

## PRESS RELEASE

### Urgent Need for Prevention Policies to Address Youth Violence in Central America – Interpeace Releases First Report in the Series -- ‘12 Strategies’ for Guatemala

**Geneva - 14<sup>th</sup> March 2011 - Central America is now considered the most dangerous place in the world. Young people are most at risk from violence either as victims or perpetrators. Interpeace releases the first in a series of prevention policy proposals that will cover the Central America region.**

In response to the urgent need for holistic and inclusive policies to address the pressing issue of youth and youth gang related violence, Interpeace issues a report detailing 12 strategies for prevention.

In Guatemala alone, over an 11 month period last year, 433 children under the age of 17 suffered violent deaths. 3,337 young people between the ages of 28-35 also died due to violence.

Previous responses to the problem of youth related violence include:

- the frequent assumption that most of the crimes being committed are by youth gang members;
- the mass detention of youth gang members coupled with harsh jail sentencing;
- extra-judicial executions and practices of ‘social cleansing’ by groups associated with the police;
- law initiatives such as the “anti-gang law” and
- the stigmatization of marginalized youth.

“This ‘*mano dura*’ (iron-fisted) approach is proving ineffective in addressing the structural causes of the problem. Violence has become a way of dealing with social conflicts,” explains Isabel Aguilar, Interpeace Director of the [Regional Youth and Gang Violence Prevention Programme](#).



Aguilar adds, “Histories of intra-family violence, violent environments at school, truancy, dropping-out, youth unemployment, easy access to and consumption of alcohol and drugs, limited access to health services and migration issues are all contributing factors that increase the likelihood of young people being impacted by violence.”

This new comprehensive report (in Spanish) [“12 strategies to prevent youth related violence in Guatemala”](#) is the first in a series of policy proposals that will cover the region. More than 200 Guatemalans representing 37 state institutions, 59 civil society organizations and 35 youth groups were involved in a unique process that brought together a wide range of actors to compile the recommendations.

Scott M. Weber, Director-General of Interpeace states, “It is the inclusive nature of the process that makes this initiative both legitimate but also ground-breaking. The content harnesses the valuable insight and input from all levels and sectors of Guatemalan society. This report also stands out as it is the first step in taking a holistic, preventive approach across the region.”

The 12 clear strategies, and associated objectives and actions to combat youth violence approach the issue from three angles: primary, secondary and tertiary prevention:

**Primary prevention: refers to general social and economic development measures with attention on the wellbeing of children, adolescents and youth.**

**Strategy 1:** To promote programmes to prevent and eradicate violence against children, adolescents and youth.

**Strategy 2:** For those adolescents and youth that find themselves outside the school system, encouraging them to stay in schools or alternative education.

**Strategy 3:** To promote art, culture and sports as means of personal development and methods of preventing violence.

**Strategy 4:** To create opportunities for vocational training and employment experience especially for adolescents and youth-at-risk.

**Strategy 5:** To promote access for adolescents and youth to preventative health services and holistic care.

**Strategy 6:** To promote the participation and the voice of youth in spaces of community, municipal and national organizations.

**Secondary prevention: refers to measures to protect and improve the quality of life of vulnerable groups and groups-at-risk, e.g. abandoned youth, children living in the street, youngsters already showing a tendency to violent behaviour, but also communities and neighbourhoods that are marginalized and show a higher incidence of violence and insecurity.**

**Strategy 7:** To promote the social integration or reintegration of people who are or were members of gangs (‘maras’/ ‘pandillas’), to prevent them from getting involved in violent activities.

**Strategy 8:** To increase and improve the services for victims of violence and promote the use of alternative methods to manage and transform conflicts.

**Strategy 9:** To promote the prevention of delinquency and improve citizen security within the framework of respect for human rights.

**Tertiary prevention: refers to measures focusing on the socialization and reintegration of those who have already been convicted as delinquents, in order to prevent them from relapsing.**

**Strategy 10:** To speed up the legal process and prioritize measures and sanctions other than imprisonment.

**Strategy 11:** To promote programmes that provide holistic care to adolescents and youth who are kept in confinement in order to enable constructive socialization.

