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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 CIUDAD JUAREZ 000596

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TAGS: SOCI, SNAR, KCRM, CASC, ECON, MX, US
SUBJECT: CRIME AND VIOLENCE ON RISE IN JUAREZ

SUMMARY

1. CIUDAD JUAREZ HAS DEVELOPED A SERIOUS CRIME
PROBLEM IN RECENT YEARS. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND POLICE
REPRESENTATIVES, WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING THAT DRUG USE
AND DRUG RELATED GANG VIOLENCE HAVE INCREASED,

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: NORMAN M BOUTON
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DOWNPLAY THE ISSUE, AND BLAME THE MEDIA FOR SENSATIONALIZING AND EXAGGERATING THE PROBLEM. CHURCH OFFICIALS AND COMMUNITY WORKERS BELIEVE THAT CRIME IS GETTING MUCH WORSE, BUT BLAME GENERAL SOCIAL PROBLEMS RATHER THAN DRUGS IN PARTICULAR FOR THE DETERIORATION. THEY CLAIM THAT THE POLITICAL ECHELON HAS NOT YET FIGURED OUT HOW TO DEAL WITH THE ISSUE. END SUMMARY.

JUAREZ POPULATION SURGING

2. CIUDAD JUAREZ HAS AN ESTIMATED POPULATION OF 1.2 MILLION TO 1.5 MILLION, INCLUDING A FLOATING POPULATION OF UP TO 300,000. THESE ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE ONLY RECENTLY COME TO THE CITY AT THE RATE OF ABOUT 300 PER DAY IN ORDER TO CROSS TO THE U.S., OR TO WORK IN ONE OF THE MORE THAN 300 MAQUILAS OPERATING IN THE METROPOLITAN AREA. OVER 160,000 PEOPLE WORK IN THE MAQUILAS, AND THE PROLIFERATION OF THESE MANUFACTURING FACILITIES HAS PROVEN TO BE AN IRRESTIBLE DRAW FOR PEOPLE FROM OTHER PARTS OF MEXICO OVER THE LAST THIRTY YEARS.

ECONOMIC CRISIS CAUSED RECORD INFLUX

3. THE MEXICAN ECONOMIC CRISIS OF 1994 AND PESO DEVALUATION DRAMATICALLY ACCELERATED POPULATION MOVEMENT TO JUAREZ FROM OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. THE CITY HAS FARED SOMEWHAT BETTER ECONOMICALLY THAN MOST OTHER PARTS OF MEXICO DURING THE CRISIS BECAUSE THE MAQUILAS WERE ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE

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DEVALUED PESO TO EXPAND THEIR OPERATIONS, AND INCREASE THEIR EXPORTS. THIS LED TO AN EVER INCREASING NEED FOR LABOR, SO THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE HAS BEEN RELATIVELY LOW DESPITE THE CONSTANT INFLUX.

ROOTLESSNESS IN THE POPULATION

4. WITH THE LARGE INFLOWS OF PEOPLE INTO THE CITY OVER THE YEARS, A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE

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POPULATION IS FROM OTHER PARTS OF MEXICO, AND HAS NO FAMILY OR OTHER TIES HERE. IN FACT, THERE ARE ENTIRE NEIGHBORHOODS IN THE CITY INHABITED BY PEOPLE FROM OTHER MEXICAN CITIES SUCH AS DURANGO OR TORREON. PEOPLE COMING FROM THE SAME URBAN AREAS HAVE TENDED TO GROUP TOGETHER TO TRY TO RECREATE A VESTIGE OF COMMUNITY FEELING FROM THEIR HOMETOWNS. IN GENERAL HOWEVER, THESE PEOPLE REPRESENT A ROOTLESS AND RESTLESS ELEMENT IN THE CITY, AND A SOURCE OF MUCH OF THE CRIME AND VIOLENCE THAT HAS PLAGUED IT IN RECENT YEARS.

