

# Guatemala



January 2008

On Jan 14, Guatemala welcomed their new president Alvaro Colom. Here are some data of the country which was published in “Prensa Libre” –the local daily paper - with the title: “The country that he receives”.



**Population:** 13 millions, 120 people per km and 2.15% more each year, 3.7 children per family  
**For every 100 employees:** 44 work in public service, 36 in agriculture, and 20 in industry, among them, 67 don't receive social security  
**Unemployment:** 4% **Underemployment:** 15%  
**Inflation:** what cost Q100 in December 2000, costs Q167.23 in December 2007  
**External public debt:** Q33,031 million  
**Internal public debt:** Q20,188.6 million  
**Poverty:** 51% live in poverty and 15% live in extreme poverty (-Q8 per day)  
**Education:** for every 100 people older than 15, 28 are illiterate, 31 students per teacher  
**Health:** for every 100 children under 5, 23 are malnourished, 4 severely  
**Medical service:** 4,069 people per doctor, 4.2 beds per 1000 people  
**Life expectance:** Man: 67, Woman: 74, for every 1000 new born babies, 39 died before 1 year old, and 15 more died between 1 and 4 years old.

More country news at the end!

## Education fund

**Scholarship project:** 23 students from Sacatepéquez won a CasaSito scholarship and are continuing their studies in junior high and high schools. Depending on their economic situation and grades, the scholars receive between Q80 to Q500 per month.



**Chocantariy nursery:** On November 11, we celebrated the opening of the Chocantariy nursery. 24 children of working mothers are receiving free pre-school education, breakfast and lunch. The monthly budget of this program is Q6000, about \$1.35 (less than €1) per day per child. Yes, a “little” can make a big difference, please keep that in mind!



**Semillas de Esperanza y Amor:** CasaSito supports this new project via our volunteer service program and education fund. Since the project began (only few months), more than 200 children and mothers from San Mateo Milpas Altas village (20 minutes by bus from Antigua) have participated in English classes and Handicraft classes. From January onward, 30 students are attending stenography class (very important in the Guatemalan education program) and 18 mothers are learning how to sew.



### **Facilities and Infrastructure Fund**

We continue looking for funds for our sponsored projects, including:

- A training center in Xela area – a permanent center where Mujb’ab’l yol Association can organize courses to teach modern broadcasting techniques and to improve the quality of the radio programs of their associated community radios stations. A presentation will be organized at Rainbow Café on March 11.
- Water system in Pacaxcoj and Chocantariy area which will serve about 1500 people. Fundraising begins in earnest this year with new promotional materials. Our project mentor, Stephen Allison of aquaconsult.org, plans to help out by making a tour of American and Canadian NGOs this year.
- School renovation project in Playa Grande Ixcán, Quiche. The local school committee has approached us for help. We will be making an on-site visit this week.

## Emergency Fund

In the last few months, we helped out several families in distress with the lost of their family member. Lack of medical service and violence are major problems in Guatemala. People still die of easily treatable illness, and are killed for a “centavo”.

## Volunteers’ House Project



Happy Birthday to the Volunteers’ House! On Jan 19, we celebrated its 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary with a homemade lunch and many CasaSito friends. Since our opening, more than 50 volunteers have become members of this big family and more than 200 people have participated in our community classes. In February, we will start 2 new classes for adults: English class for beginners and Aerobics. “One, two, one two three, and kick!”

We would like to present our special thank to “*Profe Chris*”, who lived in the volunteers’ house for 2 years and now moved to Santiago Zamora, and who is our official coordinator in that area. “*Casa de la Música*”, of course, followed its founder and moved also to Santiago Zamora, together with 2 new projects: a library & a video room where children can watch educational program and enjoy some good movies.

## Some Major news from our partner associations

**El Buen Samaritano Association:** January, the beginning of the school year, is a very busy season at EBS. Because of EBS, more than 150 children receive education and food. However, despite their good work and progress, 2007 was not a very easy year for EBS. 2 families lost their parents, and were orphaned. EBS offers these children a shelter of love and hope. Not only have they taken care of their physical health, but also their mental health. A psychologist is working full time in the center. With “*Seño Magda*”, the director, they form a wonderful team to assist families in difficult situation. If you would like to know more about EBS, please visit their webpage [www.ebs-guatemala.net](http://www.ebs-guatemala.net) or send an e-mail to [elbuensamaritano2000@hotmail.com](mailto:elbuensamaritano2000@hotmail.com) (Spanish only)

**“En Beneficio de Mujeres Indígenas” Association:** one step per time, after the bakery, their nursery program is also in service. The women realized one of their biggest dreams. It is not at all an easy job to run a bakery and to take care of the daycare center. They work from 6am to 5pm, preparing meals and assisting the teacher and baking! Their income is modest but the satisfaction is so immense that they even spend their free-time to help out in the kitchen!

