intended to provoke further thought on the subject, not to determine whether the way things were done was absolutely right or wrong.

1) Local government initiative

The Arms Exchange program is an example of a local government's entrepreneurial approach to public safety, crime prevention and gun control. The fact that all resources were raised within Panama demonstrates that there is a desire to do something about the problems related to illegal arms in society and a corresponding political will to make programs like Arms Exchange a reality. The Alcaldía was in a good position to take a leading role for three reasons. One, the Alcaldía is the governmental institution that best understands the social problems in San Miguelito. Two, the Alcaldía can assign municipal employees to work on the program as an extension of their current duties. Three, inter-institutional agreements were relatively easy to draft and sign given that

Mayor Cano Gonzalez and President Balladares are from the same political party.

However, some of these advantages are potential challenges if the Arms Exchange program is going to continue in the future. While the mayor of San Miguelito can run for re-election what happens if Mr. Cano Gonzalez is not re-elected? The Alcaldía has proven that the Arms Exchange program can be implemented in a political year as demonstrated during the 1998 referendum. Will it be suspended under a change in local government? For this reason the increased involvement of community groups, religious organizations, chambers of commerce or other groups outside the municipal government might be necessary to ensure the program's continuity. Another option could be to create an Arms Exchange committee consisting of political parties. This way each party can be involved in the process and prepared to continue with the program or create new ones should a change in political office occur.

2) Outreach

The critics of many VWCPs point to the fact that few, if any, criminals turn in their weapons during these efforts. In the case of the Arms Exchange program a specific emphasis was placed on bringing in illegal weapons in the hands of youth or imprisoned persons. Family members of criminals and gang members were called upon to take a step toward making their households and communities safer. As mentioned earlier, many of these family members did step forward and turn in firearms. At the same time, the Alcaldía provided the opportunity for employment to youth and petty criminals that turned in weapons. This might be the only opportunity these individuals have to keep themselves out of the penal system and contribute positively to their families and community.

Another positive aspect of the Arms Exchange program is the incorporation of a municipal social worker into the Implementation Commission. While this person might spend most of the time dealing with administrative tasks he or she is also available to advise persons turning in arms on their options for compensation, be they construction materials to improve their family dwelling or days of community service to work off a citation for public drunkenness. The social worker also signs for the receipt of vouchers should the individual not wish to do so out of fear. A social worker is generally not a politician nor associated with the police, and thus can show a compassionate side to local government. The participation of the social worker or similar professional is one of the most compelling aspects of the Arms Exchange program.

3) Illegal arms

Very few people argue the need to combat illicit arms trafficking and use be it at the local, national or international level. There is no evidence that the Arms Exchange program turned away anyone attempting to turn in a legally owned firearm. However, the exclusive focus on illegal arms sends a message that legally held firearms in the home are not a problem. Most people working in the field of arms control and disarmament,

including police officers will admit that legal weapons are used illegally as often as illegally obtained arms. A program that focuses on the tools of violence, not only as an issue of criminality but also of domestic safety, will reach more people. A legal gun turned in is one less weapon available for theft by criminals.

4) Disposition of weapons

Once again, the author did not have the opportunity to observe the transfer of weapons turned in to the PN. Based on interviews with municipal employees most of the firearms were destroyed while some have been incorporated into PN inventory. According to PACDC's criteria for VWCP all weapons surrendered should be destroyed publicly for two reasons. First, public destruction, especially immediate on-site destruction, assures the person surrendering their weapon that it will never be used against them or anyone else for that matter. Secondly, the symbolism of destroying the tools of violence provides tangible evidence of the program to the community, ensures greater transparency and signals a willingness to change community norms as they relate to public security and violence.

5) Different collection centers

It is clear that a great deal of thought and analysis went into choosing the three different collection centers where the Arms Exchange program was carried out. By focusing on areas statistically proven to have high rates of arms circulation and violence, and setting up operations there, the Alcaldía can better understand a neighborhood's problems and help build a working relationship between the community and local government. Some VWCP advocates propose mobile collection centers that collect and destroy weapons on-site. This however, is probably more applicable to post-conflict societies where large numbers of demobilized soldiers group in rural areas.

