



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS
AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS

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Hearing Before the:

**House Appropriations Subcommittee on
State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs**

“Assistance to Central America”

Tuesday, March 24, 2015

Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member Lowey, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Administration's Strategy for U.S. Engagement in Central America and the role of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) in supporting two key objectives of this strategy: security and governance.

Central America is at a critical juncture, and the United States has a unique opportunity to assist these governments in advancing historic change. While there are sound reasons to ensure continued focus on the entire region, there is special urgency regarding the situation of the three countries of the "Northern Triangle" – El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The Administration has therefore created a strategy which promotes an economically-integrated region able to join the Western Hemisphere's ongoing success story of prosperity and stability, with a particular focus on the needs of the Northern Triangle, which we are supporting.

In November 2014, the Northern Triangle governments, along with the Inter-American Development Bank, presented their "Alliance for Prosperity" and committed to an unprecedented plan to jointly improve economic opportunity, governance, and public safety in their countries and improve the lives of their citizens. In March, Vice President Biden met for the fourth time in eight months with these three leaders and successfully pressed them to commit to systemic changes, with timelines, to make their plan a reality. This includes their commitments to police reform, greater transparency and effectiveness in their collection and management of government resources, and prison reform. We must take advantage of this political will. With smart foreign assistance, we can address the underlying factors of insecurity in the region in a strategic and sustained way, and help support our Central American partners achieve better governance and economic growth. Let me be clear. We cannot address security in a vacuum. Sustainable security depends also on the strength of government institutions and equitable economic growth and we are working closely with our interagency partners to implement this comprehensive plan.

A combination of economic stagnation, weak governance, and political insecurity in some countries has created a challenging context in Central America. The recent surge in migration to the United States and Mexico is just one result of the challenges this region faces. Current efforts by Central American governments, the United States, and other regional governments have not been sufficient to achieve meaningful progress in addressing these challenges. As the Administration's Strategy for U.S. Engagement in Central America outlines, absent significant progress, security will continue to deteriorate, institutions will be

unable to provide services to their citizens, millions will remain in poverty, and political instability is likely to grow. This is not just Central America's problem. The declining situation in Central America poses a threat to U.S. national security. If economic prospects remain poor and the crime rate remains high, Central America will become a source of instability for its neighbors, including the United States, in the form of illegal migration and even more entrenched organized crime in the region. We are already feeling some of these effects, and we need to act now to improve Central America's ability to address these challenges.

Experience has taught us that achieving sustainable and meaningful reform is only possible when the host government takes ownership of solving these issues. To that end, the U.S. Strategy for Central America supports the Governments of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras in their Alliance for Prosperity but also addresses the other countries of the region. The overriding goal of INL's assistance programs in Central America is to help these governments achieve self-sustaining progress in ensuring a legal, regulatory, and operational framework for security for their citizens. With your support we believe this comprehensive approach can play a historic role in shifting this region back onto a positive trajectory.

Nested under the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America, the ongoing Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) is the primary U.S. implementation structure for United States citizen security assistance to the region. In partnership with Central American governments, State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), as well as other departments and agencies acting in support of security and governance efforts, CARSI establishes successful programs that will make short to medium-term sustainable impacts to reduce levels of crime and violence, build the capacity of law enforcement and rule of law institutions, and support prevention programs for youth and in communities at-risk of crime and violence.

With increased funding and additional staff dedicated to CARSI, we will be well positioned to build on successes, increase host nation ownership of programs that will over time be transferred to their national budgets, and approach institutional reforms simultaneously from both the top down and the bottom up to advance comprehensive reform. We will do so by complementing the efforts of host nations and like-minded donors through three primary security and governance-based lines of action: 1) reducing levels of crime and violence; 2) strengthening rule of law institutions; and 3) engaging at the local level to build demand for support and accountability and address the root causes of instability.

