



Chairwoman Barbara Lee
Subcommittee on Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Hearing: U.S. International Assistance to Combat Narcotics Trafficking
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As Prepared

Drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking are problems which have profound impacts on all sectors of all countries worldwide. As a former psychiatric social worker, I witnessed first-hand the devastating effects that drug addiction and trafficking have on loved ones, colleagues, and communities. While each of our districts are different, the sad fact is that one common problem is the growing number of our constituents overdosing on opioids. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Health Statistics, more than 105,000 Americans died due to a drug overdose between October 2020 and October 2021, an increase of nearly 30 percent from the prior year. The most abused illicit substances in my district are heroin and prescription opioids. The district registered an increase in opioid overdose deaths of 40 percent from 2019 to 2020, largely driven by fentanyl. On average, emergency medical services respond to about four overdoses in Alameda County per day.

I know Ranking Member Rogers knows these statistics all too well. He has long been a leader in Congress on combating the opioid public health emergency and has worked with both Republicans and Democrats to expand treatment options, reduce the supply, and develop alternatives for life-saving efforts for those impacted by the epidemic. I commend him for his work and look forward to working with him to strengthen our efforts to comprehensively address this problem.

I also commend the Biden-Harris Administration for actions taken to address the addiction and overdose epidemic. The Administration recently proposed \$42.5 billion in fiscal year 2023 for national drug control program agencies. The increased funding will support a comprehensive whole-of-government approach to drug reduction, which includes the expansion of evidence-based prevention and treatment, harm reduction, and recovery support services. It also includes an increase in funding for international efforts to reduce the supply of illicit drugs like fentanyl and combat drug trafficking. This is where the State and Foreign Operations budget comes in.

Last December, President Biden stated that “international drug trafficking – including the illicit production, global sale, and widespread distribution of illegal drugs, the rise of extremely potent drugs such as fentanyl and other synthetic opioids; as well as the growing role of Internet-based



drug sales – constitutes an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States.” He went on to say that transnational criminal organizations, and their facilitators are the “primary sources of illicit drugs and precursor chemicals that fuel the current opioid epidemic, as well as drug-related violence that harms our communities.”

Part of any comprehensive approach to combating the illicit drug problem and strengthening our national security is assisting partner governments to both reduce the supply of, and demand for, illicit drugs. For the United States, this means working with key global partners, such as China, Colombia, and Mexico, to curb illicit drug production and trafficking in a manner that upholds the rule of law, respects human rights, protects the environment, and promotes licit and equitable economic opportunity. It means that we are using all of our tools to tackle this problem including law enforcement, providing alternative livelihoods and economic development, and supporting vulnerable individuals that are both caught up in, and exploited by, drug trafficking networks.

Our witness today is at the forefront of the State Department’s work in this area. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Walsh, along with his colleagues at the State Department and USAID, are responsible for nearly \$439 million in assistance proposed in the President’s fiscal year 2023 budget for drug reduction activities. I am hopeful that today’s hearing will help us better understand—

- (1) the evolving drug trafficking landscape;
- (2) the link between the illicit drug trade, transnational criminal organizations, and corruption;
- (3) how international assistance supports the Administration’s over all drug reduction strategy;
- (4) How you coordinate with other federal agencies in implementing the President’s whole-of- government drug reduction strategy;
- (5) what metrics are being used to measure the success of the programs; and
- (6) what steps are being taken to ensure the protection of human rights, indigenous communities, and the environment.