6) Carrot and stick approach

Voluntary weapons collection alone cannot bring in most of the illegal arms in circulation. A program such as Arms Exchange must be part of a larger plan that includes increased police enforcement and community building. In a sense, the Alcaldía of San Miguelito has embarked upon a program that resembles the United States Department of Justice's Weed and Seed Program for community restoration. Weed and Seed has been implemented in dozens of U.S. cities and focuses on increased law enforcement in high crime areas accompanied by parallel community development initiatives. San Miguelito's Mayor Felipe Cano Gonzalez claims this approach has reduced violent crime by 75% from the previous year.

In the case of the Arms Exchange program one question is whether or not the carrot component of the approach is worthwhile. The symbolic and intangible benefits of bringing together the local government, national government, private sector and community to work on an issue that affects everyone are clear. Is the program cost of US\$200 per

firearm turned in a good social investment? Does the potential damage of a pistol with five bullets in the hands of a poor adolescent exceed \$200? The answer is clearly yes, and the government of San Miguelito would seem to agree.

VI. The Arms Exchange program in San Miguelito in an international context

1) Panama's problems relating to small arms and light weapons

The Arms Exchange program is one Panamanian community's effort to do something about crime and violence with existing available resources. Many other communities have the same problems, but have yet to act. Recently, the U.S. media (specifically the US national television program *Sixty Minutes* broadcast on CBS and National Public Radio) have run stories on the environmental damage and human costs related to US military ammunition firing ranges located in Panama. Most of the weapons and ammunitions tested in Panama were of the small and light variety. Now that the Canal Zone and military bases are being turned over to Panamanian authorities, the consequences of prolonged ammunition and explosive testing has come to light. While the US military has made some efforts to clean this up, there is no commitment to continue do so after 1999. Besides the environmental contamination of these zones, dozens of people die each year when they mistakenly step on unexploded ordnance.

How can the international community act? It is difficult to say since Panama is not defined as a post-conflict country, despite the 1989 U.S. military invasion. Without post-conflict status Panama does not have access to United Nations disarmament programs nor mechanisms such as the World Bank Post-Conflict Fund, despite being geographically caught in the middle of three civil wars and the Colombian narco-political conflict. However, the World Bank's participation in the Alliance for Violence Prevention in the Americas could provide support. At the same time, the Organization of American States (OAS) could ask member states for funding to support such programs. It remains to be seen how the emerging global NGO coalition, the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), will be able to benefit a country such as Panama that is not considered a high priority conflict zone nor has socioeconomic indicators low enough to warrant international attention. Regardless, the mere willingness of the Alcaldía to share this information contributes another experience and valuable lessons for the international movement.

2) Lessons for demobilization of ex-combatants

Granted, Panama is not a post-conflict country with large numbers of combatants to integrate into society. However, many individuals involved in the illegal arms trade probably belonged to the now obsolete Panamanian Defense Forces. The Arms Exchange program made an effort to reach out to young males with weapons by offering employment and counseling in exchange for their guns. While many demobilization programs have set out to do similar things, the focus of providing

employment opportunities in the individual's home community is worth re-examining.

3) Measuring impact

The organizers of the Arms Exchange program claim that the violent crime rate has decreased by 75% since implementation. I have no reason to doubt this claim, but as a policy analyst by trade, I realize that statistics can be interpreted in any variety of ways. Political oppositions will question program success when the implementing institution is closely affiliated with its evaluators. Professionals working in this field will often say that statistics in developing countries are unreliable, biased or only began to be collected in the recent past. For this reason measuring the impact of a weapons collection program is challenging if not impossible. In order to measure impact it would be useful for communities embarking on voluntary weapons collection programs, or considering doing so, to begin collecting simple data relevant to small arms proliferation and misuse.

