

**Statement of Ambassador Todd D. Robinson**  
**Assistant Secretary of State for**  
**International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs**  
**Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee**  
**“Overview of U.S. Priorities in the Western Hemisphere: Opportunities,**  
**Challenges and the Path Ahead”**  
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Chairman Meeks, Ranking Member McCaul, distinguished Members of the Committee; thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. The complex threats across the Western Hemisphere have a significant impact on the United States’ national security and economic prosperity. The Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) works closely with our State Department and interagency colleagues to combat international crime in the Western Hemisphere by bolstering the rule of law, uprooting corruption, strengthening the capacity to confront transnational criminal organizations, and deterring the production and trafficking of illicit drugs. To do this, we partner with governments and civil society organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean to modernize and professionalize their law enforcement, judicial, and correctional institutions, while supporting reform efforts to ensure that human rights are respected.

**INL Support for Holistic Criminal Justice Reform**

INL’s diplomacy and foreign assistance programs have evolved beyond our original drug supply reduction role to engage the entire spectrum of our international partners’ criminal justice institutions. INL now works with law enforcement, judges, prosecutors, forensics experts, and correctional institutions. All links in this criminal justice chain need resiliency to prevent sophisticated trafficking organizations from exploiting the weakest link. INL works closely with the Department of Justice, including the Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training (OPDAT) and the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Department of Homeland Security, and other interagency partners, as well as with international organizations, civil society, the private sector, and U.S. state and local experts to promote fair, efficient, transparent, and accountable criminal justice systems capable of preventing, investigating, and sanctioning international crime.

## **Corruption: A Key Contributor to Democratic Backsliding**

Endemic corruption erodes trust in institutions and democracy, and enables authoritarianism, crime, and violence throughout the Western Hemisphere, providing incentives to corrupt government actors to allow drug trafficking and other organized criminal groups to operate within their jurisdictions. Drug trafficking and organized crime undermine the democratic process, national security, the rule of law, and licit economies, contributing to democratic backsliding in the region. President Biden has prioritized the need to counter corruption and protect and reinvigorate democracy both at home and abroad. INL works with countries across the region to build their capacity to fight cycles of corruption; however, we recognize some governments lack the capacity, and in some cases, the political will to tackle the problem. Corruption fuels democratic backsliding in the region, facilitating the emergence of authoritarian leaders and undermining the independence of institutions.

We need to work with governments to make real inroads, but we cannot want this more than they do. As Secretary Blinken previously testified, we will work with NGOs and civil society, communities and international organizations, and the private sector where appropriate, to garner a diversity of expertise and experience to tackle our core priorities more effectively. We will work with these non-governmental partners, including in countries where we lack an appropriate government partner, to empower them and effect change where possible. We address this shared challenge, as well as our commitment to fighting corruption, in our own United States Strategy on Countering Corruption issued in December.

In Nicaragua, under the authoritarian regime of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo, government attacks on the free press are a daily occurrence. INL helps independent media and journalists carry out data-driven investigations into issues of crime, corruption, and transparency. INL partners' reporting exposes the regime's corruption and human rights abuses and informs Nicaraguans of ways the ruling party manipulates them. INL also engages with civil society organizations in Nicaragua to strengthen the rule of law, keep youth out of gangs, and address gender-based violence.

In Venezuela, the cycle of crime and corruption has eroded the democratic process, the economy, and security. To increase international attention to the problem, INL brings together justice sector and policy officials from partner countries to drive substantive conversations and information exchanges on Venezuela-based criminal organizations, illegal drug and gold trafficking, and

kleptocracy and financial crimes. These exchanges not only serve to increase countries' understanding of criminal trends coming from Venezuela, but also result in increased action to hold the Maduro regime and criminal actors operating in Venezuelan territory accountable for their crimes.

## **Financial Crime**

Criminal organizations use the traditional financial system, informal value transfer systems including cryptocurrency, and bulk cash smuggling to move illicit proceeds. To strengthen international capacities to deter, detect, and disrupt illicit finance, INL provides support to strengthen anti-money laundering capacities of our partners in line with international standards. Our assistance efforts strengthen the capacity of financial intelligence units, law enforcement authorities, and other relevant authorities, to collect and share financial information, as well as to provide case-based mentoring on financial crime investigations. INL programs also promote and help support full compliance with Financial Action Task Force standards on both technical compliance and effective implementation. Beyond this, our programs address combating the most utilized methodologies and emerging risks, including the risks and benefits of emerging technologies targeting the movement of money and other assets across illicit markets, and aim to enhance financial investigative capacity and cooperation in beneficiary countries.

