



**THE PATRIOTIC MOVEMENT
AGAINST CRIME OF EL SALVADOR (MPCD)
The Seventeenth Round of the Voluntary Weapons Collection Program 'Goods
for Guns'
San Salvador, El Salvador
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I. Introduction

This report documents the visit of PACDC Project Consultant William Godnick to San Salvador, El Salvador the purpose was to observe the Patriotic Movement Against Crime's (MPCD) Voluntary Weapons Collection Program (VWCP) known as Bienes por Armas de Fuego, or Goods for Guns. Special thanks must be extended to MPCD President David Gutierrez and Executive Director Sonia Jule for their generous hospitality and collaboration with the PACDC Project Consultant and three Guatemalan observers. The principal focus of this report is the operation of the 17th and final round of Goods for Guns in El Salvador. Some basic background information is presented within this report. However, for more thorough background information on the MPCD, Goods for Guns, or VWCP in general contact:

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II. Patriotic Movement Against Crime of El Salvador (MPCD)

The Movimiento Patriotico Contra la Delincuencia, as the organization is called in

Spanish, was formed by the Association of Distributors (consumer goods) of El Salvador (ADES) in 1996. According to ADES/MPCD Executive Director, Sonia Jule, the organizations was formed for three key reasons. First, ADES members were continually having their delivery trucks assaulted by men with military style weapons. Second, ADES members were becoming increasingly concerned with the security of their employees in transit between work and home. Third, ADES was looking to collaborate with the government and civil society to reverse the growing violence affecting all Salvadorans. The loss of a container of consumer goods might mean the loss of thousands of dollars for a distributor, while the loss of an entire paycheck (or life for that matter) has even graver consequences for the common worker and his or her family.

Aside from an administrative secretary MPCD has no paid staff. The President, Executive Director and members of ADES volunteer their time to MPCD's projects. In the case of the President David Gutierrez and Executive Director Sonia Jule approximately 50% of their time at ADES is dedicated to working on the MPCD's program Goods for Guns which will be described in detail shortly. The MPCD is an independent non-profit organization without any political affiliation.

Other MPCD projects currently under development include:

- Lobbying the central government and legislature on proposed reforms to the laws on arms and ammunitions, such as the implementation of system where gun owners must pass a test and acquire a license similar to those administered to automobile drivers.
- Projects to help reform and improve the penal system.
- A nationwide march against arms and violence.

III. Goods for Guns, El Salvador

As mentioned earlier the focus of this report is the documentation of the 17th, and final, round of the Goods for Guns programs, while also taking into consideration the general processes and systems used. It is not the intent of this author to describe the root causes that generated the need for this type of program. That information can be better found elsewhere.

Goods for Guns is a program that reimburses civilians that surrender their arms and later destroys these arms so that they do not continue to circulate in society. To date almost 8,000 firearms have been collected and destroyed in addition to more than 100,000 bullets and other ammunitions. These quantities might seem insignificant, but they greatly exceed the numbers of weapons recovered during the disarmament process sponsored by the United Nations after the signing of the Peace Accords earlier this decade. In addition to the MPCD, the program is also sponsored by the Rotary Club of El Salvador and the Advertising Association of El Salvador (AMPS). It is worthwhile to note that several years earlier the Salvadoran Ministry of Defense tried to implement a similar program and not a single weapon was turned in.

In a 1996 workshop, David Gutierrez provided an outline of the steps taken to carry out the Goods for Guns program. These steps are:

1. Plan
2. Bolster support

3. Raise funds
4. Design paperwork, publicity campaign and operational details
5. Contract auditor
6. Design systems for arms storage, transfer and destruction
7. Implement program
8. Build a peace monument

The next section of this report will take these steps and analyze them in the context of the final round of weapons collection.

Step 1: Plan

By the 17th round of operation, the Goods for Guns program was running very smoothly. Executive Director Sonia Jule explained that after the fourth round the program had been systematized. This smooth operation makes it easy to overlook the months of initial planning and more than two years of practice that it has taken to get the programs to its current level of success. The first major obstacle that the MPCD had to overcome was the existing law prohibiting civilians from possessing military-style weapons. It took six months for the national legislature to emit a decree that allowed civilians to possess these weapons on specified dates with the sole purpose of turning them in to the MPCD for destruction.

