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FACT SHEET

JUSTICE SECTOR STRENGTHENING PROJECT

USAID’s Justice Sector Strengthening Project helps El Salvador to improve security by bringing criminals to justice through an efficient, independent, and accountable judicial system.

USAID is working to increase the effectiveness of police, prosecution, forensic medicine, and the judiciary in six high-crime municipalities, focusing on the specific circumstances and needs of those locations. This “place-based” justice strategy fosters collaboration of these institutions in the investigation of crimes to improve criminal investigations and build stronger cases to reduce impunity. As a result, crime scene response time has been reduced by 60 percent; case backlogs reduced by 85 percent; and autopsy result times reduced from 10-15 days to one day. Prior to launching the “place-based” justice strategy, these locations had 61.6 percent of the national total of homicides registered in 2016. In 2018, homicides had dropped by 40 percent.

An effective justice system also requires qualified, professional, and ethical judges, lawyers, prosecutors, and police. Working together with the Salvadoran government, USAID provides assistance to training schools in the Supreme Court of Justice, the Prosecutor’s Office, and the Public Defender’s Office. Demonstrating viability and self-reliance, the schools primarily use their own trainers and infrastructure to train new entrants and provide continuing education for prosecutors, public defenders, and judges. USAID also supported the design and implementation of a master’s degree program in forensic medicine to improve the use of evidence in criminal cases and sponsored a leadership program for mid-level judicial officials. For greater judicial transparency and accountability, USAID promotes merit-based selection and

promotion of judges and works with the Supreme Court of Justice to strengthen units that are responsible for investigating malfeasance by judges and attorneys. USAID also supports citizen participation campaigns to encourage public awareness and oversight of justice sector reforms.

With support from the project, public assistance units in judicial centers offer improved services as well as a new electronic system for court notifications that is increasing efficiency. Rapid response units in the Attorney General's Office have reduced trial completion time for non-complex cases from an average of 540 days to just 39 days.

USAID also helps to provide services to victims of crimes, another important way to ensure that criminals are brought to justice. Studies show that victims of sexual and gender based violence, especially by gang members, when faced with limited access to justice, impunity and lack of victim assistance services, are likely to attempt to illegally immigrate. There are now 36 victims' assistance centers, established with USAID support and managed and financed by the Salvadoran government within police units, public defenders' and prosecutors' offices, and justice centers that provide access to legal, medical, and psychological counseling. Studies show that these centers increase the likelihood that victims will file complaints against their aggressor, improve the collection of physical and testimonial evidence, and reduce impunity. There is a 65 percent conviction rate through the work of these centers, compared to less than 10 percent generally.

To increase public confidence in the justice system, particularly in the police, USAID is helping to expand the use of community policing to reduce crime. Nearly 100 percent of police officers have received basic community policing courses that were developed with USAID assistance. The project also provided specialized training for police in leadership, group management, human rights, problem solving, and communication. Over 15,000 community members have participated in community policing activities, including vocational training, forums, sporting events, and street fairs. The number of complaints filed in community policing areas increased by 800 percent, a sign of increased public confidence in the justice system.

JUSTICE SECTOR STRENGTHENING

TOTAL PROJECT INVESTMENT: \$31.4 million

TIME PERIOD: March 2013 – January 2020

GEOGRAPHIC AREA: Priority locations include: Zacatecoluca, Colon, Ciudad Delgado, Cojutepeque, San Salvador, San Vicente, San Miguel and Sonsonate

SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT PARTNERS:

- Supreme Court of Justice
- Attorney General's Office
- Public Defender's Office
- National Judicial Council
- National Civil Police

MAJOR RESULTS:

- 60% reduction in crime scene response time
- 65% conviction rate through Victims Assistance Centers, compared to 10% generally
- 40% reduction in homicides in place-based justice locations
- Greater confidence in justice system with 800% increase in complaints filed

For more information on USAID El Salvador and USAID Central America Regional Programs, please call: (503) 2501-3411; 3344; 3432 or visit www.usaid.gov/el-salvador