

**RANKING MEMBER HENRY CUELLAR (D-TX) – OPENING STATEMENT
BORDER AND MARITIME SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING
“ELEVEN YEARS LATER: PREVENTING TERRORISTS FROM COMING TO
AMERICA”
SEPTEMBER 11, 2012**

I join Chairman Miller and my colleagues in remembering those who lost their lives in the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001.

Our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families today, the eleventh anniversary of the tragedy, and every day.

One way we honor those who died is to do our utmost to prevent terrorists from traveling to our country to do us harm.

The 9/11 hijackers did not sneak into this country across our land borders, but rather entered the United States via an airplane and carrying visas.

The attempted bombing of an airliner on Christmas Day 2009 was a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities in the visa process.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of State, with direction from Congress, have taken *important steps to strengthen visa security and to prescreen air passengers traveling to the U.S.*

Within DHS, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has expanded its Visa Security Program (VSP) at our overseas embassies, providing an important, additional layer of security in visa matters.

Similarly, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has deployed Immigration Advisory Program (IAP) officers at foreign airports and strengthened its ability to identify travelers of concern bound for the U.S.

CBP has also enhanced its efforts at the National Targeting Center to combat terrorist travel.

These programs require investments in personnel, technology, and resources, so it is imperative that Congress provide DHS the funding it needs to carry out this mission.

Today, I look forward to hearing about what security enhancements have been made since the Subcommittee met last year on this important issue, as well as what more remains to be done.

A related visa issue I continue to find troubling is that of recalcitrant countries.

It is my understanding that certain individuals subject to orders of removal from the U.S. are often delayed due to their respective governments' refusal to *accept the return of their nationals or use of lengthy delay tactics*.

I have raised this issue in previous hearings and appreciate the difficult and delicate nature of the issue.

However, I look forward to hearing more from the State Department and ICE about *recommended steps for improvement*.