



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

OF

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BEFORE

**THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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ON

**“Potential Terrorist Threats: Border Security Challenges in Latin America and the
Caribbean”**

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Introduction

Good morning Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Sires, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to testify on furthering U.S. security by ensuring cooperation and information sharing in the Western Hemisphere. Secretary Johnson and I appreciate this Subcommittee's interest in this important matter.

Overview

We have reached an important time for North America, with the region emerging as an economic powerhouse, consisting of a half billion people and 25 percent of global gross domestic product. Trilateral commerce between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico has increased 265 percent since the start of the North America Free Trade Agreement. If we are to remain competitive globally, however, we must adopt a whole of North America approach to perimeter security as well as trade facilitation. With respect to security, the focus must shift from an exclusive focus on land border lines, extending east and west, but also must recognize the reality of global flows of people and goods north and south in our hemisphere and increasingly adopt a continental perimeter approach to our security.

The lens of North American integration provides a viable framework for Mexico, Canada, and the United States to jointly address shared continental and perimeter security responsibility as well as the problems of violent crime and economic stagnation that exist in Central America's Northern Triangle countries. Thus, robust coordination among Canada, the United States, and Mexico through the North American Leaders Summit and other mechanisms is vital to Central America's efforts to promote development and security. As part of our whole-of-government approach, DHS continues to build our risk-based approach with our North American partners to address the challenges present in the region. Through information sharing efforts and law enforcement collaboration, we aim to address threats at the earliest point possible before they reach our borders to strengthen the shared security of our countries.

DHS Engagement with Canada toward Achieving Perimeter Security

The United States and Canada have a long tradition of working together to promote security and facilitate trade and travel across our borders, ensuring that they remain open to legitimate trade and travel and closed to terrorists, criminals, and illegal or unauthorized goods. The *Beyond the Border Declaration: A Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness* and its accompanying *Action Plan*, announced by President Obama and then-Prime Minister Harper in 2011, has deepened and institutionalized this cooperation within, at, and away from the shared border. To that end, during Prime Minister Trudeau's recent State visit to Washington, D.C., he and President Obama announced our countries have jointly developed protocols to exchange information on those who present a clear threat, including exchanging our respective "No-Fly" lists, with appropriate protections for the handling and dissemination of such information and processes to correct inaccurate information.

Through the Beyond the Border initiative, the United States and Canada are enhancing perimeter security by systematically checking the other's visa and immigration databases for immigration and border related purposes, including visa and refugee resettlement applications, for third country nationals. As a result of this sharing, the United States and Canada have identified individuals with immigration violations, criminal concerns, and national security concerns who otherwise might have been missed. In 2013, Canada began checking biographic

information on visa and refugee applicants to Canada against United States holdings through the Department of State's (State) Consular Lookout and Support System database, which contains records based on derogatory information related to fraud, criminality and terrorism.

In 2015, the United States deployed new technology significantly improving its sharing of biometric information with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the Canadian Border Services Agency in order to counter identity fraud, strengthen identity management and provide valuable information to inform respective admissibility determinations. Beginning in May 2015, this capability allowed Canada to vet the fingerprints of applicants for visas to Canada as well as refugees and those seeking asylum in Canada against the DHS Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT) for the first time. The IDENT system contains millions of records of immigration violators, deported felons, as well as records from the Department of Defense and the Terrorist Screening Center. As a result of this information sharing, DHS was able to provide Canada advanced warning of likely illicit travelers. Through this information sharing, Canada has succeeded in rejecting a number of fraudulent applications that would have likely been approved. Canada is providing similar access to its biometric data to the United States.

On March 10, 2016, the Government of Canada publicly assured the United States it will complete the last phase of a coordinated entry and exit information system to all travelers, so the record of land and air entries into one country establishes an exit record from the other. Currently, this information is exchanged on third country nationals and permanent Canadian and U.S. residents. In 2015, the United States and Canada securely shared entry records on approximately 8.7 million travelers, with a cumulative total of 17.8 million since June 30th, 2013.

