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NOTE

From: US Regional Chair of the Dublin Group
To: Dublin Group
Subject: Regional report on Central America

U.S. Central America Strategy

- Security is paramount to all Central American assistance, and we have broadened our vision for how to achieve it. The U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America prioritizes three interconnected objectives – prosperity, governance, and security – to promote a secure, democratic, and prosperous region.
- The Department of State Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) programming is aligned with efforts led by the Central American countries, and the Northern Triangle countries' Alliance for Prosperity – a regional initiative also supported by Mexico, Colombia, the European Union, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) – to achieve a shared vision of 1) reducing levels of crime and violence; 2) strengthening rule of law institutions; and 3) engaging at the local level to build demand for support and accountability and address the root causes of instability – in addition to a focus on economic opportunity and regional economic integration.

- In recent months INL has tightened its focus on locally-based interventions and solutions that confront problems in the confined areas that they develop with solutions backed by institutional reforms, or what we call a top-down bottom-up approach. INL is also continuing to support a number of vetted units and task forces to interdict transnational organized crime and to achieve quick operational wins at local and national levels. To make the broadest possible impact we are also engaging at the grass-roots level with local communities to improve security through tailored, place-based programming and to build lasting partnerships between civil society actors and government entities. INL works along the full spectrum of the criminal justice system, supporting institutional reform at the police, justice, and corrections ministries throughout Central America. The goal is transparent, accountable, and effective government institutions. We also provide technical support on anti-corruption, transparency, and building effective institutions.

Place-Based Strategy for Violence Reduction

- INL and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) are pioneering an innovative “place-based strategy” for crime and violence reduction in Central America.
- The place-based strategy combines prevention programs with law enforcement activities to reduce and prevent violence by targeting the most at-risk communities and at-risk people, identified through data collection and analysis.
- U.S. and host nation officials work with other stakeholders to deliver targeted prevention programs and law enforcement interventions that respond to empirically-identified risk factors for homicide and other criminal activity.
- INL and USAID piloted the place-based strategy in Honduras, where the interagency team designed a set of interventions to reduce homicides the San Pedro Sula neighborhoods of Rivera Hernandez and Chamelecón.
- In El Salvador INL and USAID are directly supporting the Government of El Salvador’s National Security Strategy “Plan Seguro” by focusing efforts in high-crime municipalities targeted by the Government.
- INL and USAID in Guatemala have targeted select public schools and a community outreach center for primary and secondary PBS prevention programs.

Model Police Precincts

- INL's Model Police Precincts (MPPs) emphasize community engagement and crime prevention through the use of intelligence, targeted investigations, and community involvement. Established MPPs have shown an average ten percent decrease in crime rates. We have a total of 26 MPPs in various stages of development located in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize.
- The MPP program in Guatemala contributed to a nationwide 9 per cent decrease in homicide rates from 2011 to 2013, and nearly a 20 per cent decrease in the 8 MPPs currently supported by INL. In response to high-demand from local leaders, INL plans to expand the number of MPPs in Guatemala to 99 MPPs by 2017.
- MPP in El Salvador have yielded similar successes. After the MPP program began in 2009 in Lourdes, one of the most violent communities in the country, homicides began an immediate downward trend. In 2009 Lourdes recorded 316 homicides; in 2010 the number dropped to 288; in 2011 it was 179; in 2012 it was 95; and as of October 2013 the number was only 62. This represents an overall reduction of homicides of more than 70 percent since inception.
- Likewise, in Santa Ana, violent crime has been continuously reduced since the MPP project began in 2011, dropping from 376 in 2011 to 149 through October of 2013, or approximately, a 60 percent reduction. In Honduras we have seven MPPs running with plans to open a total of 19 by FY17.

Intelligence-Led Policing

- Through our Central America Police Reform Initiative (CAPRI), INL has implemented a software/database management platform for police forces known as COMPSTAT in the United States. The platform supports geo-referencing of crime data, management of human resources, monitoring of police response time, and an analytical cube enabling police precinct commanders to conduct real time analysis of crime situations. COMSTAT-modeled platforms are in place in Costa Rica, Belize, Honduras, Guatemala, and Panama.