**Strategy 12:** To broaden the reach and scope, and improve the quality of programmes to facilitate the social reintegration of youth that have been in prison.

Interpeace, an international peacebuilding organization, has been working with organizations in the Central American states of El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Belize, Costa Rica, Panama, and Nicaragua to address the growing problem of adolescent and youth violence, as well as the youth gang phenomenon in the region. The proposals are being used to influence policy development with the Government of Guatemala taking the findings on board.

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**For more information, high resolution photos or to arrange and interview please contact:**

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### **About Interpeace**

Created in 1994, Interpeace is an international peacebuilding organization, with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, that plays a discrete role in helping societies war-afflicted societies to build lasting peace. Interpeace operates as an independent non-governmental organization and in partnership with the United Nations on specific programmes. The organisation works with 300 peace builders to implement programmes in 16 conflict and post conflict zones across the world:

Africa: Burundi, Rwanda, Guinea-Bissau, Somali Region, Liberia

Asia: Timor-Leste

Europe: Cyprus

Latin America: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti, and a regional programme for the prevention of Youth Violence

Middle East: Israel, Palestine



Interpeace also has an additional thematic programme on constitution building.

[www.interpeace.org](http://www.interpeace.org)

### **About the spokespeople**

**Scott M. Weber** - **Director-General of Interpeace.** Scott was appointed as Director-General in 2005 by the then-Chairman (2000-2009) of the Interpeace Governing Council, 2008 Nobel

Peace Prize laureate and former President Martti Ahtisaari. In recognition of his record of professional accomplishments, his commitment to society and his potential to contribute to shaping the future of the world through his inspiring leadership, Scott was selected as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum in 2009. Each year the Forum recognizes "the 200 most distinguished young leaders below the age of 40 from around the world." Interpeace's work has also been personally highlighted by H.E. President Bill Clinton at the 2006 and 2007 Clinton Global Initiative meetings as an innovative approach to conflict prevention. In 2010 Scott was nominated by the Governing Council, chaired by former President of Ghana, John A. Kufuor, for a second 5-year term as Director-General.

Scott began his career in the United Nations, first in disaster reduction and then in political affairs. Scott is a member of the Young Presidents' Organization (YPO), The Chatham House (UK) and the Steering Committee of the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform. He is also a member of the Advisory Board of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) and the Center for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces (DCAF). He holds a Bachelor's degree in International Relations, Economics and Russian from Georgetown University. Scott is French and American.

**Isabel Aguilar Umaña – Interpeace Director of the Regional Youth and Gang violence Prevention Programme.** Isabel received her M.A. in Human Rights in San Carlos University. She has more than ten years of experience in designing and facilitating diverse dialogue processes for the post conflict context in Guatemala, including the discussions towards a National Policy on Rural Development and the National Policy on Women. She specializes in public and political dialogue, mediation, negotiation and systematization of experiences and lessons learned within these processes. She has published several books and articles related to peace-building, conflict, post-conflict and human rights issues. She has also held several consulting positions for national and international institutions.

**Wendy Cuellar - Interpeace Political Officer – Guatemala.** Wendy received her M.A. in Public Policies from Rafael Landívar University, Guatemala, and has a Law Degree from the University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada. She has also specialized, as a post graduate, on international issues of development, human rights, justice and security. Recently she was in charge of the coordination of the National Youth Policy of Guatemala. Wendy has broad work experience in technical and managerial positions in state, civil and international organizations. She was Director of the National Council of Adoptions, Secretary of Social Affairs, Programme Officer of UNDP in charge of the portfolio of Justice and Human rights projects, facilitator at the National Commission of Justice, and was a researcher and analyst at the National Commission of Human Rights (COPREDEH). In addition, she has worked in several international consulting positions including: USDOL, IAB, WB, the UNDP, and IPEC-ILO among others.