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**The Biden Administration's Policy Priorities for Latin America and the Caribbean**  
**House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere**  
**November 16, 2021, 2:00 p.m.**

**Introduction**

Chairman Sires, Ranking Member Green, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding our efforts to advance the President's and Secretary's agenda for the Western Hemisphere. The President and the Secretary deeply value the Western Hemisphere's central role in the welfare of the United States and understand that we cannot separate our country's fortunes from those of our closest neighbors.

This Administration seeks to promote a more inclusive, green, secure, prosperous, and democratic hemisphere aligned with U.S. values and interests. In my first week in this job, I joined the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and Under Secretary for Political Affairs, along with other principals, at the United Nations General Assembly for over 20 engagements with Western Hemisphere leaders. During my first two months as Assistant Secretary, I have visited Haiti, Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, and Canada – and met with diaspora communities in Miami and New York – to advance these priorities.

Today, I want to share with you our efforts to help the Haitian people with the ongoing crisis in their country; address irregular migration and its root causes; bolster the Hemisphere's commitment to inclusive democracy; promote public health and economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in the Americas, including through the Administration's Build Back Better World (B3W) Initiative; and work with partners to promote democracy in Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela.

**The Haiti Crisis**

Haiti struggles with political, humanitarian and stabilization turmoil compounded by the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and the August 14 earthquake. NSC Senior Director Juan Gonzalez and I traveled to Miami and Haiti September 30 to October 1, Under Secretary for Civilian Security Uzra Zeya visited Haiti on October 12 and 13, and Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Todd Robinson traveled to Haiti November 8 to 10 to underscore the Administration's commitment to the Haitian people.

In our meetings with the Haitian diaspora, civil society, political actors, and Prime Minister Ariel Henry, we encouraged the Haitian people to find their own solutions and chart a broad and inclusive resolution to the current political impasse. We expressed our concerns about Haiti's security, noting stakeholders view that insecurity would not allow for democratic elections this year.

The Haitian people will determine a timeline for their elections, but we work now to support conditions for free and fair elections, including responding to the Haitian government's requests to help restore security and address gang violence.

We will provide an additional \$15 million, for a total of \$33 million, to help build Haitian National Police (HNP) capacity to combat gangs, expand community policing efforts, upgrade corrections facilities, and provide necessary security equipment. The kidnapping by a Haitian gang of 16 Americans and one Canadian serving with Christian Aid Ministries tragically illustrated Haiti's problematic security situation. The Department has no greater priority than the safety and welfare of U.S. citizens abroad. We sent additional personnel and resources to Haiti to support efforts to return these U.S. citizens to safety.

### **Irregular Migration**

Haiti's crises contributed to the complex dynamic of migratory flows in the Americas. We have broadened our efforts to address irregular migration throughout the Hemisphere. The President's February 2 Executive Order directed a new and comprehensive approach to address regional migration. As part of that approach, the State Department implements aspects of the Administration's Root Causes Strategy and the Collaborative Migration Management Strategy, and we impress upon countries in the region the shared responsibility the region has to address the issue collaboratively. The Secretary and Administrator Power met on September 24 with the Mexican and Central American foreign ministers in New York City to discuss regional migration. The Secretary and I on October 20 joined ministers and counterparts from more than a dozen hemispheric partners in Bogotá. We explored coordinated regional approaches to address irregular migration challenges and specific steps countries can take to address its root causes. Our partners concurred we need a regional response and stressed their contributions would differ depending on their circumstance as source, transit, or destination country.

We appreciate the efforts of countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Chile in accepting large numbers of migrants. We continue to work with Brazil and Chile to accept the return of Haitians with prior status in those countries. We will work together to expand legal pathways for workers within the region, and to create inclusive economic opportunities in their countries of origin or long-term residence. We will strengthen law enforcement to dismantle trafficking networks and build on efforts to make it easier for migrants to return to their countries of prior residence and encourage removals for those ineligible for protection. Each partner will concentrate on immediate efforts with the long-term objective of crafting a stable, prosperous, and democratic future for their citizens and residents.