- Following nation-wide rollout of COMPSTAT in Costa Rica and Panama, crime rates have dropped nearly 10 percent and 15 percent, respectively. With INL's assistance, Belize is also moving towards nation-wide implementation of the system.
- INL is helping train the Guatemalan police force on MOPSIC, which is modeled on COMPSTAT. In co-located regions with full MOPSIC implementation and clustered MPPs, homicide has decreased more than 30% in the first six months of 2015 compared to 2014.
- In Honduras, INL provides technical assistance and training to the Honduran National Police on the implementation of COEPOL, a Honduran government crime data gathering and analysis system similar to COMPSTAT.

Demand Reduction

While the region has historically been a transshipment zone, domestic drug consumption is a rising concern. A U.S.-Funded National Drug Use Survey conducted in Guatemala in 2014 showed a marked increase in the use of drugs among Guatemala's youth, and Nicaragua faces continued growth in domestic consumption of drugs. The exact scale of the problem is hard to determine, given a lack of data. Belize has limited data on the actual number of patients assisted and referred for treatment. In El Salvador, drug abuse is a growing concern, particularly among youth, but there is a lack of accurate information on the severity of drug use, given that the government has not kept reliable statistics for illegal consumption since 2012. In Panama, the last drug demand study was conducted in 2008, making it difficult to assess current trends.

Demand reduction programs and treatment options in the region vary.

- **Belize** has three operational drug rehabilitation centers – one is prison-based, one is run by a religious organization, and one is run by a foreign business.
- In **Costa Rica**, the judiciary began a pilot program in 2013 to allow those who commit minor crimes under the influence of drugs to opt for rehabilitation instead of prison.
- **Guatemala** has 101 treatment centers throughout the country, but only one of them is government funded.

- In **Guatemala**, INL advisers conducted 116 drug prevention workshops for students, teachers, and parents between May and July of 2015, reaching over 10,000 participants with anti-drug messaging. Also in **Nicaragua**, the INL-funded “Prevention of Youth Violence, a Drug Abuse Campaign,” awarded in 2013, is helping raise awareness on drug threats. Outreach material for the NGO-implemented campaign includes six video documentaries in Spanish, English and Miskitu that reached 430,440 people in 2014; a dramatized radio series broadcast on radio stations reaching 271,316 people; and 20 television spots on drug and violence prevention. In 2015, the project continued in the Caribbean Autonomous Regions and is expanding into Managua and its surrounding cities.
- The **Nicaraguan** National Police Juvenile Affairs Division runs a national prevention and intervention program that works with government institutions, religious leaders, local municipalities, community organizations, and parents to help at-risk youth become valuable members of society.

Donors are providing assistance in this area, however.

- In **Panama**, INL funded a project implemented by the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2014 that designed a work plan for prison reform based on international standards. The project also created a Prison Training Academy which trained over 2,400 prison staff, including 700 new prison officials, and established the first annex program of the University of Panama in a woman’s prison, offering three technical degrees. INL currently funds a second phase of the project to expand the program.
- **Belize** has an MOU with the Organization of American States to fund a drug treatment court.
- In **El Salvador**, the United States provides drug demand reduction assistance through treatment and prevention instruction for service professionals, this outreach includes specialized approaches to reach at-risk youth and people with substance use disorders.
- The Colombo Plan initiated a program in **Guatemala** to train and certify treatment providers in cooperation with the Secretariat for the Commission against Addictions and Drug Trafficking (SECCATID) and the United States. Also in Guatemala, U.S.-funded drug demand reduction programs consisting of awareness and training efforts directed towards community and government leaders, educators, parents, and students targeted 30,000 people in 25 municipalities.

- The Government of **Nicaragua**'s 2014 cooperative agreement with the European Union to increase security in the North and South Caribbean Autonomous Regions includes plans to build new Nicaraguan National Police youth centers in Puerto Cabezas and Bluefields, provide vocational training for at-risk youth, and support additional capacity building within the Nicaraguan National Police. Also in Nicaragua, the U.S. provided close to \$4 million to fund programs focused on citizen security and drug prevention in 2014, including a grant to the non-governmental Fenix Foundation that organized a drug prevention campaign for 1600 at-risk youth, as well as teachers and parents.
- In **Honduras**, U.S. assistance supports over 46 outreach centers that provide safe places for youth to participate in recreational activities and platforms for guiding at-risk youth into job preparedness training, approximately 22,000 children and young people are participating in the outreach centers, mentored by almost 700 community volunteers.