Through these three lines of action, we plan to help host nations scale up successful niche programs to national level policies to ensure that people feel the improvements in security in their everyday lives. INL already engages along the full spectrum of the criminal justice system, supporting institutional reform at the police, justice, and corrections ministries throughout Central America. We also provide technical support on anti-corruption, transparency, and building effective institutions. To make the broadest impact possible we are increasing the reach of reforms to host nation services at the grass-roots level with local communities in order to improve security through tailored, place-based programming and to build lasting partnerships between civil society actors and government entities.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 we are requesting \$205 million under the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) account for CARSIS programming. This request, a 105 percent increase compared to FY 2014, will provide INL the resources it needs to build on successful programs in the region, improve host nation ownership and ability to assume responsibility for new programs and reforms, and expand models that have proven successful to a wider geographic area. We will also embark on new projects, in coordination with our partners, that will target some of the most difficult and complex security problems facing the region. At the same time that we are requesting additional funding from the U.S. Congress to empower Central American leaders address the region's fundamental challenges, our own government needs to move quickly to demonstrate results and hold ourselves accountable. That means rigorously evaluating our programs to build on what works and eliminate what doesn't. This process is already underway, and we look forward to working closely with Congress to craft the most effective assistance package.

INL programming will focus on the expansion of successful programs such as model police precincts (MPPs), border control, police reform, anti-gang initiatives, vetted units, and justice sector training and reform. Our efforts are focused on the Northern Triangle countries of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, which receive nearly half (42%) of the FY 2016 request.

In partnership with USAID, INL is supporting a new "place-based" approach to reduce and prevent violence in the most at-risk communities in the region. Drawing upon a proven Los Angeles model for gang and homicide reduction, INL and USAID's place-based programming will work with host nation authorities at municipal and national levels to integrate community-based efforts by combining targeted youth violence prevention efforts and law enforcement interventions, to actively address those most at risk of committing crime and those

already in conflict with the law. In partnership with the Government of Honduras, INL and USAID are beginning this effort in two of the most violent neighborhoods in San Pedro Sula, with the goal of lowering homicide rates. In the coming months, INL and USAID will analyze the data we have from the Honduran neighborhoods, and then work with local governments to identify the key places and people to target for additional place-based programming in El Salvador and Guatemala.

INL will also continue to work with host nations to expand one of our most successful programs in the region, the Model Police Precincts (MPPs) program, and ensure its sustainability through adoption of key national policies and – eventually – budget support. MPPs emphasize community engagement and crime prevention through the use of intelligence gathering, targeted investigations, and community involvement. In areas where INL has established MPPs in coordination with local police authorities, we have seen an average 10 percent reduction in crime rates. In the Santa Ana municipality of El Salvador, for example, violent crime rates dropped approximately 60% between 2011 when the project began and 2013. Much of this decrease can be attributed to intelligence-led policing efforts coupled with engagement with civil society to determine that the majority of violent crimes were being committed by a small number of individuals. INL currently supports 23 MPPs in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize. Due to their success in instilling trust between local police and the community and lowering neighborhood crime rates, INL plans to work with national governments to roll out MPPs throughout the region. In Guatemala, for example, the program would increase the number of operational MPP's from the 8 we have currently to approximately 100 by 2018 - expanding them further into some of the most challenging places in the region. In order to make these expansions sustainable, we will also work with national legislatures and relevant ministries to establish a blueprint for adoption of relevant policies and, eventually, budget support for the MPP model.

Another successful program which we hope to expand further is the Gang Resistance Education, and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program, which sends police officers into schools to teach children and young adults life skills and the ability to resist the pressures to join gangs or engage in other risky behaviors. A longitudinal impact study for G.R.E.A.T. in Central America is scheduled for 2015. Seeing police officers as positive role models in a safe setting helps these young children build positive relationships and lasting trust with law enforcement that will transfer into the larger community over time. To date, over 100,000 young people have graduated from G.R.E.A.T. programs in Central America. School administrators

often cite improved student behavior on campus, and more often than not each graduation ceremony includes testimony from students about how the officers and the program have changed their attitudes and their view of their future.

