

**Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Juan Gonzalez
Before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
March 22, 2016**

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on “Border Security and Vulnerabilities in Latin America and the Caribbean.” It is an honor to appear before you with my distinguished colleagues from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Effective border management in Latin America and the Caribbean is a vital component of our economic prosperity and national security strategy in the Latin America and the Caribbean. Throughout the hemisphere, we are working with governments to eliminate trade barriers, integrate electricity grids and energy markets, connect national infrastructures, and cement commercial relationships. Our trillion-dollar trade relationship and the over three million American jobs supported by our economic relationship with Canada and Mexico bear testament to the benefits of collaboration between governments on border management.

Just as we promote the movement of goods and services, we are equally determined to safeguarding the homeland and to ensuring safe, legal, and orderly migration to the United States. From each of us today, you will hear about our whole-of-government efforts to collaborate with regional governments to face the significant and real threats of organized crime, drug trafficking, human smuggling, and terrorism. These include our major initiatives in Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Colombia, as well as our bilateral and regional programs that bring governments together to facilitate information sharing and develop best practices around customs, border management, and document fraud. I will highlight but a few in my testimony.

As the President and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau highlighted during the recent State visit, the United States and Canada partner closely to address threats at the border and throughout our countries. Together, we have taken important steps to ensure the security of our countries, prevent criminal and terrorist actors from exploiting legitimate trade and travel, and expand North American perimeter security. We actively share traveler information developed joint protocols to exchange information on those who present a clear threat, including exchanging our respective “No-Fly” lists. Additionally, Canada is completing the last phase of a coordinated entry and exit information system to

ensure the record of land and air entries into one country establishes an exit record from the other.

U.S.-Mexico cooperation on border management and migration issues is also excellent. Mexico is a strong partner with growing capabilities and a commitment to increasing efforts to regulate migration through Mexico. In his fourth visit to Mexico under this Administration, Vice President Joe Biden and Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto discussed ways to strengthen border security, facilitate legitimate commerce and travel, and reduce the flow of undocumented migration. Mexico is working to safely return migrants and to build capacity to repatriate Central American migrants. Through the Merida Initiative, the United States and Mexico have forged a multi-faceted partnership to strengthen Mexican institutions and enhance their ability to respond to security needs.

Mexico continues to bolster law enforcement efforts in locations where organized criminal groups have the highest interaction with migrants, in particular at its southern border and along common routes toward the United States. We support these efforts with more than \$130 million in fixed and mobile non-intrusive inspection equipment and small detection devices; canines to detect narcotics, explosives, weapons, and currency; and extensive training to Mexico's National Migration Institute in partnership with DHS. Mexico continues to increase the numbers of undocumented migrants it apprehends at its southern border and in the interior of Mexico.

On February 24, Vice President Biden also hosted Northern Triangle Presidents from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to review our joint efforts to address the region's security and development challenges. The three Presidents reaffirmed their commitment to continue awareness campaigns about the risks of undocumented migration to deter would-be migrants from making the dangerous journey north; deepen the fight against human smuggling and trafficking through the strengthening of the legal and institutional framework; continue regional border security coordination through the strengthening of task forces and the development of a joint intelligence and border security project; and facilitate the return, repatriation, and especially the reintegration of migrants who do not qualify for humanitarian protection in the United States. Additionally, in January, Secretary John Kerry announced plans to expand the Refugee Admission Program to vulnerable individuals from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to provide a safe alternative to the dangerous journey that many are taking at the hands of human smugglers.

Bipartisan support from the U.S. Congress has been indispensable to our Central America strategy. The \$750 million Fiscal Year 2016 appropriation Congress provided will strengthen our ability to help regional governments tackle the underlying security, governance, and economic conditions driving migration from the region. Northern Triangle governments have committed a significant amount of their own resources to address these regional migration issues, but they cannot do it on their own. U.S. support in the way of training, technical assistance, mentoring, and equipment has produced such successes as “Operation Lucero,” in September 2015, where law enforcement authorities in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico arrested 36 individuals alleged to be smuggling hundreds of migrants each month from Central America and Mexico to the United States.

The Northern Triangle governments have also put in place their own travel requirements that prohibit minors from leaving their countries alone without permission from both parents. With U.S. support, the Northern Triangle governments are also improving their repatriation facilities and capacities along with expanding the services they provide to returned migrants.

We have also been working closely with immigration, law enforcement, and border officials in Central America to enhance their capacity to control their borders and ports of entry, including screening and processing special interest aliens. These capabilities help authorities capture, share, and analyze biometric information on migrants who cross their borders and focus attention on those who require extra scrutiny.

Our efforts in the Caribbean have been aimed at combating the drug trade and other transnational criminal threats and improving border security. We are supporting regional maritime and aerial domain awareness by improving radar coverage and information sharing between partner nations. Caribbean governments are using U.S. provided equipment and training to identify threats and carry out interdiction operations. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Container Control Programme is establishing dedicated “container profiling units” to improve port security. We are providing equipment to help identify and inspect suspect containers. This assistance builds capacity to detect, identify and inspect high-risk containers.

In South America, the Tri-Border Area of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay is a focus for regional law enforcement efforts. Governments in the region have long

been concerned about arms and drug smuggling, document fraud, money laundering, trafficking in persons, and the manufacture and movement of contraband goods through the Tri-Border Area. We are working with all three governments on their efforts to improve border management and combat smuggling. Through the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) we are training police from Brazil. We brought justice and police officials from Paraguay to regional conferences on money laundering conducted with DOJ.

Throughout our efforts in the hemisphere, U.S. strategy development and program design is a function of active coordination between the Departments of State, DHS, Justice (DOJ), Commerce, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and others. Indeed, funding from the Department of State and USAID supports much of the work of our partner agencies, including the successful efforts of our partners at DHS Homeland Security Investigations. At the same time, the expertise and experience of our DHS colleagues, as well as other Departments and Agencies, have helped us refine our approach and we continue to look for ways to maximize our coordination.

The U.S. Congress is also a vital partner to the Administration in that regard, and we look forward to engaging with you on our discussion today on border security and vulnerabilities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Thank you again for holding this important hearing and I look forward to your questions.