DHS Engagement with Mexico and the U.S. Southwest Border

Over the past few years, DHS has worked with its partners in the Federal Government to respond comprehensively to a substantial increase in the number of unaccompanied children (UC), who are some of the most vulnerable individuals to interact with our immigration system, apprehended at the U.S.-Mexican border. According to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the number of UCs from all countries apprehended at the U.S.-Mexican border climbed from more than 24,000 in fiscal year 2012 to nearly 39,000 in fiscal year 2013, and to nearly 69,000 in fiscal year 2014. Total apprehensions on the U.S. Southwest Border followed this trend, with 356,873 apprehended in fiscal year 2012, 414,397 in fiscal year 2013, and 479,371 in fiscal year 2014. Yet the total number of apprehensions on the U.S. Southwest Border fell to 331,333 in fiscal year 2015, and UC apprehensions for fiscal year 2015 also decreased to just under 40,000, in large part due to the response by DHS, our excellent coordination with the government of Mexico on regional migration issues, as well as our interagency and international partners to prepare for the seasonal increase in migrants that normally begins in the winter and increases each spring. In response, CBP deployed additional Border Patrol Agents to high-traffic areas, augmented operations in South Texas with Mobile Response Teams, and redirected support from other Border Patrol sectors including through remote interviewing technology. CBP also increased surveillance capabilities by adding tethered aerostats (long-range radars) and other technology, along with additional aircraft. During the first three months of fiscal year 2016, DHS saw an increase in the number of UC and family units apprehended along the Southwest border, at a time of year when border crossings traditionally decrease. Although the number of UCs apprehended at our border has dropped from 6,775 in December 2015 to 3,111 in January 2016, and 3,113 in February, CBP will sustain its heightened border

security efforts, along with the humanitarian aspects of its responsibilities. DHS will continue to closely monitor these trends and coordinate across the whole of government to ensure an effective response to any changes in migration flows.

DHS plays a comprehensive role in migration management and security engagement in the region, focusing on border security, narcotics smuggling, human trafficking and smuggling, anti-gang initiatives, and police reforms across a wide range of law enforcement and police activities. Similarly, DHS is pursuing efforts to promote trade, travel, and commerce through trade facilitation, port infrastructure assistance, and information sharing. DHS currently has attachés and advisors working closely with their counterparts in Mexico and all of the Central American countries except for Nicaragua and Belize, although these two countries are covered by Panama and Guatemala attachés, respectively. DHS personnel in the region facilitate and support training and capacity building efforts as well as the systematic sharing of information.

In Mexico, DHS continues to deepen cooperation with Mexico counterparts to address human smuggling, to include working with our Mexican partners to coordinate enforcement efforts on the U.S.-Mexican border. DHS and Mexico are also working to shut down the criminal groups and illegal networks that exploit vulnerable migrants in the Mexico-Guatemala border region. Through information sharing, exchange of best practices, and training, DHS and our Mexican counterparts are working together to improve security for both countries. DHS will continue working with the State Department in support of the Merida Initiative, the longstanding partnership between the United States and Mexico, to fight transnational organized crime and associated violence while furthering respect for human rights and the rule of law.

In the context of Mexico, DHS has partnered with the Department of Defense's U.S. Northern Command and State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs on an information sharing initiative with the Government of Mexico called the Biometric Data Sharing Program with Mexico (BDSP/M). The purpose of this program is to develop and implement an automated biometrics solution for the Government of Mexico's (GOM) National Institute of Migration that will assist in the identification of Third Country Nationals traveling through Mexico. The BDSP/M initiative will support the exchange of biometric information between the GOM and the United States to improve regional security along the Southwest border, better identify transnational criminal threats, and bolster U.S. national security through the identification of special interest aliens (SIA).

Regional Flows

The migration of Cuban nationals to the United States has also dramatically increased in recent years. The increase is likely due to the interaction of migration policies set by the Governments of the United States and Cuba, misperceptions about what the 2015 re-establishment of diplomatic relations will mean for migration policies, and the relatively weak state of the Cuban economy. Far larger numbers of Cuban migrants have attempted to enter the United States by land in recent years than have attempted entry by sea, where they are generally interdicted and returned to Cuba. So far in fiscal year 2016, encounters with Cuban migrants at land ports of entry have increased 84.3% over the same period in fiscal year 2015. In fiscal year 2015, 24,374 Cubans arrived at U.S. land ports of entry in fiscal year 2014, almost entirely along the U.S. Southwest border. In fiscal year 2015, the figure was 43,334. A growing number of Cuban nationals arrive at the U.S. Southwest border after traveling through Central America and Mexico. Cuban nationals fly to Ecuador before traveling through Colombia, Central America, and Mexico to arrive at the United States. The GOM temporarily detains large numbers of

