

Statement of

**Heide Fulton**

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for

International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

Before the

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Migration, and International Economic Policy**

**“The Biden Administration’s Efforts to Deepen U.S. Engagement in the Caribbean”**

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Chairman Sires, Ranking Member Green, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: thank you for calling this hearing and the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the progress of U.S. diplomatic and foreign assistance to the Caribbean. Today’s hearing comes at a difficult time for our Caribbean partners; COVID-19 continues to spike throughout the region, hindering recovery in heavily tourist-based economies and enabling nefarious and opportunist actors to take advantage of strained government resources. The economic fallout from COVID and natural disasters such as Hurricane Dorian which devastated the Bahamas in 2019 has also created opportunities for China to expand its diplomatic and economic presence in the region with offers of assistance to cash-strapped governments. The United States’ security partnership with its Caribbean neighbors remains essential to ensure the United States remains the security partner of choice and is fundamental to combat the shared threat posed by transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) across the Western Hemisphere.

Since 2010, the Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) has supported Caribbean nations under the auspices of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI),<sup>1</sup> working in partnership with 13 countries to build law enforcement and justice sector capacities to reduce drug trafficking and criminal threats to the United States, enhance citizen security, and hold criminals accountable. INL’s strategic objectives under CBSI are to: (1) reduce the flow of illicit narcotics; (2) disrupt organized crime; (3) bolster citizen security and the rule of law; and (4) promote cooperation by working with regional institutions. Through CBSI, INL maintains strong partnerships with key regional institutions such as the Caribbean Community’s Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (CARICOM IMPACS) as well as the Regional Security System (RSS) in the Eastern Caribbean.

Beyond CBSI, INL’s priorities in the region also include bilateral programming in Haiti where we are focused on developing the Haitian National Police as a professional and accountable institution capable of managing Haiti’s internal security. Insecurity in Haiti has a direct impact on migration to the United States, the safety of an estimated 86,000 U.S. citizens in Haiti, and the flow of illicit narcotics through Haiti to the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> CBSI partner nations include The Bahamas, the Dominican Republic (DR), Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean States, (Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines), Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

### ***Counternarcotics and Maritime Security: Investing in Our Third Border***

The Caribbean represents our “third border” and is a significant trafficking route for cocaine from South America destined for the United States, accounting for approximately 10 percent of the hemisphere’s narcotics flow in 2020. The volume of drugs and number of migrants coming through the Caribbean are smaller than other regions in the Western Hemisphere, but maintaining security and stability in the Caribbean, at our doorstep, is crucial: The Bahamas is 47 nautical miles from Florida. Through INL’s CBSI investments to date, our Caribbean partners have greatly expanded their interdiction capacities, with seizures increasing from 5.5 metric tons (MT) during CBSI’s launch in 2010 to 22.6 MT in 2017 and more than 17 MT in 2020. INL also partners with the Organization of American States’ Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission to provide counterdrug officers specialized training on intelligence-led investigations, which enhances Caribbean countries’ ability to investigate and dismantle drug trafficking criminal networks. Further gains against transnational organized crime (TOC) requires continued U.S. commitment to investing in criminal justice institutions throughout the region to hold drug traffickers accountable and effectively deter crime.

Maritime security, and increased maritime cooperation with and among our Caribbean partners, are key elements of INL’s strategy to disrupt illicit drug trafficking and deny transnational criminal groups the ability to operate in the Caribbean. The majority of the Caribbean’s territorial domain is water, an asset supporting billions of dollars in tourism revenue and a liability enabling transnational criminals to traffic goods undetected, compounding climate-related security risks.<sup>2</sup>

For several years, INL has partnered with the United States Coast Guard (USCG) on a multi-prong maritime capacity-building program for the region to improve vessel maintenance, develop maritime interdiction capacity, and enhance maritime investigations and prosecutions. Regional USCG advisors based in the Dominican Republic support sustainable improvements to the Dominican Republic interdiction operations and investigations, including developing and providing training on a manual for interdiction operations. These new processes, combined with USCG technical assistance, contributed 29 drug interdictions and the arrest of 159 individuals by Dominican Republic partners in fiscal year 2021. INL supports programs to enhance sub-regional cooperation, improve maritime domain awareness, train prosecutors on maritime crime, and develop a regional maritime security strategy. INL also invests in bilateral maritime capacity building. For example, in The Bahamas, INL provides enabling support to the Royal Bahamas Police Force to bolster its participation in Operation Bahamas, Turks and Caicos (OPBAT), a decades-old trilateral counternarcotics partnership between The Bahamas, Turks and Caicos, and U.S. military and federal law enforcement agencies.

