

Testimony of Elizabeth Hogan
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U.S. Agency for International Development
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“The Future of U.S. – Mexico Relations”

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, and members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today. I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) contributions to the Merida Initiative and to receive your advice.

It is an honor to testify with my colleagues from the State Department, Assistant Secretaries Roberta Jacobson and William Brownfield. Collaboration among our bureaus has never been stronger.

Mr. Chairman, as underscored in our new mission statement, across the globe USAID is partnering to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies. Our best partners in this effort are democratic societies – mature governments, active civil societies and dynamic private sectors – because their commitment to growing their economies and investing in their people makes our investments go farther. We have these partners in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the impressive progress over the past several decades has enabled USAID to shift our development approach away from providing direct assistance and toward strengthening countries’ capacity to provide for their own people. Today, we serve primarily as partners and catalysts for the Mexican government, private sector and civil society to address the country’s biggest challenges and ultimately lead their own development.

In Mexico, as in the rest of the region, USAID is increasingly focused on helping the region’s governments promote the rule of law and reduce crime and violence, while furthering respect for human rights. This is a matter of national security for the United States, as my colleagues have just noted, as well as an economic and political imperative for the affected countries. Continued insecurity is a severe drain on private and public investment in the Americas, a leading constraint to economic growth in some countries, and is also arguably the greatest threat to democracy in the affected countries.

In Mexico, USAID’s collaboration with the Government on rule of law and citizen security has three principal goals: to improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system; strengthen the capacity of communities to reduce crime and violence; and promote the protection

of human rights. To achieve these goals, we operate in a genuine partnership. Every one of our programs is designed, developed and implemented jointly with our Mexican counterparts. Our activities are coordinated with the State Department and other U.S. agencies to make for a comprehensive approach to strengthening rule of law and reducing crime.

Six years ago, Mexico began a legal transition from the written inquisitorial criminal justice system to the more open and transparent oral, adversarial system. USAID's support to that transition at the national level and in 12 of the 31 Mexican states ranges from helping to develop on new legislation, policies and regulations to training judges, prosecutors, public defenders, and investigative police in operating under the new criminal justice system. We also work with our colleagues at the Department of Justice's to provide support to the Mexican Government in this transition. We are also helping the Mexican government to create and strengthen institutions essential to the reform, such as building the capacity of internal training units, victims' assistance centers, and pretrial services units. To prepare the next generation of Mexican lawyers and judges to effectively perform their functions under the new criminal justice system, we are assisting Mexico's leading bar associations in promoting professional standards and development, and more than 200 law schools in curriculum reform and teacher-training.

This year, we plan to expand our support and assistance for the implementation of the new criminal justice system nationwide, initially focusing on 20 states. This will allow USAID to continue its training programs and technical assistance, while helping the Government of Mexico share best practices and lessons learned between and among states at various stages of reform implementation. Our programs complement Mexico's substantial investments to support the reform process, which includes building new courtrooms, providing infrastructure and staffing and expanding training and capacity development.

The transition to the new criminal justice system is already producing positive results. Evaluations of the states that have advanced the reforms found a significant decrease in acquittal rates, a marked decrease in length of pretrial detentions, longer sentences assigned for serious crimes, reduced case backlogs, and better services and assistance for victims.

Strengthening Mexico's justice sector institutions is vital to ensuring that crimes are properly investigated, the accused are treated fairly, and the guilty appropriately sentenced. Ideally, however, we can help avert youth having to enter the legal process in the first place. Like its neighbors, Mexico has embraced preventative actions to reduce crime and violence, such as economic investments in communities and social programs designed for youth most susceptible to engaging in criminal activity. In February 2013, President Enrique Pena Nieto launched a national crime prevention strategy, with funding commitments totaling \$9 billion

from the Government of Mexico. They now are moving to implement this strategy nationwide, and USAID is supporting this effort.

To support the Mexican government's crime reduction efforts, we are piloting innovative prevention approaches in three of the border cities most affected by narco-related violence and other criminal activity: Ciudad Juarez, Monterrey and Tijuana. In each city, we are partnering with local organizations and drawing on international expertise to develop new models for safe urban spaces, providing life and job skills for at-risk-youth, increasing educational opportunities, improving the capacity of all levels of government to keep citizens safe, and empowering communities to address the root causes of crime and violence. We will jointly evaluate the effectiveness of these activities this summer with the Mexican government as it works towards broader application across the country. With this evaluation, we will help the Mexican government build on and replicate the most successful interventions.