In this stage the MPCD organizers did not anticipate receiving grenades, rocket launchers and other military devices. When people began bringing these items in during the first round of collection the MPCD had to go back and have the legislature amend the original decree to include other military materials besides firearms. Fortunately, the MPCD was able to convince the authorities to allow people to turn in mines, grenades and the like without being arrested in the interim.

The process of general planning to create an environment conducive to voluntary weapons collection was at times discouraging enough to put the Goods for Guns program in danger of collapsing. However, the perseverance of MPCD's leaders through these initial trials and tribulations has paid off. Also, the collaboration with the police, military and legislature during this stage facilitated better relations with these institutions for cooperation during the implementation of Goods for Guns.

Step 2: Bolster support

Part of the success of Goods for Guns can be directly attributed to the mobilization of many actors within the Salvadoran private sector. While this did not happen overnight the participation of the Association of Distributors of El Salvador (ADES) National Association of Private Enterprise (ANEP), the Rotary Club, the Association of Advertisers of El Salvador (AMPS) and the Catholic Church gave the Goods for Guns program a robust base of national support distinct from the many previous programs sponsored by governments or international organizations.

It takes time to develop a coherent group of organizations working toward a common goal and one can not overlook the absolute importance of specific individuals, such as Mr. Gutierrez, in making Goods for Guns a reality. Without the sacrifice of Gutierrez and the other ADES staff it is possible that the program would not have made it past the planning stages.

Apart from direct financial support several of the collaborating organizations provided important logistical and material support for the weapons collection program.

- The Rotary Club provided monitors independent of the MPCD at each round of collection in addition to the financial auditing services of one of its members to assure transparency in the management of funds.
- The Association of Advertisers of El Salvador provided publicity on television, radio and in the newspaper to ensure that information on Goods for Guns reached as many Salvadorans as possible.
- The Catholic Church provided sites for the collection of weapons in San Salvador as well as in the interior of the country.

These contributions eased the already difficult task of raising funds to cover the costs of each round of Goods for Guns.

Step 3: Raise funds

The MPCD is suspending the Goods for Guns program due to the lack of funds needed to continue operations. To date the MPCD has raised more the 10 million Salvadoran Colons (more than US\$ 1 million) to finance the program. An interesting characteristic of the Good for Guns programs is the fact that more than half of the funds raised have come from the Salvadoran private sector. This has given the MPCD and the Salvadoran people greater ownership of the program and its successes, as well as reduced the ability of opponents to criticize foreign intervention in domestic affairs. It also provides a strong example for other developing nations who wish to undertake similar programs.

Regardless, international donations have accounted for approximately half of all financial resources. Contributors include the governments of Canada, Luxembourg and Mexico as well as the Organization of American States (OAS). During the author's visit to El Salvador there was speculation regarding forthcoming donations from other interested governments, but this was not confirmed. Even with future donations the MPCD will have to suspend Goods for Guns at least until October of 1998. If more donations do not materialize it is likely that the MPCD will focus on other activities that work on fighting crime and violence but do not require as much money to implement.

MPCD President Gutierrez has been strong in his criticism of the international community and the lack of follow through on financial commitments made during peace agreements to help post-conflict societies in transition. He is hopeful that the work of the MPCD is successful in demonstrating that countries like El Salvador are capable of carrying out sustainable programs like Goods for Guns and in turn will motivate the international community to provide greater economic support.

Step 4: Design paperwork, publicity campaign and operational details

Paperwork and documentation are an important part of the MPCD's role in carrying out the Goods for Guns program. Forms are designed to cover the receipt of coupons and cash given to the coordinators of each collection site, registers of arms and ammunitions collected. Each arm received is documented individually and this form is signed by representatives from the MPCD, Rotary Club, National Civilian Police (PNC) and the Ministry of Defense. On each of the forms documenting the individual arms turned in the serial numbers of the vouchers are recorded to note the value placed on that individual weapon. Each of the four signatories receives a copy for internal records and auditing purposes. All of the forms and paperwork provide a paper trail that ensures the transparency and legitimacy of the Goods for Guns program.

