

New Report Cites Central American Drug Violence at ‘Alarming Levels’



The Honduran government launched "Operation Lightning" in response to drug violence, setting up police checkpoints along major routes. Photo credit: Nick Miroff/Pulitzer Center

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) released their [2011 Annual Report](#) this month, which identified Central America as a region increasingly and alarmingly plagued by drug-related violence.

The report notes that many Mexican drug cartels have moved their drug trafficking operations to Central America, resulting in increased levels of violence, kidnapping, bribery, torture and homicide in the region.

According to the report, drug-related violence in Central America has reached unprecedented levels. There are more than 900 *maras* (gangs) active in Central America today, with over 70,000 members. The homicide rate in Honduras has risen 13 percent since 2010, and is now the highest in the world—85

murders per 100,000 residents, compared to 49 in Guatemala and 14 in neighboring Nicaragua. The United States, by contrast, has an average of 5 homicides per 100,000 residents.

Factors in Central America that have permitted illicit drug trafficking to grow are poverty, social inequality and lack of economic opportunities for youth. The INCB recommended that Central American Governments allocate additional resources to drug abuse prevention and implement public health programs, focusing on treatment for drug abusers and campaigns for educating youth. The Board also called for concerted action in the area of crime prevention and criminal justice reform, as well as regional strategies to reduce drug trafficking.

The Seattle International Foundation (SIF) is committed to investing in strategies to address drug-related violence in Central America. SIF invests in violence prevention programs for Central American youth through organizations such as [ASAPROSAR](#) and [TeenSmart International](#). SIF also supports research efforts in the region to identify the most pressing issues and implement public policy solutions.