

**Statement of Mileydi Guilarte**  
**Deputy Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean**  
**Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere**  
**“The U.S.-Honduras Bilateral Relationship: Analyzing the Socialist Government**  
**of President Xiomara Castro de Zelaya”**  
**Wednesday October 25, 2023**

Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, distinguished members of the subcommittee—thank you for the opportunity to discuss our relationship with the Government of Honduras and our work in the country. I also want to thank you for your bipartisan support for our work in Honduras. These are challenging issues and we are grateful for your input as we work together to promote a better partnership with Honduras.

**Bilateral Relationship**

USAID’s work over the decades in Honduras has robustly supported equitable and sustained economic growth, so all Hondurans can thrive and prosper. Our current efforts under the Administration’s Root Causes Strategy continue to focus on creating opportunities for Hondurans, especially youth, that inspire them to stay and invest in their futures in Honduras.

Our strategy is also focused on improving governance, promoting respect for human rights and a free press, increasing citizen security, and reducing gender-based violence—addressing the key push factors for migration to the United States. And in doing so, we’re increasing our work with local actors under the Centroamerica Local initiative, to ensure these efforts are community driven and more sustainable in the long term.

I am asked frequently about the most important element for successful development. As someone who was born in Cuba and emigrated to the United States, the clearest answer to me is governance. Without responsive, transparent, good governance and an independent judicial system, investment is limited, people are disconnected from community and government, and corruption flourishes. The result is people lose faith in their government to create an environment in which they and their families can thrive, and they emigrate, creating a vacuum of human capital that impedes a society from flourishing. Our governance support is designed to improve systems, performance, and transparency to shrink those dark spaces in which corrupt actors like to operate. Additionally, our governance programs provide support to officials who want to improve governance and decrease corruption. As no government is monolithic, we need to support those fighting against corruption, malfeasance, and poor governance to deliver services and build trust with the Honduran people.

And across our decades of work, through changes of parties and administrations, we have consistently partnered with the Honduran people.

We are alarmed by levels of impunity, particularly given the number of attacks on Honduran environmental, labor, and human rights defenders. Honduras is one of the world's most dangerous countries for environmental activists—watchdog groups estimate that at least 23 have been killed since the beginning of 2022. This makes it even more important to strengthen the Ministry of Human Rights' Protection Mechanism to help ensure this doesn't keep happening. In our engagements with the Honduran government, we routinely raise human rights issues and advocate for robust funding for the Ministry's Protection Mechanism.

Weak institutions can hinder USAID's work in Honduras and impact economic growth and investment, rule of law and citizen security, and, of course, increase migration. We encourage the Honduran congress to select a new Attorney General in a transparent process so the Public Ministry—a crucial institution for the promotion of justice in Honduras—can operate effectively to the benefit of all Hondurans.

## **Positive Impacts**

USAID remains committed to implementing development programs that benefit the Honduran people—working as appropriate with the government they have elected.

Over the last 18 months, USAID worked with the Ministry of Education to get kids back in the classroom by reopening schools—including some destroyed by hurricanes Eta and Iota in November 2020. In the past year alone, USAID reached almost half a million students by supporting primary and secondary education in areas of high out-migration and refurbished 16 schools so far, with more planned, so kids have a safe and healthy learning environment. Just in the last month, Ambassador Dogu and USAID Mission Director MacLean joined President Castro to open two schools recently renovated with USAID support. This is a clear area of mutual interest and where we have seen real progress.

Beyond our work in education, USAID is promoting greater transparency in government institutions. We are working with the Supreme Audit Institution of Honduras, or TSC, and the Transparency Secretariat on a policy to prevent municipal government fraud and corruption through rules and procedures. As a result of these programs, the Transparency Secretariat and the TSC have increased access to public information and built oversight capacity in 41 municipalities.

USAID is particularly proud of our work with the National Anti-Corruption Council (CNA), a Honduran civil society organization that has exposed corruption across multiple administrations. USAID has partnered with CNA for many years and we continue to communicate our unwavering support. They are a dedicated and credible institution with many talented, courageous team members, and are a model for what we would like to see in other countries.

We're also making positive inroads to address gender-based violence. Honduras has one of the highest rates of femicide in the region, so we have put significant time and resources into programs to protect survivors and prosecute perpetrators. Around 225 women have been killed in 2023—that's one woman or girl every single day. Any case of violence against women is one too many, but we are determined to work across the region to do everything we can to combat this scourge.

On economic growth, USAID has helped increase the incomes of poor rural households by linking small farmers to market opportunities. For example, over the past year our private sector partners, including three of the world's largest coffee buyers, committed \$109 million to connect 70,000 farmer households—more than half of all Honduran coffee farmers—with global markets. In the last fiscal year alone, the yields of nearly 18,000 farmer households (58 percent women) increased by an average of 30 percent as a direct result of USAID assistance and our partnerships with the private sector. Indeed, these partnerships have boosted yields and incomes, giving hope to many rural families who have struggled in the wake of extreme weather events and rising prices of agricultural inputs.

These are just a few of the areas in which we are able to partner with Honduras and will continue doing so.

### **Looking Ahead**

As we look ahead, we hope to build on these efforts and other openings with the Castro administration so Hondurans can grow and thrive in their own communities. And when we do have concerns, we won't shy away from mentioning them. We are closely monitoring the run-up to the 2025 Honduras election and pushing for transparency, accountability, and full participation of citizens so that their will is heard, as it was in the last elections.

You only have to look to Honduras' neighbors to see how important it is to defend democratic values at all times. USAID's presence and programming in the region is critical in the face of democratic threats.

USAID will continue to put the Honduran people first, so families, communities, and the country as a whole can thrive and prosper.

Thank you for your continued support for the region. I look forward to your questions.

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