The collaboration of AMPS has allowed for a strong publicity campaign throughout the different rounds of weapons collection. The week prior to the 17th round of Goods for Guns the MPCD began to advertise in El Salvador's two largest newspapers, Diario de Hoy and La Prensa Gráfica, with the news that this would be the final round of Goods for Guns. In rural areas the message was disseminated through the radio at lunch hour when many people listen to the national news. Television was used in the day preceding the final round as well as the weekend of operation with short announcements every hour on the hour. Emphasis was placed on the fact that this would be the last round. Without the support of AMPS a strong publicity campaign would be out of reach of the MPCD budget.

Since the actual operation of the Goods for Guns program was the focus of the PACDC Project Consultant's visit to El Salvador the discussion of the operational details will be included in the program implementation section of this report.

Step 5: Contract auditor

As mentioned earlier the Rotary Club served as the monitor of each round of weapons collection. This role will be discussed further in the program implementation section of this report. In addition, a Rotarian-owned accounting firm donated the auditory services needed to verify the transparent management of the MPCD's funds.

Step 6: Design systems for arms storage, transfer and destruction

This information will also be included in the program implementation section of this report. Anyone interested in an original Spanish copy of the Plan for Weapons Destruction of the Plan for the Detonation of Explosive Materials please contact PACDC.

Step 7: Implement Program

The operation of the 17th round of Goods for Guns held on 11-12 July 1998 in reality began on 10 July. On this day the MPCD representatives divided the vouchers and cash for distribution among the two collection sites in the capital: the Metropolitan Cathedral and Christ the Redeemer Church. That afternoon two members of the MPCD signed for the vouchers and cash in preparation for the next day's activities.

During the life of the Goods for Guns program, rounds of weapons collection had taken place outside the capital in the cities and towns of Chaletanango, Santa Ana, San Miguel, Santiago de Maria and Usulután. MPCD representatives noted that these sites had limited success because of their small town atmosphere conducive to gossip that discouraged people from turning in arms for fear of it becoming public knowledge. In addition small town politics made it difficult to obtain sustainable political and logistical cooperation from local authorities. For these reasons the MPCD suspended Goods for Guns outside the capital in 1997. It has turned out that many people from the interior of the country prefer to travel to San Salvador to turn in their weapons anyway.

The incentives for turning in weapons during the 17th round were advertised as:

Vouchers for supermarkets, pharmacies and shoe stores in the value of up to:
<i>US\$60-85 - old or deteriorated pistols and rifles</i>
<i>US\$60-175 - pistols, .22 caliber rifles and semi-automatic rifles</i>
<i>US\$350 - automatic rifles such as M-16, AR-15, AR 16, AK 47, Galil, etc..</i>
<i>US\$115 - for grenade and rocket launchers, mortars and other explosives</i>
<i>Cash reimbursement of US\$3 is given for grenades and mines.</i>

During the first rounds of Goods for Guns US\$15 was given for these items, but the large quantities turned in made it impossible to sustain this level of compensation. MPCD receives ammunition but does not provide compensation, it is received as a donation.

In previous rounds other options for vouchers were available including sporting equipment, appliances and clothing stores. In previous rural collections vouchers for sewing machines and agricultural tools were also provided. It is important to note that the MPCD does NOT PURCHASE the weapons rather compensates the person turning in his or her arms for the gesture of peace and goodwill. In some cases where an individual would bring in an arm or device of no value or danger whatsoever the MPCD would compensate the person for their travel to the site.

Organization of the collection sites

Each collection site relies on the participation of a minimum of nine people, a total of eighteen for both sites:

- 1 MPCD representative and three assistants in charge of the overall operation;
- 1 representative from the Rotary Club that serves as a monitor;
- 2 officers from the National Civilian Police (not in uniform) one of which is an expert in explosives and the other who codes and signs for the arms turned in;
- 1 representative of the Ministry of Defense expert in arms (also not in uniform) who determines the value and make of the arms turned in;
- 1 uniformed representative of the PNC usually stationed within a block of the collection site but not so close as to scare off people turning in their arms.