GRAFFITI EVERYWHERE

5. JUAREZ MUNICIPAL RESOURCES ARE EXTREMELY LIMITED, AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES SUFFER THE SAME FUNDING SHORTFALLS AS ALL OTHER MUNICIPAL OFFICES. THE FACT THAT A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION IS YOUNG, AMONG BOTH THE ROOTED LONG-TERM JUAREZ RESIDENTS AND THE NEWCOMERS, CONTRIBUTES TO CRIME AND THE CONSEQUENT STRAIN ON POLICE RESOURCES. AS IN MANY THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES, YOUNG PEOPLE ARE OVERWHELMING

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THE CITY'S EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUSHING FOR EVER GREATER ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY. SOME TURN TO CRIME, ONE OF THE TAMER FORMS OF WHICH HAS LED TO THE PROLIFERATION OF GRAFFITI ALL OVER THE CITY. GRAFFITI, WHICH WAS ONCE CONFINED TO POOR AREAS HAS SPREAD EVERYWHERE, TO THE CONSTERNATION OF RESIDENTS OF MORE PROSPEROUS NEIGHBORHOODS. IN A CITY FACING SERIOUS GANG VIOLENCE, FIGHTING GRAFFITI HAS NOT BEEN A MAJOR PRIORITY FOR THE POLICE, BUT THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT ITS SPREAD HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE SENSE OF UNEASE THAT TROUBLES MANY RESIDENTS.
EFFECT OF U.S. MEDIA

6. OPINIONS VARY IN JUAREZ ABOUT THE DEGREE OF IMPACT THAT U.S. MEDIA OUTLETS IN EL PASO HAVE ON THE CITY. MOST ACCEPT THAT THE U.S. MEDIA FEEDS THE CRISIS OF RISING EXPECTATIONS WHICH CAUSES PEOPLE TO DESIRE MORE MATERIAL POSSESSIONS THAN THEY CAN

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AFFORD. HOWEVER, CHURCH FIGURES AND COMMUNITY WORKERS ARE RELUCTANT TO POINT THE FINGER AT THE U.S. MEDIA AS A MAJOR CULPRIT IN THE GROWTH OF CRIME IN JUAREZ. THEY NOTE THAT THAT MOST JUARENSES DO NOT SPEAK ENGLISH, AND THAT THE U.S. TV AND RADIO STATIONS WHICH BROADCAST IN SPANISH ARE HARDLY DISTINGUISHABLE FROM THEIR JUAREZ COUNTERPARTS.

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BASHING THE MEXICAN MEDIA

7. THERE IS A WIDELY HELD SENTIMENT THAT THE MEXICAN MEDIA WILDLY EXAGGERATE THE DEGREE OF CRIME AND VIOLENCE IN THE CITY IN ORDER TO SELL NEWSPAPERS OR
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AIR TIME. THE MEDIA CLEARLY DO SENSATIONALIZE SOME SPECTACULAR INCIDENTS, SUCH AS THE STILL UNRESOLVED SERIAL MURDERS OF YOUNG WOMEN IN THE CITY IN 1996. THIS TYPE OF REPORTING ALSO ENGENDERS FEAR AND INSECURITY AMONG RESIDENTS.

GOOD OLD DAYS ARE GONE

8. JUARENSES AGREE THAT SOME NEIGHBORHOODS IN THE CITY ARE BEST AVOIDED, AND MOST HAVE DEVELOPED COMMON-SENSE HABITS TO PREVENT BEING VICTIMIZED. IN GENERAL, PEOPLE ACCEPT THE REALITY THAT THERE IS A GROWING CRIME PROBLEM. THEY SIMPLY DO NOT LIKE TO DEAL WITH THE UGLY TRUTH THAT JUAREZ FACES ALL OF THE SAME SOCIAL ILLS THAT BIG CITIES ALL OVER THE WORLD MUST DEAL WITH - ITS HALCYON DAYS AS A RELATIVELY CRIME-FREE SMALL TOWN ARE OVER.