Cuban migrants who arrive at its border without authorization before paroling them for a short period of time. Most Cuban nationals depart Mexico rather than claim asylum. Mexican Immigration officials do not have the authority to detain Cubans with valid Mexican visas or those who travel on Spanish passports. Although there are more land arrivals than in previous years than sea arrivals, Cuban maritime migration flow exceeded the five year average by 111%.

In addition to Central American migrants apprehended on the U.S. Southwest border, DHS apprehensions of special interest aliens, or extra-hemispheric migrants, have increased in recent years. This population consists of unauthorized migrants who arrive in the United States from, or are citizens of, several Asian, Middle Eastern, and African countries. While many citizens of these countries migrate for economic reasons or because they are fleeing persecution in their home countries, this group may include migrants who are affiliated with foreign terrorist organizations, intelligence agencies, and organized criminal syndicates. Human smuggling organizations will fly migrants from outside of the hemisphere to airports in the Western Hemisphere, particularly Brazil and Ecuador. Smugglers then exploit visa free travel arrangements and corrupt officials to smuggle migrants to northern South America and Central America before crossing into Mexico via a mixture of air, land, and maritime routes. These smugglers are often part of the same networks that move economic migrants from Central America and Mexico north to the U.S.

Virtually all of these migrants are trying to reach the U.S.-Mexico Border. Many migrants from outside the Western Hemisphere, or extra-hemispheric migrants, are apprehended by Mexican immigration authorities in the Mexican Southern border region. After encountering these individuals, and often due to a lack of consular response from the consulates or embassies in-country, Mexican authorities are often forced to release the extra-hemispheric migrants who cannot be deported, many of whom continue their smuggler-led journey to the United States. Central American countries, led by Panama, also detain migrants from outside the hemisphere, but are stymied in their efforts to return these migrants to their home countries due to a combination of factors, to include lack of detention space, lack of diplomatic representation (to issue travel documents), and lack of funding to support asylum hearings and removal operations via commercial aircraft. Still, DHS is working with interagency partners and the Governments of Central America and Mexico to increase law enforcement operations and information sharing regimes to detect, deter, and dismantle human smuggling operations moving extra-hemispheric migrants through the region and identify threats as far as possible from the U.S. Southwest border.

On January 4, 2016, Secretary Johnson announced a number of ongoing and new actions that will address recent trends and improve southwest border security, including increasing border security, cracking down on criminal smugglers, and expanding cooperation with international partners. All of these measures, in concert with actions undertaken by our interagency and regional partners, will make it that much more difficult for extra-hemispheric migrants to move unimpeded into and through Central America and Mexico and approach the U.S. border.

DHS Engagement with Central America

To shape and focus the U.S. Government's response to the challenges in Central America, the Obama Administration created the Strategy for U.S. Engagement in Central America, focused on three major objectives: prosperity, governance, and security. State is currently leading the effort to match funding (\$750 million appropriated in fiscal year 2016) for

programs in support of the broader strategy, with specific programs implemented via the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), the primary U.S. implementation structure for security assistance in the region. Through CARSI, partner nations work with State, DHS, and other departments and agencies to strengthen institutions, counter the effects of organized crime, and uphold the rule of law. More specifically, DHS collaborates with State and our regional partners to build capacity for border security, information sharing, and deterring transnational crime to address the region's most pressing security needs.

Through direct engagement with affected countries, increased operations targeting regional human smuggling networks, and foreign assistance to the region, the United States continues to direct its efforts towards improving the security and economic situation in Central America. Through CARSI and other funding initiatives, the United States will continue to expand successful programs to make short to medium-term sustainable impacts and reduce levels of crime and violence, build the capacity of law enforcement and rule of law institutions, and support prevention programs for youth and in communities at-risk of crime and violence. The viability and stability of Central America have profound national security and economic implications for the United States. If economic prospects remain poor and rates of violent crime remain high in Central America, the region will remain a source of instability for Mexico and ultimately the United States in the form of illegal migration and even more entrenched organized crime in the Western Hemisphere, including in the United States. To the extent that these problems constitute grounds for individuals to seek asylum or other international humanitarian protections, the United States will continue to provide appropriate protections consistent with our laws and international treaties.

