

April 20, 1997

## Guatemala

To the Editor: Larry Rohter's piece on the imminent resurgence of tourism to Guatemala following the recent armistice was timely and frank ("At Peace, Guatemala Is Ready for Visitors," March 23). The country offers visitors a bounty of scenic beauty; however, as he points out, security remains a serious concern.

For 25 years, our company has been providing multinational companies with risk-assessment consulting around the world. The statistics we have collected on kidnappings in Guatemala, based upon available data and our own direct experience in negotiating for the release of victims, indicate that criminal kidnappings for ransom and extortion have increased at an alarming rate. In 1996, we estimate there were nearly 900, up from 150 in 1995. While most victims of crime in Guatemala are Guatemalans, tourists and foreign business people are increasingly targeted.

Shortly after taking office in January 1996, President Alvaro Arzu Irigoyen began a purge of the Guatemalan military and the police. Since then, kidnappings and other crimes have skyrocketed.

Although the United States State Department may consider changing its Consular Information Sheet to reflect the end of the war, its advice regarding criminal activity states: "Violent crime is a very serious and growing problem throughout the country."

Our current bulletin on Guatemala, among other points, advises: "Highway banditry is a serious threat to motorists virtually anywhere in the country."

Until the Guatemalan Government addresses crime, the potential tourism boom will be short lived.

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