Both sites operate simultaneously from 8am to 4pm. The procedure for turning in a weapon is as follows:

Civilian turning in a weapon is welcomed and the value of the arm is provided by the representative from the Ministry of Defense.

The civilian is given a choice of vouchers for supermarkets, drug stores or shoes based on the value of the weapon. An individual can turn in as many weapons as he or she owns.

The MPCD representatives record the serial numbers of the firearm and the serial numbers of the vouchers given in exchange for that weapon. No personal information is asked of the person turning in the gun. The entire exchange is anonymous.

The person turning in the firearm is free to go with the vouchers in hand or cash in the case of grenades and mines.

The paperwork is signed by the four parties involved and the firearm is coded by the PNC and placed aside. In the case of grenades, they are taped shut so that they do not detonate by accident.

The results of the 17th round of Goods for Guns in comparison with the first round and the previous round as well as aggregate totals for all seventeen rounds are included in the table below:

Description	1st round 21-22 Sept. 96	16th round 13-14 June 98	17th round 11-12 July 98	Total after 17 rounds
Pistols and short arms	81	21	71	1,176
Rifles and machine guns	150	70	139	2,631
Grenades	35	36	128	2,533
Grenade launchers	4	0	3	35
Rocket launchers	5	1	8	276
Detonating chord	5	0	0	74
Detonators	32	0	0	795
Blocks of TNT	26	0	0	256
C-4 explosives	3	0	0	120
Mines	0	0	0	44
Mortars	0	0	0	2
RPG-7 drivers	0	0	0	5
SAM-7 projectiles	0	0	0	1
Sub-total arms	341	128	349	7,948
Magazines	147	64	177	2,862
Ammunition	2,832	2,024	10,366	113,206
Total arms and munitions	3,320	2,216	10,892	124,016

Observations

- The 17th round was very successful in collecting arms despite the fact that it was the 17th round and was competing simultaneously with the finals of World Cup soccer play, a national event for Salvadorans.
- MPCD President David Gutierrez attributed this success to the increase in advertising with an emphasis on being the final round of the Goods for Guns programs, at least for the time being.
- The firearms expert from the Ministry of Defense commented on a significant increase in the quality of the arms being turned in from previous rounds as well as an increase in the amount of pistols being turned in.
- 60% of the arms surrendered were received at the Metropolitan Cathedral and

40% at Christ the Redeemer Church.

- The behavior of people turning in arms ranged from that similar to someone taking clothes to a second-hand clothing store to extremely cautious.

Human contact

By far the most impressive aspect of the Goods for Guns program is the camaraderie between collaborators and the expression of goodwill by those turning in their arms. Below are several examples of civilians turning in firearms:

- A middle-aged woman came in with a heavy shoulder bag containing five rocket launchers in perfect condition.
- A young man came straight from his soccer game with his uniform on and 35 grenades in his backpack.
- A peasant man with his wife and children turned in two .22 caliber rifles in order to buy needed medicine for his infant daughter.
- A wealthy man, friend of one of the program volunteers, turned in four AK-47's he had stored away for several years.

Transfer of collected weapons

On each of the two days of operation, at both collection sites, a representative of the PNC arrived in a large pick-up truck to receive and sign for the weapons, ammunitions and explosives collected. These materials were then sent to a storeroom at the Finance Division of the National Civilian Police. On Monday, 13 July 1998, MPCD President David Gutierrez arrived at the site and gave a press conference on the results of the 17th round of Goods for Guns and the future of the MPCD. At the same time Gutierrez called for reforms to the penal code and laws regulating arms possession and use. In addition, he announced MPCD plans to organize a march against arms, violence and crime in the capital.

After previous rounds a motorcade of all collaborators delivered the arms collected to the Ministry of Defense. This was not possible on 13 July because of the absence of the officer responsible for receiving the arms and had to be postponed for a later date. All explosives were passed along to the PNC Division of Explosives.