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<sup>2</sup> Fetzek, S.2018. ‘Caribbean policy brief draft – Climate security drivers in the Caribbean.’ *Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency*, [https://www.cdema.org/Caribbean\\_policy\\_brief\\_%E2%80%93\\_Climate\\_security\\_drivers\\_in\\_the\\_Caribbean.docx.pdf](https://www.cdema.org/Caribbean_policy_brief_%E2%80%93_Climate_security_drivers_in_the_Caribbean.docx.pdf), Accessed 10 June 2021, (asserting while the Caribbean has expertise in disaster and economic resilience, governance and security challenges risk amplifying climate impacts).

## ***Gangs, Guns, and Governments: Threats and Opportunities***

Despite having less than 1 percent of the world's population, the Caribbean has a regional homicide rate that qualifies as an epidemic.<sup>3</sup> For example, in 2020, Jamaica, led the Latin America and Caribbean region with a homicide rate of 46.5 per 100,000 persons, and ranks consistently among the top five countries with the highest homicide rates both regionally and globally.<sup>4</sup>

Countering societal-level violence and crime in the Caribbean is important not only to eliminate the permissive environment that enables transnational crime but also to protect the Caribbean's vital tourism industry and the millions of American tourists who visit the Caribbean each year. Drivers of high homicide rates in the region include increased gang-related violence, a pernicious illegal firearms trade, and ineffective criminal justice institutions, all of which affect the United States by creating new avenues for drug trafficking, firearms trafficking, financial and cyber-enabled crimes, human smuggling, and corruption. Through criminal justice actor capacity building, reform, and community engagement, INL programs aim to diminish the corrupting influence of criminal gangs and their deadly violence.

### *Gangs*

In Caribbean countries, gangs drive corruption and undermine fundamental institutions, including in law enforcement and rule of law, and co-opt the legitimate role of the state. There is strong evidence Caribbean gangs are involved in drug and weapons trafficking. TCOs like the Shower Posse in Jamaica and the Trinitarios in the Dominican Republic have trafficking and distribution operations in the northeastern United States. In Haiti, criminal gangs were responsible for a recent surge in ransom kidnappings—which included U.S. citizens—as well as multiple massacres and rapes. Gangs provide services in impoverished communities in the absence of an effective government. They partner with politicians and businesses to organize political support, threaten rivals, and commit violence in exchange for money, weapons, and protection from prosecution. Gang violence also is a factor in Haiti's recent economic downturn.

To address the increasing threat of gang violence, INL invests in holistic, community-oriented, anti-gang programs that incorporate lessons learned from INL's experience elsewhere in the

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<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime cites a rate of 10 homicides per 100,000 as an “epidemic” and reports the compiled homicide rate for the region in 2017 was 15.1 per 100,000. UNODC. 2019. UNODC Global Study on Homicide, p.18.n17; p.11. <https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet2.pdf>, Accessed 10 June 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Insight Crime. 2021. ‘Jamaica: InSight Crime’s 2020 Homicide Round-Up,’ <https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/2020-homicide-round-up/>, Accessed 10 June 2021 (identifying Jamaica as having the highest homicide rate in Latin America and the Caribbean, followed by Venezuela, Honduras, and Trinidad and Tobago); Economist Intelligence Unit, “Jamaica Ends 2020 with Latam's Highest Murder Rate.” *Country Report Jamaica* 1(1), <https://country.eiu.com/Jamaica/ArticleList/Updates/Politics>, Retrieved June 14, 2021. See also, U.S. Department of State Overseas Advisory Council. 2020. “Jamaica 2020 Crime & Safety Report,” <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Jamaica/Content/Detail/Report/d4b8403a-3feb-427b-bd36-18f1af0b746a>, Accessed 11 June 2021, (noting in 2018 Jamaica's homicide rate was 47 per 100,000 residents which increased 3.4% in 2019, a homicide rate three times higher than the average for Latin America and the Caribbean); The World Bank, ‘Intentional homicides (per 100,000 people) - Jamaica,’ Accessed 11 June 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5?locations=JM>, (Jamaica homicide data from 1990-2018 based on UN Office on Drugs and Crime's International Homicide Statistics database).

hemisphere and around the globe. Effective programs address the causes of gangs, disrupt the criminal financial operations that fuel their enterprises, and provide law enforcement and criminal justice officials modern skills to counter and deter gang-related crime. Programs include a mix of community policing, place-based interventions, strengthening anti-gang and firearms trafficking legislation, and coordinating with USAID to complement their youth crime and violence prevention efforts. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service credited INL's Resistance and Prevention Program (RAPP), an anti-crime community policing initiative, with helping reduce homicides in Enterprise, a high-crime community. Homicides fell from 15 in 2016 to just one in the first half of 2019. Trinidad and Tobago launched its own nationwide crime prevention program based on RAPP.

