

**“MIGRATION CRISIS: OVERSIGHT OF THE ADMINISTRATION’S  
PROPOSED \$1 BILLION REQUEST FOR CENTRAL AMERICA”**

TESTIMONY OF  
SCOTT HAMILTON  
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF CENTRAL AMERICAN AFFAIRS  
BUREAU OF WESTERN HEMISPHERE AFFAIRS  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
BEFORE  
THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
APRIL 30, 2015

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Sires, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America.

The Strategy offers a compelling way to address the severe challenges facing Central America, especially the Northern Triangle. It prioritizes physical security, but security alone will deliver only ephemeral gains. It notes security must be accompanied by vocational training and jobs, by the rule of law – or what businesses call juridical security – and by more transparent and accountable government institutions. The Strategy concludes that only in this way will we ensure that the 1.7 million young people in the Northern Triangle between 17-24 years of age who neither work nor study, or the 6 million young people entering the region’s workforce in the next 10 years, seek opportunity in their own countries and do not seek to migrate north.

The President’s \$1 billion request is an investment not only in Central America’s future, but also an investment that will benefit the United States for years to come. We propose to contribute to a credible future for a region close to home whose future is integral to our shared security and success.

Central American women and children continue to seek safety and opportunity that cannot be found in their home countries. Last summer, that message came from unaccompanied Central American children, over 10,000 in

June alone and over 50,000 over a 12 month span. The number of apprehensions of unaccompanied children at the U.S. border is lower so far this year than for the same period last year. In one year, there has been a nearly 50 percent decrease in the number of unaccompanied children apprehended at the U.S. border. In March 2015 there were 3,145 unaccompanied children apprehended on the U.S. border, whereas 7,176 were apprehended in March 2014. There are many reasons for this.

Mexico's increased enforcement of its own immigration laws, its actions against criminal organizations, including against human smuggling, as well as its efforts to share best practices on managing migration flows with Central American governments, have been significant factors in reducing the numbers apprehended at our southern border.

We believe our public messaging campaigns have helped dispel falsehoods about the benefits of child migration being disseminated by smugglers, and have reduced the number of parents choosing to send their children north.

However, conditions in these countries remain poor and the desire to migrate is still high, and our \$1 billion request is an investment to end this cyclical problem.

This is an important time to assess the merits of investing in Central America, and to consider what is different this time from our previous investments. I suggest there are four major differences.

First, women and children leaving in droves and bearing the risks of travel last year reflected chilling votes of no confidence by societies' most vulnerable members. This migration spike – and forlorn televised images of those sent back – was a political wake up call to Central American leaders. It caught the attention of the region's leaders in a new and different way and has helped to engender unprecedented regional cooperation within the Northern Triangle and with Mexico.

Second, Central American leaders now are demonstrating that they understand the gravity of their domestic situations and are willing to be held publicly accountable for the commitments they make. They understand the significant relationship between sustainable economic growth and transparent, effective, and accountable government institutions. Good governance – especially in terms of juridical security and the rule of law – gives confidence to citizens and investors alike.

In this regard, the public accountability record since last year is worth highlighting. The Honduran government signed a landmark agreement with Transparency International to publicize security sector procurement information, and President Hernandez asked the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to open a human rights office in Tegucigalpa in June. The Honduran Congress just passed legislation protecting human rights defenders and journalists. In Guatemala, President Perez Molina recently requested that the UN renew for two years the International Commission to Combat Impunity in Guatemala – CICIG – an independent judicial accountability mechanism. In El Salvador, the Sanchez Ceren government is working with us through the Partnership for Growth and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, guided by a meaningful public-private dialogue that is action-oriented, and designed to create a more investment-friendly environment. The region's leaders also committed to a series of public reform commitments in a March 3 Joint Statement with Vice President Biden.

Third, the Northern Triangle countries have a plan – the Alliance for Prosperity – and are serious about collaborating with each other. This is important because we learned from Plan Colombia that national investment – be it financial resources from the government, political courage from key leaders, or private sector partnership – is much more important than any actions or resources from the donor community. President Hernandez of Honduras has pledged that 80 percent of the Plan's activities will be funded from their national budget.

In this regard, it is the job of citizens in the Northern Triangle to determine – in collaboration with their own governments – the content of the Salvadoran dream, the Guatemalan dream, and the Honduran dream. Such discussions lie at the very heart of democratic and inclusive societies. For our part, we have tools to help build and realize these dreams – so that all citizens in the region can ultimately succeed.

And fourth, we have learned from our own past experiences and are more integrated than ever before – both in Washington and in the field. The Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) has demonstrated proofs of concept but they were too small in scale to have a transformational impact and were not always linked to national policies. We are scaling up proven models, targeting the right people and the right places. Our interagency approach is committed to making a sustainable, lasting impact on the lives of the people in Central America in ways that also benefit our long-term national interests.

All investment involves calculated risk; we assess that conditions now exist for transformation, but we do not intend to brush aside or minimize risks. Political will must be sustained, civil society engaged and supported, the private sector energized, and partners coordinated.

There is far greater risk with our inaction. The cost of investing in Central America pales in comparison with the cost of addressing increases in migration to the United States. Last year alone the federal government required \$1.5 billion to address the increase in arrivals of unaccompanied children. This does not include any additional costs that state or local communities may have contributed.

Absent U.S. assistance, Central America will be less able to create jobs, provide education and training, clean out corrupt government institutions, ensure safe communities, and offer viable lives for their citizens.

The U.S. government is committed to working with our Central American partners to realize change. Interagency coordination is ensuring consistency in messaging and effective joint programming. Our strategy for Central America is an executive branch blueprint for our outreach to the region – we have a shared vision of U.S. policy in Central America and of the outcomes we seek with regional partners.

We are committed to protecting and promoting the security and prosperity of the United States by investing in Central America's own plan for its prosperity, governance, and security, and will work with our U.S. Government partners and the U.S. Congress to realize gains from our investment.