For example, in a pilot community a neighborhood watch group could maintain a file every time someone was threatened, assaulted, injured or killed by a firearm and watch these indicators before, during and after an actual collection effort takes place, looking to see if any changes occur. The simple exercise of gathering data over time could help build local capacity as well. At the same time, a community could work with a local hospital or clinic to document the attention given to victims of firearm violence and the corresponding costs of treatment. This way the community can provide sound evidence as to both the human and economic costs of violence.

Neither of these ideas is scientifically foolproof, but they are relatively simple tasks that can be carried out in developing countries even without access to a computer. The alternative is to do nothing until the government has the capacity and resources to do so, which in many cases will be too late.

VII. Emerging model for weapons collection in Latin America

Despite years of war, post-conflict societies in Latin America have not been totally destroyed to the degree of countries like Cambodia, Somalia or Rwanda. Many Latin American governmental institutions and legitimate private enterprises enjoy continuity before and after the conflict. In a sense this demonstrates continuity in the status quo which is not altogether negative if a broader segment of society is allowed to participate in the political process and work toward gradual permanent changes. The fact that virtually every police force in Central America has been made independent of the national military is evidence of this. With this in mind, Latin America in general, and Central America specifically, provide a model for voluntary weapons collection programs that while not totally irrelevant to other parts of the world, seem to be somewhat region specific. This can be analyzed by looking at four factors common

to both weapons collection in El Salvador and Panama: legal framework and the roles of the police, the Catholic Church and the private sector.

Legal framework

Every country in Latin America has a constitutional legal system in operation regardless of its efficiency and impartiality. Civil wars may have affected these institutions but they did not have to be completely rebuilt upon the conclusion of hostilities. In El Salvador and Panama legal inter-institutional agreements were signed to make the weapons collection programs legal activities under the law. Anyone who has spent considerable time working in Latin America can attest to the influence lawyers exert on the political process. For an individual or institution to attempt to implement a weapons collection program in Latin America without a legal document outlining the mandate and procedures to follow would be a public relations disaster and potential political suicide. In a broader legal context, at least three Central American countries have bills before the legislature proposing reforms to the existing laws on arms and munitions. In every case the debate is highly political and action is slow.

Role of the police and security forces

In both cases mentioned the police (and also the military in the case of El Salvador due to constitutional jurisdiction over military weapons) are supporters and collaborators in weapons collection programs, not organizers. While some Latin American security forces have improved their public image with a new civilian look, common citizens are still wary of their participation in social programs. Despite political arguments in favor of or against their participation in collection efforts there is a consensus that we need their expertise in handling and evaluating weapons handed in.

Role of the Catholic Church

Again, in both the Salvadoran and Panamanian programs the Catholic Church was used as a site for weapons collection instead of a police precinct or city hall. People seem to trust the Church enough to not feel threatened by going there to surrender weapons. Since most Latin Americans are Roman Catholic, this is a natural choice. In communities where people have converted to other denominations there is no reason why other churches could not play a similar role granted that they have the trust of the community. Religious groups of all kinds have a role to play in disarmament and other activities that seek the elimination of violence and social injustice.

Role of the private sector

Another factor common to both weapons collection programs was the financial and moral support of the private sector. It is my personal belief that this support was due to a combination of self-interest and altruism. Self-interest in the sense that the private sector realized the serious effects that firearms and violence were having on business and the

economy in general. Altruistic in that Latin Americans have long been involved in private sector associations that promote social projects such as the Rotary International and Soroptomist. In both Panama and El Salvador, the private sector paid for almost fifty percent of the total program cost. Colleagues that work in this field in Asia and Africa tell me that private sector sponsorship of disarmament programs is not even an option for the communities they are working with.

