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GUATEMALA

BEFORE & AFTER

New Court Provides 24-Hour Justice

Court helps to fight corruption and provide timely services

High crime rates and widespread corruption pose a continued challenge to Guatemala. Sometimes police let minor offenders go free in exchange for bribes. Other times, suspects are simply sent to jail without a hearing. It can take months for a suspect to even see a judge. Thanks to a new 24-hour court, or “Juzgado de Turno,” officers are now required to bring anyone detained for a minor offense immediately to this new court. At any hour of the day or night, a judge decides whether the suspect should be free to go or enter the jail system. This is expected to reduce the number of people jailed without a hearing and make corruption within the police force less prevalent. It will also help increase the efficiency and effectiveness of Guatemala’s legal system. USAID helped the 24-hour courts come to fruition by negotiating an agreement between the four government bodies with a stake in the courts; by training judges, prosecutors and public defenders in oral arguments; and by remodeling the new hearing rooms.

Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>



Photo: Prensa Libre/Jorge Castillo

BEFORE This building was renovated for the new 24-hour court, where suspects detained by the police are immediately given a hearing before a decision is made to send them to jail.



Photo: USAID/José Garzón

AFTER This hearing room at the newly renovated court is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Three judges rotate shifts at the court, ensuring that access to justice is always within reach. The 24-hour courts prevent overcrowding in pre-trial detention facilities by providing timely alternatives to imprisonment, such as bail. This system presents a deterrent to police corruption because police can no longer detain suspects for lengthy periods without court orders.