### **Reinforcing Democracy and Civilian Security**

As the Secretary said in his October 20 remarks in Ecuador "we find ourselves in a moment of democratic reckoning." In the Hemisphere and around the world, all of us who believe our shared future depends on the survival of democracy must ask, as the Secretary put it, "what can we do to make democracies deliver on the issues that matter most to our people." In a region where 70 percent of citizens expressed dissatisfaction with how democracy works, we must combat corruption, enhance civilian security, and address the economic and social challenges facing the region's citizens to close the gap between democracy's promise and the reality.

President Biden designated fighting corruption as a core U.S. national security interest. Corruption costs an estimated five percent of global GDP each year, impeding growth, increasing inequality, and undercutting citizens' trust in government. We work with partners to hold corrupt individuals and groups accountable, including through the new tool Congress

created to fight corruption in Northern Central America - the Section 353 Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors list. We named over 50 corrupt actors in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to the list in a public display of accountability. As host of the Ninth Summit of the Americas, we will uphold and expand upon our commitment to fight corruption, and focus governments, civil society, and the private sector on working together to increase inclusion, transparency and accountability in government and bolster and defend our democratic institutions.

To enhance civilian security the United States invests billions of dollars globally to reduce violence and combat transnational criminal organizations, but as the Secretary noted in his October 20 remarks in Quito, we need to pay more attention to addressing root causes of insecurity in our hemisphere. I joined Secretary Blinken, DHS Secretary Mayorkas, and Attorney General Garland at the October 8 High-Level Security Dialogue (HLSD) with Mexico where our two governments adopted a new Bicentennial Framework, based on partnership, and shared responsibility for the safety and security of our two countries. The Secretary took a similar comprehensive and integrated approach at the October 21 U.S.-Colombia High-Level Dialogue.

### **COVID-19 Recovery**

In addition to curbing corruption and strengthening civilian security, we and our partners must address the economic and social challenges facing our citizens as together we recover from the pandemic. We must ensure that opportunity and access to basic services extends to all citizens with intersectional approaches, particularly marginalized and underserved populations, including African Descendant, Indigenous, and LGBTQI+ communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic struck Latin America and the Caribbean with unrivaled lethality, especially marginalized communities. The region represents only eight percent of the global population but approximately 30 percent of COVID-19 related deaths. We remain committed to bringing the same urgency to international vaccination efforts that we demonstrated at home. We have donated more than 47 million doses to 29 partners in the Western Hemisphere. We contributed \$4 billion to GAVI for COVAX to support vaccine procurement, readiness, and in-country vaccination efforts, including in the region. The Department and USAID also provided the region more than \$614 million in COVID-19 supplemental assistance and American Rescue Plan Act funding – including technical assistance to support vaccine roll-out, case management, and oxygen access. All COVAX participant countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have received shipments. This is the right thing to do and in our national interests.

### **Inclusive Economic Development**

The IMF estimated Latin America and Caribbean's GDP contracted by seven percent in 2020, the largest contraction of any region. We must help the region restart its economy. The United States has invested more than \$10 billion in Latin America and the Caribbean through the International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) to grow economies and create jobs. The United States also recognizes the tremendous infrastructure needs, which some estimate at more than \$40 trillion by 2035, across low- and middle-income countries. Done the right way, with transparent, sustainable investment in projects that respond to a country's needs and engages its

local workers to maintain high labor and environmental standards, infrastructure can provide a strong foundation that allows societies to grow and to prosper.

To address these challenges, President Biden committed to an affirmative and comprehensive initiative with G7 leaders: the Build Back Better World (B3W) Initiative. The values-driven, high-standard, and transparent infrastructure partnership offers recipient communities the long-run benefits, protections, and transparency they deserve. Through B3W, the United States and its G7 partners will offer local communities in low- and middle-income countries help in building infrastructure, including sustainable and resilient projects that focus on climate, health and health security, technology, and gender equity and equality.

Our delegation to Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama in September – with Deputy National Security Advisor Singh, DFC COO Marchick, and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Zúniga highlighted the B3W Initiative’s commitment to work with our partners to narrow the gaps in physical, digital, and human resources infrastructure exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The delegation met with government officials, the private sector, and environmental, labor, and civil society leaders to solicit their views as to how we can best support local communities in a way that responds to infrastructure needs and advances the highest standards for transparency and anticorruption, financial sustainability, labor protections, and environmental preservation.