INL has provided over \$10 million to promote effective justice systems and counter illicit finance networks to disrupt transnational and complex crime in the Caribbean. Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI)-funded technical assistance increased the use of counter-financial crime measures in the Caribbean, including the passage and implementation of civil asset recovery legislation in six countries. Through this legislation, CBSI partner nations successfully recovered \$2.7 million in cash since 2016 with another \$3 million cash forfeiture pending, froze \$64.5 million in property, and reinvested these assets to strengthen criminal justice sector institutions.

## **Using Foreign Assistance to Address International Crime and Support Reform in Law Enforcement Agencies**

In Central America, INL support for rule of law programming remains a priority under the Root Causes Strategy. The United States encourages justice sector authorities in northern Central America to recognize the deficit in citizens' trust in institutions to deliver trustworthy investigations and prosecutions, and ensure credible, independent judicial investigations into crime. We continue to

support civil society and watchdog groups in their efforts to expose poor law enforcement practices, advocate for justice, and support anticorruption reforms in their countries, as no one understands these challenges better than those whose livelihoods suffer because of it.

INL supports law enforcement reform through police professionalization, anticorruption training and community-based policing support, and supports specialized and vetted units that conduct complex investigations, anti-gang initiatives, anti-money laundering operations, cyber-enabled crimes, and financial crimes. We have invested in programs to stand up internal affairs sections and reform human resources practices and hiring. For example, as part of our efforts to support the transformation of the Dominican National Police, we have improved their technology platform resulting in significant progress in the management of human resources, improved oversight and discipline, and advances in the police education and training systems. INL also launched a police academy support grant to assist Caribbean police forces with assessing and modernizing their recruit basic training, recruitment practices, in-service training requirements, career tracks, and pursue accreditation through international law enforcement bodies.

In Colombia, INL supports efforts to expand the presence, reach, and professional capacity of the police in rural areas – fundamental to implementing the peace accords, ensuring citizen security, and reducing the flow of illicit narcotics. INL also supports institutional reform within the Colombian National Police by raising its education standards, accelerating deployment processes, and incorporating human rights, diversity, and inclusion principles into police education, protocols, and processes.

In Haiti, weak institutions and pervasive corruption contribute to proliferation of gang violence, including kidnappings for ransom and control of critical, public infrastructure. Gang violence has become the primary security concern in Haiti and continues to grow as Haitian gangs expand their influence and geographic presence: gangs control nearly 50 percent of metropolitan Port-au-Prince and have begun expanding into less urban areas. We see increasingly aggressive tactics, such as the kidnapping of American citizens, and control of transport routes leading to fuel scarcity throughout the country. In November, I visited Haiti to assess the immediate security situation, and to emphasize the need to strengthen police anti-gang capabilities while ensuring police and correctional officer accountability, respect for human rights, and transparency. I am grateful for this Committee's support as we provide additional embedded advisors, training, vehicles, and protective equipment for Haitian police units countering gangs.

## **Supporting Key Regional Partners in the Western Hemisphere**

In environments where we can effectively partner with central governments, INL develops the professional capacity of police, prosecutors, judges, and forensics and corrections officials to help create strong, transparent democratic institutions. In coordination with the Department of Justice (DOJ), we mentor law enforcement and justice counterparts throughout the region, including in Colombia, Central America, and Mexico. INL trains judicial actors, improves compliance with international standards, and promotes accountability in justice systems.

Our shared border with Mexico facilitates over \$1.8 billion in trade per day and supports hundreds of thousands of jobs on both sides of the border. Criminals in both countries seek to exploit it. Interim data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show more than 60 percent of the over 100,000 Americans who died of a drug overdose between June 2020 and June 2021 involved a synthetic opioid, most of which originated or flowed through Mexico. On October 8, 2021, I joined our U.S. delegation to the High-Level Security Dialogue with Mexico to establish a new security cooperation agreement: the U.S.- Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities. Through the new framework, we advance three shared goals: 1) Protect our People, 2) Prevent Transborder Crime, and 3) Pursue Criminal Networks. The new framework adopts the Biden Administration's drug policy priorities and sets the stage for a more comprehensive approach to advance the security and well-being of both countries, including through strategic actions to address drug addiction through a public health lens, reduce the trafficking of weapons, prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals for illicit drug production such as fentanyl and methamphetamines, and disrupt transnational criminal organizations and their illicit financial networks.

In Colombia, INL provides significant support in coordination with our DOJ partners to mentor elite cadres of specialized Colombian prosecutors who tackle Colombia's most high-profile cases, many of which involve public corruption. In Peru, INL provided training to all justices on the National Anticorruption Court who then utilized this knowledge to train other judges in regional anticorruption courts throughout Peru. With INL's support, Peru's Attorney General's office intends to implement anti-bribery standards in several key units, including the newly created Integrity Office. Supporting efforts to improve judicial compliance with international standards increases citizen's trust and create an effective judicial check and balance on other government branches.

