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**"U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation: An Overview of the Merida Initiative 2008 - Present"**

Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sires, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your today. I am grateful for the Subcommittee's interest in the U.S. Agency for International Development's contribution to the Merida Initiative and pleased to have this opportunity to hear your advice and counsel.

It is also an honor to testify alongside my colleagues from the State Department, Ambassador William Brownfield and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary John Feeley. Collaboration among our agencies in support of Mexico and the Merida Initiative continues to be strong.

Mr. Chairman, the impressive progress in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) over the past several decades has enabled USAID to completely shift our development approach away from providing direct assistance and toward strengthening countries' capacity to provide for their own people. While our relationship with Mexico has been a bit different than in other parts of the region, today our joint cooperation serves as a catalyst for the Mexican government, private sector and civil society to improve their ability to address the country's biggest challenges and ultimately lead their own development.

USAID considers insecurity related to high levels of crime and violence in Mexico to be a grave threat to the remarkable development advances of recent decades. Cartels and criminal groups have diversified in recent years, expanding beyond drug trafficking and into extortion, kidnapping, murder and other crimes that adversely affect people's lives. Analyses in LAC countries indicate that high levels of crime and violence are a leading constraint to economic growth, because it discourages investment and diverts resources away from productive investments to security.

While reducing crime and violence requires a range of tools, the Government of Mexico (GOM) is increasingly embracing community-based prevention programs and investments in

youth as a central part of their security strategy. USAID was honored to attend the formal launching of the GOM's crime prevention strategy in February 2013 which was presided over by President Enrique Pena Nieto. The ceremony coincided with the creation of a new interdisciplinary government commission to prevent crime and violence that will be led by the Governance Secretariat (SEGOB), with participation from seven other cabinet ministries and a \$9 billion commitment across ministries to prevent crime. The strategy is designed to be an integrated approach to crime prevention with an emphasis on social risk factors.

The crime and violence prevention component, Pillar IV, of the Merida Initiative is at the heart of USAID's work in Mexico. Since the inclusion of Pillar IV within the Merida Initiative in 2010, we have worked alongside the GOM and local communities to prevent crime and violence in communities that have been most effected by narco-trafficking, with a particular focus on at-risk youth. We do so by helping to create safe urban spaces for youth, provide life and job skills, increase access to educational opportunities, improve the ability of the government to keep citizens safe, and strengthen the capacity of communities to address the root causes of crime and violence. In all of these efforts, we work collaboratively with Mexican federal, state and local authorities. Our experience has demonstrated that when identifying the leading risk factors to crime and violence, process is often as important as product. Our projects have worked with our government counterparts at all three levels together with communities themselves to identify and address the leading causes of crime and violence, and to develop ways to measure the impact of our collective interventions.

To make the most of our resources and to accelerate progress in this area, we are embracing a new way of doing business.

We are targeting our assistance to have the greatest impact on the most people. Because communities along the U.S. – Mexico border are especially vulnerable to the inherent evils of drug trafficking, we are developing and testing models to reduce crime and violence in nine communities selected by the Government of Mexico in the cities of Ciudad Juarez, Monterrey and Tijuana. As we identify successful approaches, the GOM and the private sector are expected to bring them to scale in other parts of the country facing similar challenges.

We are tapping into the expertise of countries and cities that have successfully addressed gang violence and reduced crime. For instance, through an agreement signed last year with Los Angeles, USAID is sharing that city's successful gang reduction and youth development approaches with our partners in Mexico. In fact, earlier this month, a delegation from Mexico traveled to Los Angeles to participate in a conference about that city's successful experiences and visit the sites where gang reduction and youth development programs are showing results. We have also shared other U.S. experiences in crime prevention, such as the Cease Fire models employed in Chicago and Boston.

Across the globe, USAID is diversifying its lineup of implementing partners to include more local institutions. In Mexico, we are channeling more resources through home grown entities to test and expand successful Mexican innovations to prevent crime and productively engage youth. For example, in FY 12, we began working directly with five local organizations, including Fundacion IDEA, Alianza Heartland, Scouts of Mexico, the Chihuahuan Business Foundation and Citizens Committed to Peace to: create a network of local organizations to advance positive youth development nation-wide; provide educational and professional counseling services to 2,500 youth and their parents in Tijuana; set up after school programs for 2,200 young people; and offer support services to 8,000 youth and families affected by gang violence in Monterrey. We believe that these efforts will translate into more resilient communities in Mexico that are able to create more opportunities for at-risk youth, more efficient and effective utilization of resources and ultimately more sustainable development gains for Mexico.