### *Guns*

Trafficking in small arms and ammunition compounds homicide rates across the Caribbean. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, firearms are used in 68 percent of homicides in the region, a higher rate than the global average.<sup>5</sup> Since 2015, INL programming has built Caribbean capacity to seize, track, and investigate firearm crimes; interdict illegal firearms and other contraband in shipping containers; and develop coordinated national policy frameworks to counter trafficking. CARICOM reports that between 2009 and 2018, law enforcement agencies seized over 22,000 illegal firearms and over 300,000 rounds of ammunition in the Caribbean.

Our investments have also increased our partners' ability to collaborate with U.S. law enforcement on firearms trafficking crimes and are yielding results. For example, on April 20, Trinidad and Tobago's Transnational Organized Crime Unit (TOCU) executed a controlled delivery of firearms resulting in the seizure of 17 handguns, 17 magazines, and two rifle lower receivers, and one local arrest. Homeland Security Investigations collaborated closely with the INL trained and equipped TOCU in this and other operations to counter the illicit flow of firearms, firearm parts, and ammunition into the region.

### *Countering Corruption*

Countering corruption is a top priority of the Administration, and recent elections in the Caribbean may offer a new opportunity to make progress on this key issue. In 2020, elections were held in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Most of the election winners, whether newly instated or re-elected, included strong anticorruption messaging in their campaigns and national speeches.

Surinamese President Santokhi, a former police chief and minister of justice, took office in July 2020 and by January of 2021, INL had initiated new anticorruption training for prosecutors and judges to support his administration's effort to implement anticorruption legislation and pursue high-profile cases. In the Dominican Republic, the Abinader administration publicly committed to tackling drug trafficking, corruption, organized crime, and financial crimes, and to partnering with us on justice sector capacity building. INL is working to enhance port security, building the counternarcotics capacity of both the Dominican National Drug Control Directorate and the Dominican National Police (DNP), and advising on draft proceeds of crime legislation.

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2016. 'Homicide rate by mechanisms, victims of intentional homicide by mechanisms,' <https://dataunodc.un.org/data/homicide/Homicide%20rate%20by%20mechanisms>. Accessed 10 June 2021.

### *Financial Crimes*

INL counters corrupting influences by building partner capacity to target illicit finance. Our projects build capacity of Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) to counter financial crimes and money laundering. This empowers justice sector institutions to seize and recover the illicit proceeds of drug trafficking through civil litigation, which undercuts the profitability of drug trafficking and related transnational crime. INL support to FIUs includes equipment, training, and advisors.

INL and the National Center for State Courts' civil asset recovery project works with partner governments to draft model civil asset recovery legislation, which has been formally adopted by six CBSI partner nations to date.<sup>6</sup> This effort also provides training to financial investigators, attorneys, and judges on the new laws and mentoring for financial investigators and attorneys on cases. These nations are now implementing the legislation and have recoveries of more than \$1.27 million in cash and \$2.5 million in property for reinvestment into Caribbean criminal justice sector institutions. A host of larger actions are pending.<sup>7</sup>

### *Investing in Caribbean Institutions*

U.S. assistance is often most effective when matched to regional cooperation. Critical to our efforts in the Caribbean is an articulation of U.S. and Caribbean shared goals for the region alongside a mutual understanding of our shared threats.

The United States and its Caribbean partners hold regional high-level technical security working groups, or TWGs, and meet annually for the CBSI High-Level Dialogue to discuss ongoing and new areas for cooperation. The TWGs have identified opportunities critical to our efforts against firearms, maritime security cooperation, combating financial crimes, and will be convening virtually this fall to discuss access to justice and improving court efficiencies.

### *Caribbean Regional Security Institutions*

Caribbean regional security institutions are integral to INL's strategy and ability to build sustainable and effective criminal justice institutions. CARICOM IMPACS works with INL on shared projects to build regional capacities and, more recently, serves as a regional implementer for INL programs. INL also invests in the RSS through investments in its Air Wing, forensic lab, police training academy, and a new TOC task force. Building regional institutions yields results beyond an individual program. INL recently transferred management and sustainment of the regional online law enforcement training platform, CBSI-Connect, to IMPACS. Since 2012, INL supported the development, maintenance, and installation of the system at 17 Caribbean law enforcement academies, including the CBSI countries, Belize, and Haiti. Crucially, CBSI-Connect empowered Caribbean criminal justice sector institutions to keep functioning during COVID-19 lockdowns, and convinced previously hesitant judges, court administrators, law enforcement, and corrections officers of the platform's value. In its first year managing CBSI-Connect, IMPACS