CHURCH OFFICIAL DOWNPLAYS CRIME/DRUG CONNECTION

9. THERE IS DISAGREEMENT REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF DRUGS IN THE JUAREZ CRIME PROBLEM. A HIGH CHURCH OFFICIAL AVOIDED LINKING DRUGS TO CRIME. THE OFFICIAL EMPHASIZED THE LACK OF VALUES AMONG THE PEOPLE AND THE FACT THAT SO MANY HAVE COME FROM OTHER CITIES TO LIVE IN JUAREZ. HE ALSO VOCIFEROUSLY ATTACKED THE MEDIA FOR SENSATIONALISM AND LAMENTED THE PROLIFERATION OF YOUTH GANGS WITH THEIR ATTENDANT

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TURF WARS AND OCCASIONAL VICTIMIZATION OF INNOCENT
PASSERSBY. WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING THAT SOME GANGS ARE
INVOLVED IN SELLING DRUGS, HE STATED THAT THIS
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PHENOMENON IS SIMPLY ANOTHER MANIFESTATION OF THE
ROOTLESSNESS AND LACK OF VALUES HE HAD BEEN
EMPHASIZING. IN GENERAL, HE VIEWED DRUGS AS A
GROWING BUT NOT YET CRITICAL PROBLEM.

SOCIAL WORKERS SEE DRUGS AS SERIOUS PROBLEM

10. OTHER COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS EXPRESSED A DIVERGENT
VIEW ABOUT DRUGS. THEY CLAIM THAT DRUG ADDICTION IS
SPREADING, BUT THAT THE POLITICIANS REFUSE TO
ACKNOWLEDGE THE PROBLEM IN ORDER NOT TO HAVE TO FUND
PROGRAMS TO DEAL WITH ADDICTS AND THEIR BROKEN
FAMILIES. IN ADDITION, THEY CONTEND THAT THE PRICE
OF DRUGS IN JUAREZ HAS GONE DOWN RECENTLY DUE TO THE
SUCCESS OF THE U.S. BORDER AUTHORITIES IN PREVENTING
DRUGS FROM REACHING EL PASO. THEY CLAIM THAT THE
DRUGS THAT DO NOT MAKE IT ACROSS REMAIN IN JUAREZ AND
ARE SOLD AT GIVEAWAY PRICES IN DOWNTOWN JUAREZ,
THEREBY ATTRACTING MORE USERS. ADDICTS WHO DO NOT
HAVE EVEN SMALL AMOUNTS OF MONEY MUG PEOPLE TO GET
IT, CAUSING MANY JUARENSES TO AVOID DOWNTOWN AFTER
DARK.

POLICE REPORT ALARMING DRUG PROBLEM

11. THE PRESS HAS REPORTED THAT THE FEDERAL AND
STATE POLICE HAVE RECENTLY COMPLETED A STUDY
HIGHLIGHTING A DRUG PROBLEM MUCH MORE SERIOUS THAN
ANYONE HAD IMAGINED. THE REPORT STATES THAT THERE
ARE AT LEAST 400 "DRUG HOUSES" IN JUAREZ WHERE
HEROIN, COCAINE, MARIJUANA, A NEW DRUG CALLED
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CELESTIAL WATER, AND DIFFERENT TYPES OF PSYCHOTROPIC
PILLS ARE EASILY AVAILABLE. IT SAYS THAT THESE
HOUSES CLEAR NINE MILLION PESOS A DAY JUST FROM THE
SALE OF HEROIN. EVEN MORE STARTLING IS THE CLAIM
THAT HALF OF ALL FAMILIES IN JUAREZ ARE AFFECTED BY
DRUG USE - ONE OR MORE MEMBERS EITHER USES OR IS
INVOLVED IN THE SALE OF DRUGS. 600F USERS
ACCORDING TO THE REPORT ARE BETWEEN THE AGES OF
TWENTY AND THIRTY, 20ARE UNDER TWENTY, AND 20ARE
BETWEEN THIRTY AND FIFTY.