One of the keys to success of our Merida activities has been the extent to which the private sector has already contributed to our programs and partnered with us. To raise additional resources and ensure that job training provides skills that employers are looking for, we have partnered with companies like Cisco, Intel, Prudential, and CEMEX, Mexico's global construction company, to train youth from tough neighborhoods for jobs in the growing fields of technology and construction.

We are also helping to spur economic activity in poor communities across Mexico by opening up affordable financing via our Development Credit Authority. For instance, a 2013 partnership between USAID, the Mexican financial institution, Velfin, and Credit Suisse, unlocked \$60 million in private capital for local job creators -- small and medium businesses. Another example of our new development approach is our Cleantech Challenge Mexico (CTCM), which through USAID support seeks to promote the development of the clean technology industry in Mexico. Since 2010, CTCM has contributed to the creation of over 190 new clean technology companies and 2,500 "green" jobs, and the filing of 141 new clean technology patents.

To truly ensure the sustainability of our efforts, we are increasingly supporting local organizations to reduce crime and violence in Mexican communities. Such organizations as the Chihuahuan Business Foundation and Citizens Committed to Peace are embedded in their communities, providing educational and professional counseling services to vulnerable youth and their families in high crime communities within Ciudad Juarez, Monterrey, and Tijuana. To date, these projects have collectively supported over 17,000 at-risk Mexican youth.

We are also supporting the efforts of Mexican social entrepreneurs to discover and expand the best ideas for creating productive opportunities for at risk youth and their communities. Recently, USAID Administrator Shah met with his counterparts in Mexico, awarding \$800,000 dollars in innovation grants, as part of the Agency's science, technology, innovation, and partnership efforts, to entrepreneurs seeking to improve living standards, expand job training, and increase the incomes of marginalized groups.

The crime and violence prevention approaches that we and our Mexican counterparts draw upon were developed throughout the region, including the United States, where major cities have achieved dramatic reductions in crime in the past two decades. For instance, through a 2012 agreement with the City of Los Angeles, USAID has been sharing that city's proven gang reduction and youth development tools with officials in Mexico, as well as in Central America. The tools used by Los Angeles to identify the youth most at-risk of recruitment to violent activity are now being adopted by the Monterrey municipal government and adapted to its local context. Monterrey officials are also considering implementing proven interventions piloted by Los Angeles, such as late evening or weekend activities for at-risk youth.

Our efforts to advance prevention by reaching and providing viable alternatives to Mexican youth are already bearing fruit. For example, one of our programs focused on employability engaged 8,900 at-risk youth in employment and education activities and approximately 70 percent of the participants have re-enrolled in school or gained employment, while 88 percent of youth participating in summer camps also re-enrolled in school. The nine focus communities identified by the Mexican government and USAID have all developed locally-driven community master plans, which will be used by communities to make the best use of limited local resources for targeted interventions to address crime and violence in that community.

Through the Merida Initiative, USAID is helping the Mexican government to protect journalists and human rights defenders and others who expose crime and corruption. Together we are benefiting from lessons learned from nearly a decade of investments to enhance similar protection mechanisms in Colombia, and helping the Mexican government to apply those lessons. During the recent Bilateral Human Rights Dialogue in April which I attended, we discussed many areas of cooperation on human rights. Since then, we are pleased that the Protection Mechanism for Journalists and Human Rights Defenders has taken very concrete steps to improve its operations and better respond to the safety concerns of journalists and human rights defenders across the country. In addition, over the last two years, USAID trained more than 200 Mexican journalists and human rights professionals on practices, tools and technologies

to protect themselves and their work, and we plan to continue to partner with the Mexican government to further advance and protect freedom of expression.

Citizen activism is critical to raising awareness and mobilizing action on the defense of human rights. So we are collaborating with Mexican organizations on campaigns to prevent torture, while supporting the implementation of the Mexican government's human rights reforms, including a groundbreaking Constitutional Reform that strengthens Mexico's human rights commission and elevates the country's international human rights commitments to the same level as their national laws. USAID has trained 270 government officials and civil society representatives on the Constitutional reform and their corresponding roles and responsibilities.

We are encouraged by many of the steps that Mexico has taken to reduce crime and violence. But we also recognize that defeating the powerful cartels and reducing other factors that contribute to crime will take time. We are prepared to continue to partner with the Mexican government, private sector and civil society for as long as they need our assistance. Their success will make both our countries safer and more prosperous.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.