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<sup>6</sup>Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>7</sup> In 2020, Antigua and Barbuda filed an application to freeze \$59 million in a pending criminal property case. In May 2021, pending claims filed for recovery include one for \$4 million in Grenada; a forfeit of \$20,000 in criminal cash in Dominica; a ruling by the High Court in Dominica that supported a state civil asset recovery case involving \$300,000 in criminal assets; and two applications to freeze \$50,000 and \$58 million in two pending criminal property cases in Antigua and Barbuda.

has increased the number of active users five-fold and virtual trainings on CBSI-Connect have saved more than \$18 million in travel costs.

### *Law Enforcement Institutions*

INL enhances law enforcement effectiveness through police professionalization, anticorruption training, community-based policing support, and sharing regional ballistics fingerprint information. INL also provided equipment and training to enhance the region's polygraph capacity, such as in Jamaica, and has cultivated technical law enforcement expertise through specialized training. INL supports specialized and vetted units that conduct complex investigations, anti-gang initiatives, anti-money laundering operations, cyber-enabled crimes, and financial crimes.

Recognizing sustainable law enforcement training requires institutional structures to support it, INL has invested in programs to stand up internal affairs departments and reform human resources practices and hiring. For example, INL support for the DNP has focused on professionalization and has resulted in significant progress in modernizing the DNP human resources, internal affairs, and educational systems. Improvements to the internal affairs and inspector general's offices further strengthened anticorruption efforts and have led to the removal of over 1,000 police officers in the first year alone.

To develop strong law enforcement institutions at both the national and regional level, INL is launching a police academy support grant that will assist Caribbean police forces with assessing and modernizing their new recruit basic training courses, recruitment practices, in-service training offerings and requirements, career tracks, and pursue accreditation through international law enforcement bodies as well as universities.

### *Justice Sector Professionalization and Court Case Management*

Case backlogs and large pre-trial detention populations plague criminal justice systems throughout the Caribbean. In some countries, it is not uncommon for cases to take more than four years to be adjudicated—which is often longer than the sentence the accused would have received. This impacts overall criminal justice system effectiveness, infringes on the rights of the accused, and damages public confidence. While many courts were able to utilize virtual platforms, including CBSI-Connect, to continue essential court functions during COVID-19 restrictions, the pandemic has exacerbated case backlogs in most Caribbean courts.

For more than eight years, INL has worked with CBSI partner countries to strengthen the capacity of justice sector actors to respond effectively and efficiently to criminal justice challenges, combat crime, and uphold the rule of law. Through a partnership with the National Center for State Courts, INL has trained nearly 4,000 justice sector officials—55 percent of whom were women—including attorneys, judges, magistrates, law enforcement officers, and other justice officers in critical skill areas including case management, investigation and prosecution of gangs, financial crimes, and legal aid.

In addition to extensive training, INL has invested in modern court case infrastructure to enable courts to keep accurate, accountable, and efficient case records and calendars. Major investments in Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Barbados demonstrate the promise and potential of these case management systems.

### ***Future of U.S.-Caribbean Security Cooperation***

INL recognizes significant challenges remain for the Caribbean, particularly given the high rates of homicide and gang violence and compounded with government budget and service deficits exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Foreign assistance investments will be key in the Caribbean and are an opportunity for the United States to reinforce its position as the partner of choice.

U.S. investments, when coupled with political will, can shore up regional and national institutions and promote sustainable, incremental improvement. We will seek opportunities to have an impact and continue to work closely with our Caribbean partners to cement the United States as the security partner of choice.

### ***INL Project Design Builds Opportunities for Partner Ownership***

We constantly look to improve our programs to ensure lasting impact in the Caribbean and to demonstrate good stewardship of U.S. taxpayer dollars. Investing in project design and being clear about our goals will increase the value of our investments in the Caribbean. After more than a decade of investment in CBSI, INL is focused on projects that not only seek to build shared commitment to tackle problems and build a pathway toward ownership.

### ***Conclusion***

Transnational crime, violence, and insecurity are threats we share with our Caribbean neighbors, our third border, and require our coordinated, sustained efforts. Over the past decade, our security partnership through CBSI has adapted to changing priorities and regional contexts and must continue to adapt to meet future threats such as climate change and an increasing Chinese donor and economic presence. Where our programs are matched with committed partners in region, we see results, and we will continue to work to enhance regional cooperation.