The effects of globalization and consumerism have changed even the poorest Latin Americans. For that reason the material incentives to turn in arms that the private sector can provide are attractive. Private sector supported social programs, such as the Arms Exchange in Panama and Goods for Guns in El Salvador, should be encouraged and applauded by the United Nations, IMF, World Bank and industrialized governments that continue to pressure developing countries to reduce state budgets and social spending in the name of fiscal austerity. The challenge for Latin American countries in post-conflict times, or just experiencing alarming rates of crime and violence for that matter, is to integrate this corporate generosity with other factors that promote community building, social justice and nonviolence.

Appendix 1

Register of arms turned and value of exchange during the Arms Exchange Program in San Miguelito during 1998

Type of Weapon	Make	Value of Exchange in US\$
.22 caliber pistol	Jennings	100
.22 caliber pistol	Singles	150
.22 caliber pistol	R98	300
.22 caliber pistol	None Given	400
.22 caliber pistol	Amadeo Rossi	200
.22 caliber pistol	None Given	50
.22 caliber pistol	Jennings	200
.22 caliber pistol	Rohm	300
.22 caliber pistol	Eybar	300
.22 caliber pistol	Astra	200
.22 caliber pistol	Rossi	150
.22 caliber pistol	RG8	50
38 caliber pistol	Taurus	300
38 caliber pistol	Rossi	50
38 caliber pistol	Taurus	300
38 caliber pistol	None Given	200
38 caliber pistol	Smith Wesson	400

38 caliber pistol	None Given	100
38 caliber pistol	Rossi	200
30-30 rifle	Savage	300
Rifle	None Given	150
9mm pistol	Browning	300
380 pistol	Vzor	300
12 caliber pistol	None Given	200
16 caliber pistol	Rossi	150
12 caliber pistol	Winchester	200
12 caliber pistol	Winchester	150
22 caliber rifle	Rossi	150
22 caliber rifle	Crossman	250
22 caliber pistol	Skorpion	500
32 caliber pistol	Ruby	250
32 caliber pistol	FNH	200
32 caliber pistol	None Given	100
25 caliber pistol	None Given	300
25 caliber pistol	Rave	100
38 caliber pistol	Taurus	200
38 caliber pistol	Rossi	150
38 caliber pistol	Cooth	150
38 caliber pistol	Smith Wesson	150
38 caliber pistol	Smith Wesson	200
38 caliber pistol	Smith Wesson	200
38 caliber pistol	Smith Wesson	150
38 caliber pistol	Smith Wesson	200
38 caliber pistol	Smith Wesson	200
38 caliber pistol	Cooth	200
38 caliber pistol	Rossi	200
38 caliber pistol	Taurus	250
22 caliber pistol	Made in Germany	150
22 caliber pistol	Bereta	150
22 caliber pistol	R.G.	150
22 caliber pistol	None Given	200
22 caliber pistol	USSA	150
22 caliber pistol	Taurus	150
380 pistol	Taurus	300
45 caliber pistol	Cooth	250
12 caliber pistol	Mosberg	150
AK-47 assault rifle	None Given	200

AK-47 assault rifle	None Given	300
22 caliber rifle	Magnum	150
22 caliber rifle	Daisy	20
22 caliber rifle	Daisy	50
38 caliber pistol	Davis	300
38 caliber pistol	Made in Brazil	150
38 caliber pistol	Taurus	150
38 caliber pistol	Smith Wesson	200
38 caliber pistol	Bereta	250
22 caliber pistol	Ruby	200
22 caliber pistol	V. Berardellz	200
22 caliber pistol	Cooth	150
38 caliber pistol	Smith Wesson	250
22 caliber pistol	Rossi	200
22 caliber pistol	Astra	200
38 caliber pistol	Smith Wesson	250
22 caliber pistol	None Given	150
25 caliber pistol	Made in Germany	200
22 caliber pistol	Astra	200
38 caliber pistol	Smith Wesson	200
38 caliber pistol	None Given	160
22 caliber pistol	Luger	150
12 caliber pistol	Maverick	150
12 caliber pistol	None Given	80
38 caliber pistol	Standard	250
22 caliber pistol	RG-10	100
22 caliber pistol	Luger	200
38 caliber pistol	Taurus	200
38 caliber pistol	Smith Wesson	150
38 caliber pistol	Cooth	160
9mm pistol	Smith Wesson	350
22 caliber pistol	RG	150
38 caliber pistol	Rossi	200
12 caliber pistol	Winchester	100
32 caliber pistol	Cooth	150
16 caliber pistol	None Given	80
4.45mm pistol	None Given	40
22 caliber rifle	Daisy	50
32 caliber pistol	Cooth	150
25 caliber pistol	Made in Germany	200