DRUG PRICES VERY CHEAP

12. THE REPORT ALSO HIGHLIGHTS HOW CHEAP DRUGS HAVE
BECOME IN JUAREZ. A DOSE OF HEROIN COSTS BETWEEN
TWENTY AND THIRTY PESOS (ABOUT \$3 USD). ENOUGH
MARIJUANA FOR TWO TO THREE CIGARETTES GOES POR TEN
PESOS (ABOUT \$1 USD). MANY OP THE PILLS ARE SOLD
POR ABOUT ONE PESO EACH (13 US CENTS). CELESTIAL
WATER, A CHEMICAL COMPOUND, SELLS POR ABOUT TEN PESOS
PER DOSE.

POLICE CORRUP
TION HAMPERS CRIME PIGHTING

13. WHILE THE DRUG AND CRIME PROBLEMS WORSEN, THE

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LOCAL POLICE HAVE BEEN ROCKED BY A CORRUPTION SCANDAL
IGNITED WHEN AN OFFICER WAS FIRED. THE POLICE
DEPARTMENT HAS NOT CLEARLY EXPLAINED WHY HE WAS
FIRED. HOWEVER, HE HAS SINCE BEGUN NAMING ALLEGEDLY
CORRUPT OFFICERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE HE CLAIMS ARE ON
THE TAKE FROM THE DRUG HOUSES. SINCE THEN, OTHER
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POLICE HAVE MADE VAGUE ACCUSATIONS, BUT NO ONE ELSE
HAS BEEN WILLING TO NAME NAMES. SOME OPPICERS HAVE
BEEN PIRED, BUT THE DEPARTMENT HAS BEEN CLAIMING THAT
THEY WERE LET GO FOR REASONS OTHER THAN CORRUPTION.
MAYOR RESISTS EFFORT TO DUMP POLICE CHIEP

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14. THE POLICE CHIEF HIMSELF HAS NOT BEEN ACCUSED OF CORRUPTION SO FAR, BUT CRITICS HAVE NOT HESITATED TO CALL HIM INCOMPETENT. THE MAYOR HAS HOWEVER TAKEN A POLITICALLY UNPOPULAR POSITION AND EXPRESSED COMPLETE CONFIDENCE IN THE CHIEF. HE ALSO PERSUADED SOME LOCAL BUSINESS LEASERS TO WITHDRAW THEIR CALL FOR THE CHIEF'S RESIGNATION, ORIGINALLY ISSUED BECAUSE OF THE GENERAL FEELING OF INSECURITY IN THE CITY AND THE EVOLVING POLICE SCANDAL.

MAQUILAS PUNDS TO HELP WITH NEW ANTI-CRIME PLAN

15. IN ADDITION, THE MAYOR ANNOUNCED A NEW INITIATIVE AIMED AT CRACKING DOWN ON CRIME, WITH THE HELP OF AN UNSPECIFIED AMOUNT OF FUNDING PREVIOUSLY PLEDGED BY THE MAQUILA ASSOCIATION TOWARDS THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE CITY'S INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SECURITY. HE IS TARGETING THE SERIOUS SURGE IN ARMED ROBBERIES OF BUSINESSES AND PRIVATE HOMES, AN EXAMPLE OF WHICH WAS THE KILLING SEVERAL WEEKS AGO BY AN ARMED ROBBER OF THE PROPRIETOR OF A CURRENCY EXCHANGE HOUSE LOCATED TWO BLOCKS AWAY FROM WHERE FIVE PSO FAMILIES LIVE. THE PLAN ALSO CALLS FOR INCREASED PATROLS AT THE INTERNATIONAL BRIDGES, AT SCHOOLS, AND

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IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA, ESPECIALLY ON WEEKENDS. THE MAYOR HAS CLEARLY INDICATED THAT HE WANTS THE POLICE DEPARTMENT TO GET BACK TO FIGHTING CRIME, AND NOT BE SIDETRACKED BY ALLEGED CORRUPTION.

