



Helping Create A Modern Criminal Justice System

Challenge

Until February 2002, Honduras had an antiquated criminal justice system in which all proceedings were conducted in writing and often under secretive conditions. It was very difficult for the average citizen to get a fair trial, especially those with few resources.



Photo: USAID/Honduras

Study tours of the U.S. justice system for law students and faculty from Honduras.

“This tour gives students a model to strive for in their professional legal careers.”

- José Oswaldo Guillén

Results

Through these tours, USAID has introduced almost 120 Honduran law students and faculty to all aspects of the U.S. justice system so that they have a model to embody in their professional lives. José Oswaldo Guillén was one of the first students to participate in the study tour in 1998. During the tour, Guillén met with U.S. judges, prosecutors, public defenders, law professors and law students, visited U.S. Supreme Court and the American Bar Association, and observed several criminal and civil trials. Guillén is now putting into practice what he learned through this study tour in his position with the Honduran Government as the current Secretary General of the Honduran Ministry of Governance and Justice. He is also a law professor at the national university and is educating his students about the U.S. justice system as part of his curriculum.

Initiative

With USAID support over a seven-year period, a new Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) became effective in early 2002. The CPC introduced changes to the criminal justice system in Honduras, including oral adversarial trials, transparent procedures, and greater protections for individual rights. Implementation of this new system required a series of efforts. Among the most important initiatives were changing the country's perception of the criminal justice system and educating citizens and administrators of this new system.

To meet this need, USAID has sponsored study tours of the U.S. justice system during the last six years for law students and faculty who demonstrate excellence and leadership qualities. These tours give the participants an opportunity to observe a modern criminal justice system and use this experience to develop a vision of what the Honduran system could become.

