

TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE
THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Merida Initiative to combat transnational narcotics trafficking and organized crime in Mexico and Central America.

As Assistant Secretary Tom Shannon explained, our partners in Mexico and Central America have already made considerable progress in their own efforts to fight these transnational organized criminal networks, and they would like our help to do more. Through bilateral and multilateral initiatives, the Governments of Mexico and Central America are demonstrating unprecedented will to work with us and each other to address these issues. This is a compelling opportunity to advance our common national security interests.

Roughly 90 percent of all the cocaine consumed in the United States transits Mexico. The country is also the largest foreign supplier of marijuana and the largest foreign source of methamphetamine consumed in the United States. Central American officials have identified gangs, drug trafficking, and trafficking of arms as the most pressing security concerns in that region. The Merida Initiative will respond to those security threats and build on existing strategies and programs. We are confronting vulnerabilities posed from the increasingly violent nature of the security situation in Mexico and Central America that if left unchecked, could open the way for more dangerous threats to emerge.

Through the Merida Initiative, the United States seeks to strengthen our partners' capacities in three broad areas: 1) Counter-Narcotics, Counterterrorism, and Border Security; 2) Public Security and Law Enforcement; and 3) Institution Building and Rule of Law. Through this cooperative effort, we intend to achieve the following strategic goals: break the power and impunity of criminal organizations; strengthen border, air, and maritime controls from the Southwest border of the United States to Panama; improve the capacity of justice systems in the region to conduct investigations and prosecutions, consolidate the rule of law, protect human rights, and reform prison management; curtail criminal gang activity; and reduce the demand for drugs throughout the region.

This cooperation is designed to build on activities already underway in the region. For example, Mexico is undertaking historic efforts to improve coordination among security agencies, modernize law enforcement agencies and professionalize their staff. Since his inauguration in December 2006, President Calderon has taken decisive action against transnational criminal organizations by deploying 24,000 troops to support joint police-military counternarcotics operations in 10 Mexican states, increasing extraditions, and initiating large scale police reform.

The results of these efforts are striking. The Calderon administration has extradited a record 79 fugitives to the United States this year, including prominent members of the Gulf drug trafficking organization. Mexican law enforcement authorities have seized over \$200 million in cash from a methamphetamine trafficking organization, and have seized record amounts of narcotics. Seizures of cocaine, marijuana, opium gum, heroin, and methamphetamine are on pace to exceed last year's totals. As noted by Assistant Secretary Shannon, cocaine seizures in recent weeks have shattered all previous records in Mexico. We are also beginning to see encouraging signs that these achievements, together with successful programs in the Andean source zone, may be having a measurable impact on the availability of cocaine here in the U.S.

Mexico has also made great strides in its efforts to root out official corruption. Since coming into power, the Calderon administration has conducted thousands of inquiries and investigations into possible malfeasance or misconduct. These investigations resulted in the dismissal of over 1,600 employees, the suspension of nearly 2,000, as well as thousands of reprimands. The imposition of economic sanctions against corrupt federal

employees brought the equivalent of over \$300 million in fines and reimbursements into the Mexican Treasury.

Existing U.S. programs complement and support the historic counternarcotics efforts of the Calderon administration. For example, we are conducting programs supporting professionalization and justice system restructuring. These efforts include training and other support to police reform, and development of federal police institutions and infrastructure. These programs support the vetting of Mexican law enforcement agents and assist state and federal police and prosecutors. We provided training for 4,627 Government of Mexico officials in 2007, and have plans to train about 5,800 in 2008. Our Good Governance programs support rule of law education programs and promote anti-corruption initiatives within the Mexican federal bureaucracy.

Looking into the future, the Merida Initiative, if approved, will include various efforts to improve crime prevention, modernize the Mexican police force, and provide institution building and the rule of law. Case management software, technical assistance programs, and equipment will support Mexico's judicial and police reforms by enhancing their ability to investigate, convict, sentence, and securely detain those who commit crimes. Technical assistance and training programs will support Mexico's development of offices of professional responsibility, inspectors general, and new institutions designed to receive and act on citizen complaints. Increased training for prosecutors, defenders, and court managers in Central America, will assist with judicial reform. The Initiative will expand needed technical assistance on prison management and aid in severing the connection between incarcerated criminals and their criminal organizations.

