



Violence in Guatemalan Elections Averted By Long Efforts

Threatened by drug cartels, street gangs, and political corruption, Guatemalan voters elect for new government direction.

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GOD'S CHILD Project founder works to oversee Guatemala national elections

"Two weeks ago 300,000 people demonstrated in Guatemala's streets," said Bismarck native Patrick Atkinson. "They were demanding that the President resign, and asking for fairness and transparency in this Sunday's national elections."

"I was on the East Coast finishing a 12-day speaking tour when I got the call," he said. "The President had resigned, was now in prison, and the people now demanded free elections."

The Guatemalan Human Rights Protectorate asked Atkinson to travel to Guatemala in advance of the national elections, and help oversee the national election process.

Atkinson is the Executive Director of the Bismarck-based international GOD'S CHILD Project and the 'Institute for Trafficked, Exploited & Missing Persons' ([ITEMP](#)).

The GOD'S CHILD Project, which Atkinson founded in 1991, "is a nonpolitical, international humanitarian organization that develops and administers health, education, family foster care, community development and human rights systems in the world's poorest countries," according to its website. It currently cares for and educates 13,700 orphaned and poverty-stricken boys and girls, and widowed and abandoned mothers and their dependents, in the United States, Guatemala, El Salvador, India and Malawi (Africa).

Atkinson founded ITEMPT, which is North Dakota's oldest dedicated anti-human trafficking program as well as one of the nation's oldest contemporary programs, in 2001 as a means for raising public awareness and social action against contemporary slavery and human trafficking, and as a way to rescue, care for, and return human trafficking victims home.

ELECTIONS

According to Atkinson, the Sunday September 6th national and presidential election were pivotal for the Guatemala. "There was a lot of violence that was anticipated and we felt we were ready for that," he says. "Tremendous efforts had been made by different cartels, including drug cartels and political cartels, to influence the outcomes of the different national elections, and we couldn't let that happen," Atkinson says.

Atkinson, who resides in Bismarck, Minneapolis, and Antigua Guatemala, is a Goodwill Ambassador for the country of Guatemala, as well as a United States Embassy Warden. Prior to traveling to

Guatemala for the Presidential elections, he had been told to expect to accompany one of the national human rights directors throughout the day. Upon arrival, he was asked to provide specialized assistance to both the human right's office, as well as to visiting United Nation's observers.

His responsibilities included arriving at polling locations early in the morning to check the polling grounds for cameras or other signs or objects intended to intimidate or coerce voters, and interview community polling booth officials to verify that none were relatives of candidates, or had a personal vested interest in the election. He also checked the voting tools and ballots to make sure none of them were pre-marked or pre-punched.

He worked about 22 hours on Election Day, Atkinson said.

"The work was hard, but it was worth it since everyone went home safely, and the people had a fair chance to choose their next generation of leaders," Atkinson says.

"Step by step we can bring stability to this increasingly crazy world."

For more information on The GOD'S CHILD Project and ITEMP, visit www.GodsChild.org and www.ITEMP.org.

For more information on this release, or to arrange interviews with Mr. Atkinson or Guatemala embassy or electoral officials, please contact Chris.Hasse@GodsChild.org.

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