In addition to traditional law enforcement support, we are increasingly focused on supporting wider rule of law programming to help support judicial institutions and address the ongoing problems of impunity and lack of transparency. We will increase the number of Resident Legal Advisors (RLAs) in the region to focus on reducing the impunity rates for violent offenders and ensuring adequate legal frameworks are in place to efficiently and effectively prosecute criminals. We are actively partnered with the Government of El Salvador on asset forfeiture and anti-money laundering legislation and prosecution capability. These types of reforms – laws on the books – are necessary for sustainable change.

Within corrections systems, INL provides technical assistance for critical reforms. We are developing regional models in Costa Rica and El Salvador to secure these locations more effectively and ensure that criminal enterprises are not run from inside prison walls, while allowing for rehabilitation and reintegration services that will lower recidivism rates. We also are in ongoing discussion with the Government of Honduras regarding a forthcoming prison reform law.

We are also focused on addressing gender-based and family violence, which contribute to the high rates of violence and homicide throughout Central America. INL programs, in close coordination with partners at USAID, will provide complementary assistance to address these challenges. Last year, a group of prosecutors, judges, and doctors, selected by the President of Costa Rica's Supreme Court, attended a Gender Based Violence (GBV) INL training in the United States. Upon their return, participants quickly acted on what they had learned in training. As a result, they recommended creating a specialized unit to help victims of sexual assault, launching a national campaign to promote awareness and prevention of sexual assault and domestic violence, and called for a national congress to provide train-the-trainer workshops for 450 people to combat gender-based and domestic violence.

Through continued support for law enforcement training, regional aviation, and vetted units, INL is also focused on promoting reforms to establish new relationships between police forces and the public they serve and improving the capacity of law enforcement to combat transnational organized crime. We will expand efforts to professionalize and reform police departments through modern

policing techniques, to include a focus on community policing and the use of technology such as Complaint Statistics (COMPSTAT), an electronic tool that allows police to make informed, targeted responses to crime. We also started a pilot program to expand the Honduran criminal records data base (NACMIS) to five official border checkpoints. Since November 2014, this program has led to the arrest of 34 individuals wanted for a variety of crimes and once it is connected to all Honduran border posts, we expect these results to multiply. Lastly, INL will continue to build its regional aviation platform in Central America to extend state presence to remote areas and improve capacity for law enforcement operations to address international drug trafficking and transnational organized crime.

INL support for vetted units in the region has been crucial to the removal of transnational crime leaders and organizations. INL supports vetted units in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Belize, Costa Rica, and Panama. Members of these units are often the best of the police force; officers who focus on specialized areas such as counternarcotics, violent crimes, and financial crimes. The work of these units is essential to reducing the power and influence of these sophisticated transnational criminal organizations, which are responsible for promoting much of the growth in violence and corruption of public officials in the region that undermines security and governance. Recently, these vetted units have seen notable success in taking down large transnational criminal organizations and, in some cases, extraditing their leaders to the United States. In Honduras, INL-supported vetted units are responsible for the arrests and in some cases extraditions of key members of the Los Valle drug organization, the arrest of drug kingpin Carlos Arnoldo Lobo, and the seizure of \$800 million in assets from the Los Cachiros criminal organization. In Guatemala, an INL-supported vetted unit arrested the head of the Monje Alien Smuggling Organization (MASO) along with a high-ranking corrupt police official who was enabling this organization's trafficking of vulnerable Guatemalans across the Mexican border. Collectively, vetted units also saw record seizures of over 35 metric tons of cocaine in 2014 throughout the region. With FY 2016 funding, INL plans to continue work with host government and U.S. interagency partners, to provide training, equipment, mentoring and vetting support to these units.

Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member Lowey, and Members of the Subcommittee, we are committed to working with our neighbors in Central America to influence significant and positive change in the region. Governance and prosperity require a secure environment in which to flourish. Likewise, security will only be sustainable in an environment where democratic institutions flourish, human rights are protected, and citizens enjoy economic opportunity. We

need all three: prosperity, governance, and security. While the task at hand is incredibly challenging, INL is well-positioned to expand on our progress in the region, partner with the interagency, and work in alignment with host nations to effect systemic and positive change in Central America's security environment.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss INL's work in Central America and our role in the ambitious action strategy for the region. I look forward to your questions.