One of our existing programs supports anti-money laundering efforts by the Government of Mexico, by assisting the Government's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) and by supporting police and prosecutors who investigate money laundering-related crimes. As part of the Merida Initiative, we plan to support the FIU through the expansion of software for data management and data analysis associated with financial intelligence functions and law enforcement.

Nearly half of our current programs focus on interdiction, including support for the Mexican counterparts of our federal law enforcement agencies. To further advance this cooperation, funding under the Merida

Initiative focuses support for a Consolidated Crime Information System; purchasing special investigative equipment, vehicles and computers for the new Federal Police Corps; creating special police units to focus on high-profile criminal targets and deploy at major airports and seaports; assessing security and installing equipment at Mexico's largest seaports; and procuring additional clandestine laboratory vehicles and safety gear to assist the Government of Mexico in combating methamphetamine. This program includes specialized equipment and training to safely and effectively dismantle methamphetamine super labs.

Our existing programs focus on Border Security by principally providing inspection equipment and associated tactical training to support inspection capabilities of police, customs and immigration. Funds also provide equipment and specially trained canine teams to pursue arms trafficking and explosives. Through linkages with the USG's Advanced Passenger Information System, we also facilitate the real-time interchange of information related to potential counterterrorism targets.

The Merida Initiative includes several programs to support interdiction and border security efforts such as information technology support that will assist Mexico's federal migration authorities improve their database and document verification capabilities. Additional communications equipment will improve their ability to conduct rescue and patrol operations along Mexico's southern border. Equipment for a secure communications network, data management, and forensic analysis will strengthen coordination among Mexican law enforcement agencies and greatly enhance Mexico's ability to prosecute narco trafficking and other transborder crimes. Technologies such as gamma-ray scanners, density measurement devices, and commodity testing kits will help prevent the cross-border movement of illicit drugs, firearms, financial assets, and trafficked persons. Expansion of weapons tracing programs will enable increased joint and individual country investigations and prosecutions of illegal arms trafficking. Enhanced information systems in Mexico will strengthen analytical capabilities and interconnectivity across law enforcement agencies and improve information sharing with U.S. counterparts. Additional transport and light aircraft in Mexico will give security agencies the capability to rapidly reinforce law enforcement operations nationwide.

In Central America, maritime assistance and both fixed and mobile non-intrusive inspection assistance, will allow regional migration officials to better defend national sovereignty from land and sea incursions by illegal traffickers. In addition, technical assistance, training, and non-lethal equipment will improve policing and promote preventative and community policing. Specialized anti-gang units in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala will also improve investigation and prosecution of dangerous gang members in the United States, Central America and Mexico. Moreover, the Merida Initiative will provide funding to implement all five elements of the U.S. Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs, including improved processes for repatriation and strong community action programs to prevent youth from joining gangs. We will also begin a focused program to address illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons throughout the region by providing a regional adviser, training and stockpile management and destruction assistance.

Finally, an existing U.S. program supports demand reduction efforts by Mexican governmental and non-governmental entities that pursue drug remediation, rehabilitation and public awareness activities. The Merida Initiative will build significantly on these small programs by providing technological support to the Mexican National Network for Technological Transfers in Addictions, which will improve its ability to deliver drug treatment and prevention services across Mexico.

The Merida Initiative will be implemented through bi-lateral Letters of Agreement with the host governments that will include provision for end use monitoring. We will work with the inter-agency to identify implementers for the various programs under the Merida Initiative, building on the results of inter-agency validation teams that verified the proposals in consultation with Mexican and Central American government agencies, and by expanding ongoing inter-agency cooperative relationships at the various Embassies and Consulates in the region.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.