22 caliber pistol	Cooth	150
38 caliber pistol	Cooth	200
38 caliber pistol	Smith Wesson	150
22 caliber rifle	None Given	10
12 caliber pistol	Chambers	150
22 caliber pistol	Sentinel	150
38 caliber pistol	Cooth	200
38 caliber pistol	Cooth	160
25 caliber pistol	None Given	160
12 caliber pistol	CBC	100
22 caliber pistol	None Given	150
TOTAL		\$17,230

Other items turned in:

Ammunition

- 79--.22 caliber bullets
- 66--.25 caliber bullets
- 6--.32 caliber bullets
- 52--.38 caliber bullets
- 158--9 mm bullets
- 2--30-30 caliber bullets
- 5--380 bullets

For a total of **718** bullets

Magazine cartridges

- 7 for 22 caliber weapons
- 4 for 9mm weapons
- 2 for 25 caliber weapons
- 3 for M-16 assault rifles
- 3 for 380 weapons
- 2 for 12 caliber weapons
- 1 unidentified

For a total of **22** magazine cartridges

Miscellaneous

- 1 flask of gun powder

Appendix 2

Comparative Table of Voluntary Weapons Collection Programs in El Salvador and Panama

	El Salvador	Panama
<i>Situation</i>	Post-conflict	Post-intervention
<i>Organization</i>	Patriotic Movement Against Crime (MPCD)-private sector NGO	Office of the Mayor of San Miguelito
<i>Program Name</i>	Goods for Guns	Arms Exchange
<i>Staff</i>	All volunteers from private sector, except for one full-time secretary	Municipal employees and police officials
<i>Scope</i>	National project, mostly in the capital with some activities in the interior	Limited to the City of San Miguelito
<i>Time</i>	Carried out over 21 weekends since 1996, operates from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., last round of collection 13 Dec. 1998	Carried out 3 times since March 1998, last round of collection on 23 July 1998.
<i>Place</i>	Catholic Church	Soccer fields and baseball diamonds adjacent to the Catholic Church
<i>Incentives</i>	Non-cash vouchers for supermarkets, pharmacies, shoe stores and agricultural implements	Non-cash vouchers for construction materials, foodstuffs, appliances and employment
<i>Conditions</i>	Complete amnesty, no personal information taken, no questions asked	Amnesty, no questions asked, person must sign for vouchers.
<i>Results</i>	> 10,000 weapons and 100,000 munitions	>200 weapons, >700 munitions
<i>Role of Police</i>	Catalogue, code, transport and transfer weapons for destruction	Evaluate weapons, transport, store and destroy weapons
<i>Role of Military</i>	Evaluate weapon value, remove ammunition if necessary, destroy and store destroyed weapons	Panama does not have a military
<i>Final Disposition of Weapons</i>	Explosives are detonated by the Police firearms are destroyed and stored by the Ministry of Defense	Most weapons are destroyed, some are integrated into Police inventories

<i>Funding</i>	50% by Salvadoran central government and private sector, 50% by international contributions	50% by Municipality and local private sector, 50% by Presidential donation
<i>Publicity</i>	Nationally on TV, radio and print	Locally on TV, radio and print
<i>Tranparency</i>	Audited by the Rotary Club of El Salvador	Audited by Internal Auditor and central government
<i>Part of larger program</i>	Lobbying for reforms to arms and penal codes, trying to mobilize popular support	Yes, includes community service and increased Police enforcement
<i>Program cost per weapon*</i>	Approximately US\$ 100	Approximately US\$ 200

*This is an approximate figure taking into account the number of weapons collected and the total expenditures of each program. Does not include ammunitions.