Carrying forward this positive agenda for the hemisphere advances U.S. interests and increases our partners’ resilience to engagements and investments of concern, particularly by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Russia, Iran, and other actors who do not share our values.

To advance our positive agenda, Secretary Blinken underscored our commitment to promoting democracy, human rights, security, and development in the Western Hemisphere at the OAS General Assembly on November 11. The leaders of North America will also meet in Washington on November 18 to chart a path for our partnership at a time of complex global challenges, including focusing on pandemic recovery, increasing North America competitiveness, and addressing migration through a regional approach.

### **Supporting Democratic Reform in Non-Democratic Regimes:**

We work to help to ensure that democracy delivers for all the region’s citizens, and we must continue working to support democracy where undemocratic regimes prevail.

We support the Venezuelan-led negotiations between the Unity Platform and the Maduro regime. We hope that these talks lead to the peaceful restoration of the democracy that Venezuelans deserve, an end to human rights abuses, and the alleviation of Venezuela’s dire humanitarian crisis. We will only review sanctions policies if the parties make meaningful progress. Nicolás Maduro must release wrongfully detained American citizens immediately so they can return to their families in the United States. Along with the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, we remain in frequent touch with these families.

We will continue to work with our Venezuelan and international partners to help address the Venezuelan crisis. We announced on September 22 an additional \$336 million humanitarian,

economic, and development assistance for Venezuelans, bringing total U.S. assistance for Venezuela since 2017 to \$1.9 billion. We call on the international community to redouble its support to the Venezuelan people as they work peacefully to restore democracy to their country.

In Nicaragua, the Ortega-Murillo government launched an unprecedented crackdown against political opposition leaders and independent journalists. Following the ersatz elections on November 7, Ortega and Murillo no longer have a democratic mandate. We urge the Ortega-Murillo government to take concrete actions now to return to democratic norms; cease repression against Nicaraguans calling for democracy; and immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners.

The United States and over 70 international partners passed two OAS resolutions, each supported by 26 countries, and a 59-country joint statement at the UN Human Rights Council. The Administration sanctioned 31 individuals and eight entities under our Nicaragua-specific and Global Magnitsky sanctions programs. We imposed visa restrictions on 169 individuals linked to the Ortega-Murillo government and their immediate family members. We welcome concrete actions taken by our partners, including Canada's decision to apply sanctions on 15 individuals who undermined human rights in Nicaragua and the EU's decision to apply targeted sanctions on eight individuals, including Vice President Murillo.

We continue to work with Nicaragua's neighbors, Canada, the EU, and the UK, among others, to apply economic and diplomatic measures to raise the costs for those who support the Ortega-Murillo government. We will continue to rally the international community and use our diplomatic and economic tools to condemn Ortega and Murillo's actions and the Russian-inspired laws they use to justify them.

Our Cuba policy focuses on support for the political and economic wellbeing of the Cuban people and accountability for Cuban government officials involved in human rights abuses. Collectively with the international community, we condemn the violence and repression perpetrated by the Cuban regime upon the Cuban people for demanding their fundamental freedoms. The Cuban government's attempts to quash demonstrations on November 15 further proves its malice toward the Cuban people.

Events in Cuba, especially since July 11, weigh heavily on our approach. Treasury since July has imposed four rounds of targeted financial sanctions against Cuban officials and military and security services in connection with violence, repression, and human rights violations against peaceful protestors. Through these Global Magnitsky sanctions, the Administration seeks to impose tangible and significant consequences against repressors and to promote accountability for serious human rights abuse.

We will also continue to support increased exports of humanitarian goods to the Cuban people and to continue to work with the private sector and other stakeholders to identify viable options to ensure greater internet access for the Cuban people.

As we work to support democratic reform and ensure democracies deliver for all the peoples of the Americas, President Biden's words continue to guide us: "Democracy holds the key to

freedom, prosperity, peace, and dignity. If we work together with our democratic partners, with strength and confidence, we will meet every challenge and outpace every challenger.”