Success Stories

There have been several success stories in the region over the past year.

- In **Belize**, following the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF) designation for not making sufficient progress in addressing AML/CFT deficiencies and not complying with its action plan to address those deficiencies, the Belizean government dramatically increased its efforts to strengthen its national AML/CFT regime over the past two years. In 2014, the Belize National Assembly amended a number of laws and adopted regulations to increase government oversight of financial activities in Belize. The amended acts include the Money Laundering and Terrorism (Prevention) Act, the Companies Act, the Domestic Banks and Financial Institutions Act, the Financial Intelligence Unit Act, the Mutual Legal Assistance and International Cooperation Act, the Insurance Act, the Financial Investigative Unit Act, the International Financial Services Act, the Gaming Control Act, the Interception of Communications Act, Customs Regulation Act, Trust Act, Non-Governmental Organizations Act, Criminal Code Act, Firearms Act.

- **Costa Rica** opened a DoD and INL-funded border checkpoint at Kilometer 35 of the Pan-American Highway, a strategic checkpoint for traffic entering Costa Rica from Panama. Since then, Costa Rica’s Border Police seized unprecedented amounts of cocaine and other contraband on this previously unmonitored roadway, with more than 40 drug seizures made in the first two months of 2015 alone. With INL support, the Border Police doubled manpower deployed along the Nicaraguan border and, using the KM35 checkpoint as a model opened a new official checkpoint at Tablillas to regulate that crossing into Nicaragua.
- In **Costa Rica**, INL-provided training and equipment programs are helping the Costa Rica Coast Guard (SNGC) seize unprecedented volumes of drugs. As of July 6, the SNGC has seized over 13 metric tons (MT) of illegal drugs in 2015, reflecting growing SNGC coordination with its neighbors and enhanced capacity to operate independently.
- In 2015, **Guatemala** captured several high-profile drug kingpins like the “Poppy King” Cornelio Esteban Chilel. In July, drug kingpin Jairo Orellana was handed over to DEA agents for extradition to the United States. 2015 also saw continued high levels of interdictions as well as seizures of drugs and bulk cash moving through the country.
- In **Nicaragua**, the Supreme Court of Justice publicly upheld as a disciplinary model the 2014 dismissal of a judge who “counseled” relatives of drug traffickers in exchange for large sums of money, alerted drug dealers to search warrants, and released drug traffickers whenever he handled their cases, also in 2014 the Supreme Court of Justice dismissed an entire court staff that had granted a national identification card to a drug trafficker from Venezuela.
- In **Honduras**, INL supports a Financial Crimes Task Force (FCTF) comprised of specially-vetted Honduran investigators and embedded U.S. advisors, specializing in the use of asset seizure to target organized crime. Over the past two years, the FCTF helped seize approximately \$900 million in assets and win 35 of 39 forfeiture cases, targeting some of the largest drug trafficking organizations operating in Central America.
- In 2014, **Panama** seized 35.1 metric tons of cocaine - more than all other Central American governments combined. INL assistance has enabled the Special Investigation Unit – responsible for 90 percent of these seizures – to grow from 15 to 90 officers, with further expansion possible.

- Thanks to “train-the-trainer” cooperation with the United States and Colombia, the **Panamanian** National Border Service is now capable of conducting various levels of training on its own and has begun to offer and provide such training to regional partners including **Costa Rica, Belize, and Honduras.**

Mini-Dublin Group Meetings in Central America

Panama is the only Central American country that holds regular Mini-Dublin Group meetings. The last large meeting was held in late June, but due to the high number of participants and Government of Panama presence the discussions were somewhat limited. Smaller “Mini-Mini-Dublin Group” meetings with British representation yielded more focused conversation on justice sector programs. These meetings assuaged fears of duplicate programming, and revealed that the Government of Panama had not been “double-dipping” with other governments for assistance.