ALLEGATION: JUAREZ GANGS WAREHOUSE DRUGS IN EL PASO

16. A SENIOR CHIHUAHUA STATE OFFICIAL EMPHASIZED THE CONNECTION OF DRUGS TO THE INCREASE IN CRIME IN JUAREZ, ESPECIALLY MARIJUANA, COCAINE, AND HEROIN. SO FAR, PSYCHEDELIC DRUGS SUCH AS LSD DO NOT APPEAR TO BE PRESENT IN SIGNIFICANT QUANTITIES. THE OFFICIAL INDICATED THAT SOME JUAREZ GANGS ARE DEEPLY INVOLVED IN THE DRUG TRADE - BOTH AS COURRIERS FOR THE LARGE OUTSIDE CARTELS AND AS SUPPLIERS IN JUAREZ

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AND EL PASO. IN FACT, CONTRARY TO THE OPINION OF COMMUNITY WORKERS THAT U.S. ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS ARE SUBSTANTIALLY IMPEDING THE FLOW OF DRUGS INTO THE U.S., THE OFFICIAL WENT SO FAR AS TO ALLEGE THAT JUAREZ GANGS STORE THEIR DRUGS IN EL PASO TO SAFEGUARD THEM FROM RIVAL GANGS, AND ONLY BRING THEM BACK TO JUAREZ FOR DELIVERY TO LOCAL PURCHASERS. THE OFFICIAL WAS VERY CRYPTIC IN HIS COMMENTS ON THIS SUBJECT, AND REFUSED TO ELABORATE ANY FURTHER. THE CONSULATE HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO CONFIRM THIS ALLEGATION FROM ANY OTHER SOURCE.

SUSPICION OF MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN POLICING

17. THE SAME OFFICIAL INDICATED THAT THERE HAVE BEEN TWO CASES OF THE UNEXPLAINED DISAPPEARANCE OF

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SUSPECTED CRIMINALS IN THE CITY. AGAIN COMMENTING CRYPTICALLY, THE SOURCE REFUSED TO INDICATE WHAT CRIMES THE ALLEGED CRIMINALS HAD BEEN ACCUSED OF. HE SAID THAT NO ONE KNOWS THEIR WHEREABOUTS, AND THAT THE SUSPICION HAS ARISEN THAT THE MILITARY IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR DISAPPEARANCE. AGAIN, THE CONSULATE HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO VERIFY THIS ALLEGATION. NONETHELESS, THE OFFICIAL MAINTAINED THAT EVEN IF THE MILITARY WERE INVOLVED IN THESE INCIDENTS, THIS DID NOT NECESSARILY AUGUR A MILITARY TAKEOVER OF LAW ENFORCEMENT IN JUAREZ ANYTIME SOON. HOWEVER, HE SAID THAT IT MADE CLEAR TO HIM THAT THE MILITARY IS WATCHING THE CRIME SITUATION IN JUAREZ, AND DOES NOT WANT IT TO DETERIORATE BEYOND A CERTAIN POINT.

COMMENT

18. THE CONSULATE HAS RECEIVED CRIME STATISTICS FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES, AND MANY OF THEM CONTRADICT ONE ANOTHER.

HOWEVER, REGARDLESS OF WHAT THE STATISTICS SAY, THE ISSUE OF PERSONAL (IN)SECURITY HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT FOR THE AVERAGE JUARENSE. UNTIL RECENTLY, THE POLITICAL ECHELON TENDED TO DOWNPLAY

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THE PROBLEM, DESPITE THE BLEAK PICTURE PAINTED BY
THOSE IN THE FIELD, ESPECIALLY OF THE HAVOC WROUGHT

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BY DRUGS. THE POLITICIANS NOW SEEM TO BE GETTING
SERIOUS ABOUT CRIME AND ARE TRYING TO MOVE FORWARD
DESPITE THE PROBLEMS IN THE POLICE DEPARTMENT. THE
CRIME SITUATION MIGHT GET WORSE BEFORE IT GETS
BETTER, BUT NOW AT LEAST, SOMEONE IS PAYING
ATTENTION. COLBERT

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