

**Testimony of Ambassador William R. Brownfield
Assistant Secretary of State
Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
U.S. Department of State
before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps,
and Global Narcotics Affairs
Hearing on “A Shared Responsibility: Counternarcotics and Citizen
Security in the Americas”**

Thursday, March 31, 10:00a.m.

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Rubio, and other distinguished Senators, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss counternarcotics and citizen safety efforts in the Western Hemisphere. Today, we are facing complex and evolving threats from a wide range of transnational criminal organizations, established drug traffickers, foreign terrorist groups, and violent youth gangs in the region. Illegal narcotics remain the financial lifeblood of these organizations and while the interdiction and eradication of narcotics remains a major priority, we recognize that these efforts cannot be sustained without holistic support for the rule of law, measured most importantly by the safety of citizens in each country.

In South America, drug production often occurs in areas controlled by groups like Sendero Luminoso in Peru and the FARC and ELN in Colombia which use proceeds to wage wars on their governments. In Mexico, we face a different threat from groups willing to use shocking amounts of violence to protect their

criminal interests with no political aspirations beyond that of sheer profit. The most emergent threat in the hemisphere is that facing Central America. As our partner nations in the Andes assume greater responsibility for expanding the rule of law and as our cooperation with Mexico continues to grow, transnational criminal organizations are moving deeper into Central America, where weak institutions and low capacity offer a climate of impunity for criminal activity. To meet this threat, the Department is accelerating and refocusing the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) as a Citizen Security Partnership for Central America, to address the region's most urgent needs and support the growth of the strong institutions needed to fight violence in coordination with regional partners like Colombia and Mexico as well as other international donors.

However, progress in Central America will only push drug traffickers elsewhere if we do not support strong institutions throughout the hemisphere. Recognizing this, we are also implementing the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), to address citizen safety and regional cooperation throughout the Caribbean, another conduit through which drugs and other contraband can enter the United States. As these projects unfold in Central America and the Caribbean, and our partnerships with Mexico and Colombia continue to grow, we are putting in place a comprehensive approach to address crime, violence, and trafficking throughout the hemisphere.

Meeting these challenges will not be easy, but we have considerable experience to draw upon. In Colombia, we now have a partner assuming greater responsibility for the rule of law within its own territory. Over the past decade, Colombia has developed a robust institutional capacity to combat narcotics cultivation and trafficking. We estimate that potential pure cocaine production potential in Colombia fell to 280 metric tons in 2009, a sixty percent decline from 2001. More important than these numbers, however, are the critical reforms made by the Colombians, who are now increasing responsibility for counternarcotics programs, to promote development and greater inclusion throughout the population. Most critical of all, the Government of Colombia has implemented tax reforms needed to pay for these critical initiatives. The Colombian experience demonstrates that U.S. assistance, coupled with strong leadership and political will, provides the support needed for a country to take responsibility for its own security.

Although each country is different, Colombia's success holds important lessons for the hemisphere. Today, Mexico faces unprecedented levels of violence and, while Mexican cartels do not have the political motives of the FARC or the ELN, the magnitude of the violence overcome by Colombia suggests that supporting strong institutions is also essential in Mexico. Together with Mexico, we have already made significant progress under the Merida Initiative. Since

December 2008, we have delivered a total of \$408 million in equipment, technical assistance, and training to Mexico and we are committed to delivering \$500 million in assistance this calendar year. Assistance delivered to date has trained over 57,033 Mexican police and justice sector officials, provided \$29 million in non-intrusive inspection equipment, and provided 11 helicopters, including eight Bell 412's and 3 UH-60M Black Hawks. Since December 2009, information sharing and technical assistance from the U.S. has contributed to the arrest or elimination of over twenty major drug cartel figures in Mexico while information shared by our Mexican counterparts was critical to U.S. operations such as Xcellerator, Coronado, and Deliverance that resulted in thousands of arrests of Mexico-linked traffickers in the United States.

However, as in Colombia, institutions will make the lasting difference in Mexico. Some major drug trafficking organizations in Mexico have splintered and increasingly fight among themselves, and are now expanding into enterprises beyond drug trafficking such as extortion, kidnapping, immigrant smuggling, protection rackets, and domestic drug retailing. Supporting our partners in Mexico to face this evolving threat for the long term must be the primary goal of our partnership under the Merida Initiative, and with that in mind we are shifting our focus away from provision of equipment, towards capacity building and training efforts.

It is with these lessons that we move to address the threats challenging Central America. As pressure intensifies on criminal groups in both Mexico and Colombia, drug traffickers increasingly look to Central America as a sanctuary. Weak institutions, populations mistrustful of their governments after years of civil war, and remote, often unpatrolled national borders allow free reign to drug trafficking organizations from Mexico and South America as well as violent gangs with roots in our own cities. The situation in Central America is dire, with the per capita murder rates in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras among the highest in the world.

We have learned from Plan Colombia and the Merida Initiative that citizen safety must be our priority in this region; only by helping to protect the people of Central America can we hope to build the partnerships necessary to fight transnational crime. We have also learned that progress in one region without building institutions in the next will only move the threat. That is why we have launched both the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) and the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), two regional partnerships aimed at improving these nations' ability to cooperate with each other as well as with the United States.

We are currently working to accelerate and refocus our assistance to Central America towards the most critical threats, and will review our assistance to ensure

we coordinate efficiently and effectively with the international community. Our priorities in the region include helping Central American nations provide safe streets for their citizens, disrupting the flow of criminals and contraband across national borders, and extending governance and rule of law to vulnerable groups, especially youth. We will do this by rewarding strong, accountable governments and by enhancing our regional partnerships with Mexico and Colombia to provide their own assistance to the region. Already, we are preparing an up to \$20 million “Challenge Grants” initiative intended to increase host-nation support. The initiative will award assistance to the country that submits the most competitive proposal in key law enforcement, citizen safety, and rule of law areas. We are also working closely with Colombian police to provide joint training and support to law enforcement in Central America and pursuing curriculum reform at the region’s police academies drawing from best practices in Panama. In high-crime communities, we are working with police and local organizations to establish model precincts, which appear to have already reduced crime in some of Guatemala’s most dangerous communities.

Continued support for these initiatives, and a continued focus on what works and what is sustainable, is the only way to meet the criminal threat facing our half of the globe. Crime and violence anywhere in this hemisphere threatens the United

States as well as its neighbors, and we must work together to ensure the security and well being of all Americans.

Thank you Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Rubio, and other distinguished Senators for your time. I look forward to answering your questions.