Appendix 3

Text of selected news articles covering the Arms Exchange Program in San Miguelito (in Spanish)

"Entregan a la Gobernación informe de programa de recolección de armas"

El Universal de Panamá, Melissa Novoa
25 de Julio de 1998

El Municipio de San Miguelito hizo la entrega del informe del programa armas por mejores condiciones de vida, a la Gobernadora de la provincia de Panamá, Susana Richa de Torrijos.

Este programa se realizó con el apoyo de la empresa privada y el gobierno nacional.

El programa de armas por mejores condiciones de vida se realizó este año por primera vez en el distrito, en tres etapas diferentes en diferentes áreas del sector.

La primera etapa se llevó a cabo el 12 de marzo en el sector 2 de Don Bosco en el corregimiento Belisario Porras, donde con el apoyo de la Policía Nacional se recolectaron 35 armas, junto con municiones y cargadores.

En esta primera etapa se entregaron 20 mil balboas en bonos de alimentos, electrodomésticos y materiales de construcción.

La segunda etapa se efectuó en celebración de los 28 años de fundación

del distrito, en el sector 4 de Samaria, el pasado 16 de julio donde se recolectaron cerca de 26 armas y se entregaron 7 mil balboas en bonos.

Finalmente, en la tercera etapa realizada el 23 de julio en el estadio Marcos A. Gelabert en el corregimiento Victoriano Lorenzo, donde fueron entregadas más de 47 amras de fuego, AK-47, M-16, T-65, rifles de pelex, esopetas y cientos de municiones calibre 22, 38 y 45.

Aproximadamente 108 armas de fuego fueron entregadas durante la ejecución de este proyecto, cuyo objetivo es disminuir el nivel de delincuencia y criminalidad antes del referendo del próximo 30 de agosto.

"La violencia ha bajado 75%: Disminuyen todos los índices"

La Estrella de Panamá, Rafael E. Berrocal

5 de agosto de 1998

Las tierras invadidas en la década de los 80 son los lugares más peligrosos del distrito San Miguelito, es decir, Marta, La Felicidad, Emberá Puru, y Altos del Valle de Uraca, reveló el alcalde Felipe Cano.

Según Felipe Cano, en San Miguelito se ha logrado disminuir la violencia en un 75% debido a los operativos de profilaxis y allanamientos.

Agregó que hace dos años existían bandas organizadas que cometían sus fechorías, asesinatos y a veces chocaban entre ellas mismas, hoy día eso está prácticamente eliminado.

Cano indicó que el Programa Armas por Comida, had dado resultados muy positivos y ha mermado la violencia en las calles de San Miguelito.

Añadió que en menos de seis meses se ha logrado recoger 205 armas.

Este proyecto va a continuar con el esfuerzo de la Alcaldía de San Miguelito, la empresa privada y el gobierno central, ya que la meta que se ha fijado es la recolección de mil armas, manifestó el alcalde Felipe Cano.

Los casos que más presentan en San Miguelito son hurtos, personas baleadas, atracos y heridos con armas blancas, alegó Cano.

Por otro lado señaló que el 60% de los delitos de San Miguelito son cometidos por menores de edad.

En el distrito de San Miguelito, una estadística de la Policía Nacional revela que el porcentaje de violencia en todos sus corregimientos disminuyó con relación a las cifras del año pasado.

En lo que va del año, el corregimiento Belisario Porras, en el aspecto de la violencia presentó una reducción de 5,324 casos a 1,573, con relación al mismo periodo del año pasado.

En el mismo caso, el corregimiento de Mateo Iturralde presentó una reducción de 1,588 a 236.

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