DHS continues to utilize its excellent bilateral partnerships with our counterparts in the Honduran, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan Governments to enhance the quick, efficient, and safe repatriation of children and families who are apprehended in the United States, who are subject to a final order of removal issued by an immigration judge, and who have no outstanding appeal or claim for asylum or other humanitarian relief under our laws. To provide participating nations with criminal history information in advance of an undocumented migrant's removal from the United States, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) uses the Criminal History Information Sharing (CHIS) program. DHS has CHIS agreements with our counterparts in the Governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

To build capacity for anti-smuggling investigations, DHS, with State funding, is planning to expand the Transnational Criminal Investigative Units (TCIU), which are sponsored by ICE in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Panama. Comprised of foreign law enforcement personnel, TCIUs facilitate information exchange, rapid bilateral investigation, and ultimately enhance the host country's ability to investigate and prosecute individuals involved in violations within the ICE investigative purview. Partner nation authorities in Central America, including immigration services and border police, collect biometrics in cooperation with the TCIUs and through ICE's Biometric Identification Transnational Migration Alert Program (BITMAP). The host country owns the biometric data and shares the information with ICE for intelligence and screening.

To strengthen air, land, and maritime border security efforts in the region, DHS, acting primarily through CBP, is providing assistance and capacity-building at and between ports of entry. DHS plans to expand border-focused vetted units, such as the Special Tactics Operations Group or *Grupo de Operaciones Especiales Tacticas* (GOET) in Honduras, to El Salvador and Guatemala. Through these vetted units, funded primarily by State, CBP provides training and

capacity building to foreign counterparts, empowering them to identify, disrupt, and deter criminal organizations engaging in illicit cross-border activities in the region. In the maritime environment, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) performed a comprehensive naval assessment for the Government of El Salvador in fiscal year 2015 and plans to complete assessments for the Governments of Guatemala and Honduras in the near future. These assessments identify gaps in organizational structure and create a road map of potential areas where the USCG can provide capacity-building and training.

DHS will also support increased passenger and cargo information sharing via programs designed to collect and verify information through U.S. databases and help reveal transnational criminal organization smuggling routes. By pursuing efforts to expand Joint Security Programs and Advanced Passenger Information Sharing in Central America, DHS will augment the ability of host country law enforcement and migration officials to identify and respond to illicit trade and travel occurring at major transit hubs, primarily at the international commercial airports.

In my engagement with our Central American partners, I have been impressed and encouraged by the political will demonstrated by each country, which is a critical component to our success. Salvadoran law enforcement leaders have described the need to build investigative capacity within the national police, with a particular focus on building capacity on the border. In Guatemala, President Jimmy Morales outlined his security and immigration priorities for Secretary Johnson during their February meeting, emphasizing that his administration will prioritize aviation passenger information sharing systems and build border security capacity in the air, land, and maritime environments. Senior officials in Honduras have outlined their goal to increase capacity of domestic police units, particularly investigative capabilities, to crack down on crime and violence. The Government of Honduras also expressed a strong interest in pursuing efforts to improve airport security and migration control. These efforts are but a few examples of how the governments of Central America are taking ownership of these challenges.

One important step for the Northern Triangle governments was creating a strategic vision through the “Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle: A Road Map” which was created by the three Central American countries themselves with support from the Inter-American Development Bank. This plan emphasizes the importance of regional economic integration through stronger transportation, communications, customs, and border linkages. In support of this Plan, the Northern Triangle governments are undertaking ambitious reforms and allocating over USD \$2.6 billion from their national budgets in 2016. Following their February 24, 2016 meeting, Vice President Biden and the presidents of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras issued a joint communique in support of the Plan, agreeing to take numerous actions to augment current efforts to combat transnational crime, improve border security, cooperate on migration management, and promote economic growth, among other initiatives.

