

**Written Testimony of
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Before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
“Latin America Forgotten: A Look at President Biden’s FY 2025 Budget Priorities”
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Chair Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to discuss USAID’s role in advancing the United States’ foreign policy priorities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This is a pivotal moment for the region, one of challenge and opportunity. Historic levels of migration are impacting nearly every nation in the hemisphere, democracy is gaining ground in some places and facing threats in others, and malign actors continue to seek influence. The President’s fiscal year 2025 budget request of \$1.31 billion for USAID-managed programs in Latin America and the Caribbean recognizes that the investments we make today in these critical areas will help shape the region and our own national security for decades to come.

USAID has spent the last 60 years building enduring bilateral and regional relationships that have helped create peace and prosperity. We invest not only in programming but also in local partners, creating regional capacity for inclusive and sustainable development through a collaborative approach that provides a clear contrast to the transactional nature of our strategic competitors, including the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The resources requested in this budget will allow USAID to continue this vital work.

Expanding Democracy & Stability

That includes helping to promote stability in the most fragile place in the region, Haiti, where we continue to operate our programs despite significant challenges on the ground. In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, USAID supports health clinics, works to expand economic opportunities, provides food security assistance, and builds stronger communities through citizen security programs. The requested \$87.4 million for programming in Haiti will allow USAID to sustain our investments in improving health and education outcomes, advancing economic and food security, and re-establishing and strengthening government institutions. With support from the Multinational Security Support mission, the Haitian government is taking steps toward stability and paving the way for free and fair elections. USAID is supporting these efforts to make it possible for the Haitian people to elect a representative government, including by providing identification cards that will facilitate more than 2 million people voting. All told, this work is helping to lay a foundation on which Haiti can build a more secure, prosperous, and democratic future.

Indeed, this is our goal for nations across the hemisphere. To pursue it, USAID champions democracy, stability, and opportunity wherever we can.

We look for opportunities to capitalize on democratic advancement and surge our efforts when courageous citizens peacefully advocate for reform. We find the bright spots of democratic renewal and help reformers show that democracies can and do deliver. This budget request prioritizes the continuation of that work in the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and the region's most recent democratic opening, Guatemala, which is rejecting corruption and the PRC's economic coercion in favor of accountability and inclusive economic growth. Additionally, we look forward to working with Mexico's first female president, Claudia Sheinbaum, on shared priorities including citizen security, economic development in Southern Mexico, and environmental conservation.

In more challenging environments, USAID supports civil society groups doing the courageous work of documenting abuses and fighting for individuals' human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In Venezuela, courageous citizens have responded to years of repression and highly dysfunctional governance by mobilizing for democratic change and human rights. USAID has been proud to support those efforts, which have been instrumental in the lead up to this weekend's elections. No matter how July 28th plays out, there will be work to do. Therefore, this budget requests \$50 million to increase our support to civil society, human rights defenders, independent media, and democratic actors.

Similarly, USAID stands with the brave Nicaraguans who are continuing to demand respect for human rights protections in an increasingly authoritarian environment. The requested \$15 million to foster the conditions for democracy in Nicaragua is especially critical as USAID is one of only a few donors supporting human rights defenders and activists both in the country and in exile.

Our tenure in the region has allowed us to see the long-term impact of these investments. USAID has worked in and with Colombia for decades, helping them as they moved from war to peace. The requested budget for Colombia would allow us to continue supporting Colombia's peace accord implementation, increasing access to justice, improving citizen security and public services, and generating sustainable and licit livelihoods that offer alternatives to coca cultivation. These efforts with national and local government institutions, civil society, and other partners have helped build a platform that allows us to maintain progress and advance

our strategic interests across administrations. Colombia’s strong partnership in the response to unprecedented levels of regional migration is one example of the benefits that come from such sustained investments.

