

**Statement of Todd D. Robinson
Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics
and Law Enforcement Affairs
before the House Foreign Affairs Committee,
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere
Fiscal Year 2024 Western Hemisphere Budget Request
June 7, 2023**

Chair Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the Department of State's fiscal year (FY) 2024 budget request for the Western Hemisphere. The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) is responsible for nearly \$1.4 billion of foreign assistance globally under the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) account request. This includes \$536.5 million in INCLE funding for the Western Hemisphere, about 38 percent of the total INCLE request.

Countering the flow of fentanyl and its precursors from sources abroad is a top priority of this Administration, the Department, and INL. The State Department is leading a global response to the synthetic drug challenge, including countering the flow of fentanyl into the United States by disrupting the ability of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) to produce, traffic, and profit from these deadly substances.

Since the People's Republic of China (PRC) scheduled all fentanyl-related substances as a class in 2019, most of the fentanyl seized in the United States has been trafficked through Mexico using diverted precursor chemicals sourced from the PRC. Our relationship with Mexico is critical to the success of our efforts to combat the fentanyl crisis. The U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities is the foundation for our mutual efforts to protect our people and combat fentanyl trafficking and other criminal activities and actors. We also recognize that disrupting the flow of PRC-origin precursor chemicals to Mexico is crucial to our success. We will continue to seek productive

engagement with the PRC to stem production of fentanyl and to work with partners around the world to better track and control the precursor chemicals that fuel drug production.

Under this framework, INL is advancing programs that are making an impact in our fight against fentanyl. For example, INL has provided more than 500 canines to multiple Mexican agencies to assist in seizures of fentanyl and other drugs and contraband. Since January 2019, these canines have supported seizures of more than 485,000 fentanyl pills, with over 300,000 of those seized just since the North American Leaders Summit in January 2023. We will continue to capitalize on these successes and expand areas of mutual cooperation with our Mexican counterparts, including working with Mexican regulators and public health agencies as we seek to tackle the challenge of synthetic drugs from all angles. We appreciate Congressional support and want to continue to work closely with you on this challenge.

While we direct our focus toward fentanyl, we cannot ignore the other counternarcotics challenges in the Hemisphere – primarily those related to cocaine and other plant-based narcotics. Colombia and Peru persist as the largest global suppliers of cocaine. Our approach to cocaine in these countries has evolved to focus not just on drug supply reduction, but on a holistic approach to address the full spectrum of forces that enable cocaine production and trafficking. This approach focuses on a variety of strategic areas to increase security and decrease criminality. These include promoting rural security, justice, and development; addressing corruption; and preventing, detecting, and countering money laundering and other financial crimes in order to deprive TCOs of their profits.

In Ecuador, a key transit country for cocaine enroute to the United States, INL partners have created several inroads to root out corruption in the national judiciary and to hold accountable TCOs that engage in and profit from drug trafficking and other crimes. In December 2022, Ecuador launched a specialized court to handle corruption and TCO cases. The court is the result of two years of INL efforts and technical assistance to advance

legislative changes allowing for the establishment of the court. The court will have national jurisdiction over drug trafficking, corruption, crimes against humanity, human trafficking, illegal mining, kidnapping, fraud, and money laundering cases.

In Haiti, we are taking a targeted approach to develop the capacity of the Haitian National Police (HNP), and to implement the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability 10-year Plan for Haiti. The July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse exacerbated an already precarious security environment. INL and its interagency partners have surged support and resources to Haiti to help stabilize the security situation. INL works to build the HNP's capacity to counter the violent gangs that control much of Port-au-Prince and are the main drivers of instability throughout Haiti.

The evolving security situation in Haiti reaffirms the importance of maintaining stability and combating transnational organized crime in the Caribbean, America's "third border." The Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) seeks to provide this security bulwark by supporting collective and regional approaches to address shared threats. Strategic programming under CBSI seeks to reduce the flow of illicit narcotics and illicit firearms, disrupt organized crime, bolster citizen security and the rule of law, and promote regional cooperation. By working collectively to mitigate and contain these and other emerging threats, partner nations and regional institutions can develop the capacity to address them before they reach the United States.

INL also is supporting the Administration's efforts to address the record number of irregular migrants reaching the southwest border. INL leverages its strong interagency partnerships with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ), in particular, to strengthen law enforcement cooperation; detect, investigate, dismantle, and prosecute migrant smuggling and human trafficking networks; and hold those involved accountable. In Northern Central America, consistent with the security and governance related pillars of the U.S. Strategy for Addressing Root Causes of Migration in Central America, INL efforts focus on

community engagement to address underlying causes of violence and insecurity. Programs to improve community policing complement youth engagement activities to deter gang influence.

Combatting endemic corruption and impunity by strengthening institutions and the capacity of partner nations to better identify, dismantle, and prosecute the main drivers of corruption is a top priority. Unfortunately, in many countries in our hemisphere the space for productive engagement with willing partner governments is closing as anti-democratic governments have gained power. As a result, we now seek to develop the capacity of local civil society, the private sector, and independent media actors and organizations to equip them with tools to shed light on the corruption, crime, and impunity threatening their communities and dragging down their countries.

Corruption, insecurity, mis- and disinformation, weak institutions, and lack of economic opportunities have dimmed the perception of democracy and the rule of law to many people in the region. This has allowed opportunities for external actors with undemocratic interests and values to exploit these challenges for greater influence and acceptance. In particular, the PRC seeks to capitalize on these factors to increase its presence in the hemisphere and to compete against the United States as the security partner of choice.

In response, INL priorities ensure our partners in the region remain committed to the rule of law and the rules-based international system. It is essential they are aware of the risks to partnering with the PRC and continue to favor the United States as the partner of choice. We seek to prevent the transfer of items of concern from PRC entities to partner nations for use in the security and law enforcement sectors and are exploring ways to help address this challenge through multiple fronts. The threat from malign external actors is constantly evolving and growing and requires additional creative and innovative thinking. Working with our like-minded partners in the region, in the interagency, and in Congress will help us ensure we are successfully countering this challenge.

Chair Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, the challenges, and issues INL is confronting in the Western Hemisphere cannot be solved overnight or alone. Getting ahead of these threats requires strategic and innovative thinking, including pursuing new partnerships with non-traditional actors such as the nongovernmental and civil society community and potentially the private sector, and new creative ideas that are rooted in evidence and data to address continued and persistent challenges. At the same time, we can only affect meaningful change in places where we have willing partners. Where partner nations are not willing to cooperate, we must be proactive and creative so we can continue to advance regional priorities. The challenges before us are immense, but I am confident we can address them together to keep our country and people safe and secure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, and I look forward to your questions.