

Prison raid kills 7 in Guatemala

Guatemalan inmates responded to a prison raid with grenades and rifles. At least seven were killed.

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FRAIJANES, Guatemala - More than 3,000 police and soldiers stormed a prison housing many of Guatemala's most-feared criminals on Monday, touching off a fierce battle in which seven inmates died.

Prisoners responded to the raid by lobbing at least six grenades and opening fire with automatic rifles smuggled inside the Pavón prison. They also attacked authorities with homemade bombs and knives.

Prison authorities originally reported that eight prisoners had been shot dead, but investigators later said seven died while an eighth was treated for gunshot wounds.

Police and the military needed hours to take control of the facility, which they say has been run for years by the convicted murderers, kidnapers, street-gang members and drug and weapons smugglers inside.

"We ran into strong resistance. They had grenades, assault rifles, homemade weapons and Molotov cocktails," Guatemala's national director of prisons, Alejandro Giammatei, said in an interview. Giammatei said authorities weren't sure how many inmates the facility housed at the time of the raid.

Prisoners were transferred to a nearby penitentiary while police and soldiers searched for remaining explosives. In the hours after the raid, they had already recovered 150 firearms.

Located in Fraijanes, just east of the capital, Guatemala City, Pavón is a maximum-security prison and work farm. Small-scale raids in years past have turned up guns, drugs and other contraband, including cellular phones, inside the facility -- but authorities had never met such fierce resistance as they did Monday.

Interior Secretary Carlos Vielmann said Pavón had become a den of drugs and organized crime.

"This is a Pandora's box that is only beginning to be opened," Giammatei said.

Vielmann said at least one of those killed while exchanging fire with authorities was armed with an M-16 rifle.