

**Statement of Ambassador Brian A. Nichols Assistant Secretary of State for
Western Hemisphere Affairs Before the
House Committee on Foreign Relations
“Overview of U.S. Priorities in the Western Hemisphere: Opportunities,
Challenges and the Path Ahead”
February 3, 2022**

Chairman Meeks, Ranking Member McCaul, Distinguished Members of the Committee, I welcome the opportunity to testify regarding the Administration’s priorities in the Western Hemisphere.

This is a pivotal moment for our Hemisphere. President Biden will host the Ninth Summit of the Americas on June 6th to 10th in Los Angeles. As the only meeting of leaders from across the Americas, the Summit serves as the most important forum to address our region’s shared challenges and opportunities. The Ninth Summit marks the first time the United States will host the event since the inaugural gathering in Miami in 1994.

The theme of the Ninth Summit -- “Building a Sustainable, Resilient, and Equitable Future” -- represents a shared vision developed with the region’s governments, civil society, and private sector.

The Summit will produce concrete outcomes, including in responding to the pandemic, building strong and inclusive democracies, addressing irregular migration, and increasing equity and inclusion, including by countering corruption. We will also seize opportunities to promote greener economies and accelerate the clean energy transition.

The people of the Americas want effective and accountable governance. Input from civil society, the business community, and marginalized groups will help ensure our Summit priorities respond to the needs of all our hemisphere’s citizens. Our efforts will place a particular focus on supporting the nations of Caribbean, which face grave risks from climate change.

Respect for democracy and human rights underpins our foreign policy in the Americas. We will build on the commitments made in December 2021 at the Summit for Democracy. Twenty-seven Western Hemisphere countries participated in that Summit. We will work with Hemispheric leaders to fulfill the promise of the first Summit for Democracy and transform 2022 into a “Year of Action,” as we

come together for the Summit of the Americas and ahead of Summit for Democracy II.

Twenty years after approval of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, we have more work to do to strengthen democracy in the region. Too many ordinary citizens have seen their governments fail to meet their aspirations for a better future. As we have seen too many times, governance failures put countries on a dangerous path that can ultimately put democracy itself at risk.

As we work to build a more democratic and inclusive Americas, we know that nations from outside our region seek to undermine democracy, exploit national resources, evade sanctions, and leverage state-dominated businesses to extend their malign influence. Using the full range of policy tools, we will put forward accessible alternatives to ensure that partner nations can choose their own democratic and free-market path forward without submitting to outside pressure.

The Administration's Build Back Better World (B3W) Initiative will play an important part in the region's recovery, promoting the highest labor, environmental, social, and technical standards. Transparent, sustainable investments that respond to our partners' infrastructure needs will provide a strong foundation for their societies to grow and prosper. The B3W initiative will help demonstrate that democracies can deliver for their people.

Once again, Haiti struggles with grave humanitarian and security challenges, as well as political turmoil. Authoritarian regimes still oppress people in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. In northern Central America, we see an erosion of democratic norms and institutions. We will redouble our efforts to address those challenges. In a hopeful sign, following an election with record voter turnout, Vice President Harris led a delegation to the January 27 inauguration of President Xiomara Castro in Honduras, where we will help the new government deliver on the aspirations of the country's voters and strengthen democratic principles.

We place our commitment to diversity and inclusion at the center of our efforts. In Colombia, we have invested unprecedented resources to promote racial and ethnic inclusion, including the launch of a \$60 million USAID program that will support economic, political, and social inclusion -- the largest program of its kind in the world. We and our Colombian partners agreed to resume our dialogue on the U.S.-Colombia Action Plan for Racial and Ethnic Equality (CAPREE). Our next meeting will focus on advancing implementation of the Peace Accord's Ethnic Chapter.

Our U.S.-Brazil Global Human Rights Working Group will include multilateral and bilateral engagements on the rights of People of African Descent and Indigenous Peoples.

The 2021 Roadmap for a Renewed U.S.-Canada Partnership calls for support for underserved communities and advancing diversity and inclusion. President Biden and his Canadian and Mexican counterparts agreed during the November 2021 North American Leaders' Summit to a North American Partnership for Racial Equity and Inclusion and to advance the Trilateral Working Group on Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls. They also pledged a trilateral commitment to the Global Equality Fund to protect LGBTQ+ human rights.

Chairman Meeks and Ranking Member McCaul, thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions. Thank you.