**Mujb’ab’l yol Association:** with the contribution of their members, they collected Q20,000 to start the construction of the Training center. Tino, the president of MJB Y, and Walter “chameleon” themselves into construction workers, working together with the young people of *Doble Via* and volunteers to build up their dreams. If you would like to know more about their activities, please read the attached document.

**Santiaguüito Association:** with the help of Carrie Smith from Rotarac Club of Central Coast of Australia, Santiago Zamora will receive help for the education fund and for the development of their association. Congratulations!

## Country news

### **Adoption Law**

After many years of worry and concern from the international community regarding the ethics and legality of many adoptions of Guatemalan children, mostly to United States residents, the Guatemalan Congress passed a new law in mid December that went into affect December 31, 2007 making the process of adoption longer and stricter. Guatemala is second in the world, after China, in number of children adopted by foreigners each year. Previously, foreigners wanting to adopt a child paid approximately \$30,000 and simply worked with a notary to complete all necessary paper work. The process was relatively fast compared to adoptions in other parts of the world and raised concern that the lack of red tape allowed Guatemalan women to essentially sell their babies, almost as if it were a business. The new adoption law has now eliminated the participation of notaries and created a nation adoption council that will oversee the process of all adoptions to assure that it is ethical.

### **Sandra Torres de Colom and the Guatemalan Presidential Elections**

In September Guatemalan voters went to the polls to choose a new president. However the results were too close to call and it came down to a runoff vote between Alvaro Colom of the party, Nation Unity for Hope (UNE) and Otto Perez Molina of the party, Patriot Party (PP). The runoff election was held on Nov 4<sup>th</sup> and a reported 2.6 million of the county's 6 million registered voters came out to the polls. They ultimately chose Alvaro Colom, a center-left businessman who has expressed that he wishes to change the state of living conditions and level of education for the indigenous Mayans of Guatemala who have for years lived as the countries' biggest, yet most marginalized part of the Guatemala population.

Perhaps more interesting will be the role of Colom's wife, Sandra Torres de Colom. A businesswomen herself, Torres de Colom has managed numerous factories and sweatshops and has long been said to be able to influence her husband heavily. She has played an active role in politics for years and will be in charge of Q2,191 million (nearly \$300 million) as head of the Social Cohesion fund. Alvaro Colom has himself stated that she will not be an ordinary first lady. Rather, she will have a large role in the administration's actions and decisions.

It appears we may be seeing many changes in the way the Guatemalan government is conducted in the years to come.

### **Earthquakes**

While earthquakes and small tremblers have always been a common occurrence here in Guatemala, we have experienced a number of rumblings in the last couple weeks. The strongest was on January 4<sup>th</sup> and registered 5.6 on the Richter Scale. It was centered in Quetzaltenango and was felt all the way out to the pacific coast at Esquintla, inland to the capital city of Guatemala City and across the Mexican border at Tapachula and Chiapas. No one was reported hurt or killed.

**Adoption Law / Ley de la adopción**

[http://www.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2007-12-11-492777574\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2007-12-11-492777574_x.htm)

<http://www.prensalibre.com/pl/2007/diciembre/12/190259.html>

**Sandra Torres de Colom and the Guatemalan Presidential Elections /****Sandra Torres de Colom y las elecciones presidenciales guatemaltecas**

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/08/AR2007090800986.html>

[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/05/world/americas/05guatemala.html?\\_r=1&scp=3&sq=Alvaro+Colom%2C+Guatemala&st=nyt&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/05/world/americas/05guatemala.html?_r=1&scp=3&sq=Alvaro+Colom%2C+Guatemala&st=nyt&oref=slogin)

<http://www.prensalibre.com/pl/2008/enero/24/216178.html>

**Earthquakes / Terremotos**

<http://metmex.wordpress.com/2008/01/04/sismo-56-enero-04-08-guatemalachiapas/>