In Central America, INL targets assistance to willing partners and trusted institutions to build successful security programs. For example, Costa Rica works closely with INL to implement aspects of the “Sembremos Seguridad” community policing project to increase security and confidence in the police. In Honduras, INL has provided standardized training in basic and advanced prosecutorial skills to approximately 1,000 prosecutors as well as courses on handling corruption cases for specialized prosecutors. In Panama, a new INL-supported Anti-Money Laundering and Anticorruption Taskforce brings all Panamanian agencies involved in money laundering, terrorism financing, transnational economic crimes, and corruption together in one building to work with U.S. law enforcement agencies to conduct complex investigations with the goal of successfully prosecuting cases to reduce money laundering and corruption.

Recent data suggests traffickers and criminals are increasing use of Caribbean routes to move narcotics to the United States, often facilitated by corruption. In the Caribbean, INL partners with regional institutions to find regional solutions to regional problems. Drug and firearms trafficking, corruption and money laundering, and maritime crimes affect all Caribbean nations. INL leverages relationships with organizations like CARICOM IMPACS, the Regional Security System, and our bilateral partners to increase maritime capabilities, improve criminal justice systems, and strengthen port security throughout the region.

## **Deterrence Tools**

To complement and reinforce our diplomacy and assistance, INL also works with interagency counterparts to employ targeted sanctions and deterrence tools to combat high-level corruption, democratic backsliding, and international crime. INL manages two rewards programs targeting high-level drug traffickers and other transnational criminal leaders which have helped our law enforcement partners bring more than 75 international major violators to justice. INL manages two anticorruption visa restriction authorities, and, in close cooperation with the Department of the Treasury, supports application of the anti-corruption prong of the Global Magnitsky sanctions program, as well as actions taken under the Kingpin Act and the recently signed Executive Order 14059, imposing sanctions on foreign persons involved in the illicit drug trade. INL also coordinates with relevant partners to update the report required by Section 353 of the United States – Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act, also known as the Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors List.

## **Multilateral Engagement**

In addition to our assistance programs and deterrence tools, INL supports the Department's multilateral efforts. The Summit for Democracy reinforced the importance of democratic values and reasserted America's role as the leader of democratic nations. Acknowledging the threat that corruption and international crime pose to democracy, the Summit served as a platform to discuss and coordinate with partners, from a diverse group of democracies around the world, opportunities to reduce its corrosive effects. In particular, the Summit gave us the opportunity to advance U.S. security priorities and announce our own commitments to renew democracy and get our own house in order, including shutting down safe havens for corrupt actors and their ill-gotten gains; increasing our partners' capacity to prevent and combat corruption and international crime; and improving our ability to respond decisively to opportunities and threats to partner governments facing corruption and crime related challenges. Those who attended the Summit also announced commitments to combat kleptocracy and foreign bribery, and promote the role of civil society, independent media and journalists, and the private sector in these efforts.

We will continue to work on these and with countries to uphold their commitments throughout the Year of Action and in advance of Summit II. Similarly, we will reinforce these and other commitments to democracy and transparency when President Biden hosts the Ninth Summit of the Americas in June of this year. During this Summit, we propose leaders adopt an inter-American action plan on democratic governance, identifying concrete actions to implement our shared commitments on democracy, transparent governance and good regulatory practices, anticorruption, human rights, rule of law, diversity, gender, racial, and ethnic equity, and social inclusion emanating from our regional and global commitments and the Summit for Democracy. Committing to democracy in these summits will solidify and confirm our approach to defending and supporting democratic governance throughout the region.

## **Conclusion**

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, my testimony has focused on the work of INL, but let me end by reiterating an important point: we need political will from our partners to confront transnational crime and modernize criminal justice systems in our hemisphere. Even the best resourced and planned U.S. foreign policy intervention cannot succeed without partners equally committed to

addressing these challenges. Governments must own their efforts to enact reforms and disrupt criminal networks.

Our assistance programs can nudge countries in the right direction, but long-term progress to combat international crime and modernize criminal justice systems in the Western Hemisphere must come from our partners. To mobilize political will for further reforms, the United States must continue to engage civil society and public audiences. Partner governments accountable to their citizens who value contributions from civil society have much greater resiliency against corruption, drug trafficking, and other criminal threats. However, the United States is not immune to these challenges and we must work to reduce our own vulnerabilities, such as the demand for illicit drugs. By holding ourselves and our partners accountable, we give greater credibility to our public messaging and increase our appeal as a partner.