Weapons destruction

All firearms collected are eventually cut or the barrel is filled to make the weapons unusable. They are then stored in large shipping containers at the cost of the Ministry of Defense. The weapons are not melted down or scrapped rather they are maintained in a condition that allows them to be recognized as firearms but not usable. The MPCD will eventually build a monument with these arms and wants the people who see it to see that it is made of weapons turned in by Salvadoran citizens. The Ministry of Defense is pressuring the MPCD to begin the construction of the monument as the containers are becoming too full. Now that Goods for Guns is over for the time being, MPCD can focus on the monument.

The case of the destruction of explosives is a bit more interesting. This is the responsibility of the PNC to carry out and they must follow both technical and administrative processes. The technical aspects require detonating the explosives in a timely fashion because of the risks of storing them at high temperatures over time. Generally, the explosives have to be exploded in six holes in the ground, each a meter deep and 50cm wide.

The choice of where the explosives will be detonated requires the PNC to find a

location and receive permission from the local municipal authorities, community groups and final clearance from the Ministry of Environment (CEMA). CEMA ensures that there will be no negative impact on the local community. After approval, the PNC detonates the explosives. If the community has the need to build a road, a bridge or other construction that requires the explosives this can be arranged with the PNC, killing two birds with one stone.

Step 8: Build a peace monument

The MPCD has several design alternatives and options of places where the monument will be located. Over the next several months these decisions will have to be made in order to fulfill the promise of building such a monument established in the planning stages of the Goods for Guns program.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

First, it is important to note that beyond the weapons collected there are significant intangible benefits of the Goods for Guns program in the area civil society/government/military collaboration toward a common goal of reducing crime and violence. The lack of reliable statistics on firearm related crime, injury and death within El Salvador make it difficult to evaluate the impact of Goods for Guns on violent crime. From a public health standpoint, at minimum, the 7, 948 weapons collected, and more than 100,000 munitions, represent thousands of accidents that did not happen and consequently more money can be spent on providing preventative health services to poor Salvadorans.

It would be naive to believe that organized criminals and gangs would turn in their arms. However, the MPCD and Goods for Guns have been successful in drawing attention to the fact that guns are designed to kill people. This is the beginning of a long process that attempts to change a very old culture of gun ownership in El Salvador. Not something that can be done in a couple of years.

Strengths of the MPCD and Goods for Guns program

- Has done a better job at disarming society voluntarily than the United Nations has within formal mandates.
- Autonomy and ability to mobilize resources from the private sector within El Salvador
- Systematization of the program and applicability as model for other countries
- Relationships built over time with the private sector, civil society, media, government, police and military
- Public relations on a national scale

Weaknesses

- Has not incorporated the participation of the youth of El Salvador into its activities, although this will surely change with a mass march against crime and violence.
- Programs are not coordinated within a larger national development plan.
- Not successful in the interior of the country due to the largely centralized Salvadoran government and society

Recommendations

Specific

- The international community and Salvadoran private sector should continue to fund future rounds of the MPCD's Good for Guns and program as well as incorporate its activities into programs that include a true reintegration of demobilized soldiers and their families into civil society.
- The MPCD model should be analyzed and adapted to the realities of other Central American countries, including those that have not experienced civil wars such as Costa Rica, Honduras and Panama. This model could even be used outside the region depending on the existence of a robust private sector in society.
- MPCD should continue to share its experience with other organizations interested in implementing VWCP in their home countries.

General

- VWCPs should look for new creative incentives that will balance short term need with long term benefits such as education, training, etc.
- Voluntary Weapons Collection Programs (VWCP) should be considered at the same time that mediated peace processes take place.

On any given day dozens of violent crimes are committed with military weapons all over Central America. Hostages are taken by a man with a grenade in Guatemala, the daughter of a coffee grower is kidnapped and murdered by masked individuals armed with Galils in El Salvador, tourists are held up by bandits with M-16s in Honduras, paramilitaries and guerilla groups rearm themselves in Nicaragua and a bank is assaulted by robbers with AK-47s in Costa Rica. At the same time, traffic of these weapons flows to and from the bordering regions of Chiapas and Colombia.

In an age when social, political and economic problems are regional and global in nature it would be a shame to let the positive experience of the MPCD and Goods for Guns disappear into the abyss of pilot development projects that never received adequate follow up. The experience proves that local organizations are capable of initiating and managing a program over time and can find the necessary local support to complement international contributions.