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**GRANGER OPENING STATEMENT: STATE AND FOREIGN OPERATIONS
APPROPRIATIONS HEARING ON SECURITY CHALLENGES IN LATIN AMERICA**

The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs will come to order.

I want to welcome everyone to today's hearing. Deputy Assistant Secretary Whitaker, Assistant Secretary Brownfield, and Assistant Administrator Feierstein, thank you for being with us today to discuss challenges in Latin America and the funding provided in the State-Foreign Operations bill to address these issues.

The Administration's fiscal year 2013 request is approximately 1.65 billion dollars for programs that enhance security, encourage democratic principles, and foster economic growth in the region.

In a few weeks, world leaders will gather in Colombia for the sixth Summit of the Americas. The meeting's theme is "Connecting the Americas: Partners for Prosperity", and this could not come at a more important time.

The United States must work together with our neighbors to focus on our joint interests, and the economy and security are closely linked.

So while we must help these countries address the immediate problem of violence and insecurity, we also must help them focus on creating economic opportunity. I would like to explore this topic more fully during the hearing.

There are several other issues I hope the witnesses will address today.

We need an update on the security situation in Mexico. The U.S. has provided more than \$1.6 billion since 2008 to help Mexico address its enormous challenges. President Calderon initiated a new era of cooperation with the U.S. and he has been dedicated to reducing drug trafficking and related violence. He will soon be leaving office, and we want to know how we can ensure that programs begun during his administration will be sustained.

And as the pressure mounts on drug traffickers in Mexico, there is even more activity in Central America and the Caribbean. These criminals know no boundaries, and we want to hear what is being done to stop them.

Specifically, we want to hear more about regional security cooperation. We know that Colombia, for example, is now reaching out to other countries to teach the lessons they learned in their fight against drug traffickers. We need to know how the Administration is encouraging this type of information-sharing.

Finally, we know that USAID continues to work toward the very important goal of more countries “graduating” from U.S. assistance. But in order to determine whether countries can move forward and implement programs on their own, USAID plans to channel more funding directly through host country systems.

I remain concerned about this approach and want to caution the Administration that this should be pursued without jeopardizing other important work in-country, such as building up civil society.

None of the issues that we will discuss today have simple answers.

When many of our southern neighbors are more violent than Iraq or Afghanistan, it reminds us all that we must continue to focus close to home.

Last year, the President said that Latin America is more important to the prosperity and security of the United States than ever before, and I agree. But at the same time, the President’s budget request for the region is down 9 percent from the estimated 2012 level. We must ensure that adequate resources are available to address our interests in the region, and we look forward to your testimony today so we can hear more about the programs that are proposed.

We truly thank you and all the dedicated men and women of the State Department and USAID for the work you do every day.

I’ll now turn to Mrs. Lowey for her opening remarks.