We are also partnering more and more with the private sector to raise additional resources for prevention, as well as to make our efforts more sustainable. For instance, we are working with Intel and Prudential in the cities of Monterrey and Tijuana to train at-risk youth from tough neighborhoods for productive employment in the technology and construction fields.

Our effort to reach more at-risk youth is already bearing fruit. In Ciudad Juarez, approximately 88 percent of the youth who took advantage of our programs re-enrolled in middle school; in Tijuana, 60 percent of our enrollees have found internships or jobs upon program completion with 70% either back in school or employed six months after program completion; and the nine focus communities identified by the GOM and USAID have all developed

community-driven community master plans which will be used by communities to make the best use of limited local resources to make targeted interventions to address crime and violence in that community.

Because insecurity thrives in environments where corruption is rampant and impunity emboldens criminals, we are continuing our longstanding efforts, through Merida, to strengthen the institutions charged with ensuring that rule of law is served, human rights are respected and citizens feel secure.

We work closely with the Government of Mexico to help both the federal government and Mexican states transition from a closed written inquisitorial criminal justice system to a more open and transparent accusatorial one. A 2012 impact study conducted in five states (Chihuahua, State of Mexico, Morelos, Oaxaca, Zacatecas) implementing the reforms indicated that they were already having the desired effect. States reported a marked decrease in pretrial detentions, serious crimes received longer sentences, case backlog was reduced, and alternative dispute mechanisms and victims' assistance units were strengthened. Moreover, more than half of Mexico's 32 states have revised their criminal procedure codes to facilitate this shift. Mexico is scheduled to enact these reforms nationwide by 2016.

Human rights defenders of all stripes – journalists, citizen bloggers and activists -- are under increasing pressure from criminal elements in Mexico. Through Merida, we are supporting the government's efforts to prevent, protect and advocate for human rights. In 2012, we trained more than 150 journalists and human rights defenders on practices and technologies that can help protect them and their work. We are also supporting human rights training for federal and state police officials and the federal government's new victim assistance unit. This includes supporting master's degrees for 300 police in human rights and developing training curricula and videos that incorporate internationally recognized standards in human rights. In addition, we are partnering with local organizations on campaigns to prevent torture and support the implementation of human rights reforms, including a ground-breaking Constitutional Reform that elevates Mexico's international commitments in human rights to the same level as their national laws and strengthens its human rights commission.

Mr. Chairman, to be sure, we have faced some challenges in our efforts to implement Merida. When considering the transition of the criminal justice system, USAID and our partners initially focused on the thousands of justice sector operators that needed to be trained. After closer analysis, we shifted our focus beyond training to a more sustainable approach of strengthening Mexican institutions and working with our federal and state counterparts to create new institutions that are providing a range of services to victims and helping to resolve minor crimes through mediation. Our government and civic partners share our interest in focusing more directly on ways to bring citizens into the reform process by keeping them better informed about how they can access new justice services and the benefits of the accusatory system. We understand that a nation-wide transition to the new system by the 2016 constitutionally mandated deadline is ambitious, but we are encouraged by the political will of our partners, as well as the reform's increased momentum, and are well poised to amplify our focus and work with additional states to support the transition. Crime and violence prevention can be a challenging concept, but we are working closely with our counterparts who share our vision of developing civic prevention policies and programs that complement security policy. USAID and our federal counterparts understand that protecting citizens also means protecting their rights, and we are encouraged by the increasing bilateral focus on human rights, including USAID's portfolio that has expanded into areas previously considered too sensitive for bilateral cooperation.

The GOM has been a full partner in this endeavor. We credit the willingness of a range of ministries and administrations to work in equal partnership with us to address crime, support youth and strengthen the judicial sector via Merida, for the overall success of our efforts. Our main interlocutors housed in the Governance Secretariat including the U/S for Human Rights, the U/S for Crime and Violence Prevention, and SETEC, the GOM agency mandated to implement justice sector reform have all expressed their interest in not only continuing but expanding our close working relationship.

We look forward to continuing to partner with them as they press ahead with their reform agenda.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.