Migration Management

Historic numbers of people are migrating out of, through, or into nearly every nation in the hemisphere. In response, USAID is taking a holistic approach focused on supporting long-term integration, expanding access to lawful pathways, and addressing root causes. This budget requests \$218 million for USAID and the State Department to expand that work at a vital juncture for our migration response.

More than 7.7 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees have been displaced, and nearly 85 percent of them have relocated within the region. To help meet this moment, we are supporting the bold, generous policies of our partner countries, which allow migrants to regularize and integrate into their new host communities. USAID has helped Colombia register 2.5 million Venezuelan migrants and issue legal residency to more than 2 million individuals so far. We support “one-stop shops” where they can access schools, health care, bank accounts, and jobs and rebuild their lives. In Peru, we have supported degree validation so migrants can work and contribute at their highest potential. We also have backed similar integration efforts in Brazil, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama, and Belize. The budget request includes \$120 million to build on this win-win approach, which not only deters onward migration toward the United States but also helps grow the economy, workforce, and tax base of the host countries.

USAID also works to decrease irregular migration by expanding access to lawful pathways that provide access to temporary work opportunities abroad. We have strengthened the capacity of our government counterparts in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, allowing them to nearly triple their citizens’ access to H-2 temporary work visas. This helps American companies fill critical labor gaps and gives workers access to jobs where they can gain skills and resources to reinvest in their home communities. Evidence shows it also deters irregular migration. In communities that received a high share of temporary work visas, irregular migration rates were around 11 percent, compared to nearly 30 percent in similar communities that did not.

Finally, under the Administration’s Root Causes Strategy, USAID supports good jobs and training programs that are creating opportunity and anti-corruption programs that create more confidence in local government across Central America. These initiatives, among others, help mitigate some of the push factors that force people to search for stability outside of their home communities. While we cannot claim direct causality, 2023 data has shown a sustained, double-

digit decline in intentions to migrate from Guatemala and Honduras since the Root Causes Strategy launched in 2021. Total numbers of encounters of Northern Central Americans by Customs and Border Protection have also fallen by nearly a third over the same timeframe. At the program level, emerging evidence shows USAID programs can influence participants' plans to migrate. The number of young people in USAID's vocational training program in El Salvador who planned to stay in El Salvador increased by 13 percentage points. In Honduras, schools in our basic education program show high retention, low dropout rates, and lower rates of out-migration.

Meeting Evolving Needs

USAID also works to enhance stability and security through our ongoing efforts to improve access to basic government and health services and our efforts to respond to environmental challenges. That includes working with partner governments on improving a variety of services including water treatment, nutrition, public lighting, and waste collection.

This budget request also includes \$53 million to help the region rebuild its health services in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic which took such a toll on the Americas. Our Global Health Security programming will work to detect public health threats, enable rapid response, and prevent threats from turning into regional or global crises.

In addition, as the region faces challenges such as forest loss and increasingly frequent and intense periods of heat, droughts, floods, and storms, this budget will help communities access: early warning systems that will help save lives; drought and heat-resistant crops that provide a more reliable source of food; and secure, affordable, and clean energy. It will also allow us to continue investing in the future of the Amazon by conserving biodiversity and combating deforestation, while providing sustainable livelihoods for local people and national economies.

Conclusion

As we seek to maintain our competitive advantage in the region, resources do make a difference. If we have to reduce our footprint due to budget cuts, it will not only jeopardize the hard-won gains we have made alongside our partner nations, it will open the door for other actors including the PRC, Russia, and Iran to fill that space.

This budget will allow us to continue operating and investing in America's foreign policy priorities and national security. As always, we will continue to look for every opportunity to take our dollars further by leveraging our programs to encourage effective policies, bringing in

private sector and other partners, and using our programming to build the capacity of our local partners so they can sustain progress beyond our programs.

As our closest neighbors, Latin America and the Caribbean are critically important to the United States, and our futures are inextricably linked. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today about how USAID looks to advance America's strategic interests and build a more secure, democratic, and prosperous hemisphere. I look forward to your questions.