DHS Engagement with South America

Elsewhere in the region, we’ve made great strides in collaborating with partner governments in South America to prevent the entry of terrorists, terrorist weapons, and their components into the United States, as well as reduce regional threats presented by transnational criminal organizations. To this end, DHS components have deployed nearly 40 full-time employees with regional responsibilities in five countries in South America, including Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, who enhance engagement in a range of areas. DHS, in coordination with U.S. interagency partners, collaborates closely with South American governments to share information and build capacities to enhance security.

To support South American partner countries' investigative capabilities and enhance law enforcement information sharing, DHS, through ICE, engages with foreign law enforcement to combat human smuggling and terrorist finance networks. For example, under the Biometric Identification Transnational Migration Alert Program (BITMAP), DHS provides training and equipment to build partner countries' ability to collect biometric and biographic data on suspect individuals. BITMAP enrollments provide U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies information on foreign partners' law enforcement and border encounters of special interest aliens, gang members, and other persons of interest who may pose a potential national security concern to the United States. BITMAP is currently operational in Colombia and, pending funding, will expand to other countries in the region in 2016. DHS also works to combat trade-based money laundering, in which transnational criminal organizations (TCO) move and launder illicit proceeds disguised as legitimate trade, through Trade Transparency Units (TTUs). TTUs currently operate in Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru, and we are working to expand to Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay in the coming months.

To enhance border security and help prevent illicit travel to the United States, DHS, through CBP, partners with South American countries to enhance the security at and between ports of entry through training, capacity building, and information sharing programs. For example, CBP is working to partner with countries across South America to support capabilities to detect individuals that may require additional screening when they enter and leave the country. CBP, in collaboration with ICE and other U.S. government agencies and using some funding from State, also provides training on fraudulent document detection, with recent courses in Brazil. To support secure air travel to the United States, DHS through TSA, works with partner countries with last point of departure flights to the United States to perform airport assessments and inspections, as well as provide training to enhance international airport security measures. Recent trainings include collaborating with FBI to provide airport police authorities a seminar on Advanced Improvised Explosive Device Post-Blast in Argentina, and baggage handling system training in Chile.

To enhance maritime security, the USCG partners closely with partners in South America to include Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Suriname, and Venezuela to counter the flow of narcotics and counter transnational criminal organizations. Over the last five years, Coast Guard assets operating in the offshore regions of the transit zone have removed more than 450 metric tons of cocaine with a wholesale value of nearly \$15 billion, removing a major source of funding for these criminal organizations. At maritime ports, CBP, through the Container Security Initiative, partners with Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia to address the threat to border security and global trade posed by the potential terrorist use of a maritime container to deliver a weapon to the United States.

In areas that are hotspots for illicit activity, such as the tri-border region where Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay intersect, we provide in-depth, focused trainings aimed at countering illicit flows. For example, in 2015 ICE provided Cross Border Financial Investigations Training to the countries of the tri-border areas to increase the participants' ability to investigate transnational illicit financial and smuggling schemes used by terrorists, foreign fighters, and other TCOs. In 2016, we are seeking to enhance our efforts in this region, including exploring options for additional personnel and training that could be supported by State funding.

DHS also provides specialized trainings in advance of large events. DHS, in coordination with the U.S. interagency, worked closely with Brazil in the run up to the 2015 World Cup to support security efforts across multiple cities in Brazil. Likewise, in advance of the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, DHS is working closely with Brazilian counterparts on measures to address a range of Olympic-related security issues, including training on fraudulent documents, and a workshop to increase Brazil's ability to halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and its related commodities, and the trafficking of destabilizing conventional arms.

Conclusion

We appreciate the support Congress has provided to improve security at our borders and ports of entry. With that support, we have made significant progress. There are now increased personnel, technology, and infrastructure on our borders, more than ever before. As we work to increase border security, however, we must continue to collaborate with our regional partners and look beyond our borders to identify and interdict threats at the earliest possible point, before they reach our borders. To achieve this goal, we are sharing more information with these partners in a manner that preserves the privacy protection laws and policies of each country; we are working in a joint capacity to counter transnational criminal organizations, human and drug smugglers, and those who traffic in persons; and we are building greater security and integrity into our shared systems of trade and travel. We will continue to engage with our foreign and interagency partners to extend our security beyond our borders and address threats as far from the homeland as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, for your continued support of the Department, and for your attention to this important issue. I would be pleased to answer any questions at this time.