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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

April 29, 2024

The Honorable Anthony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

Over the past decade and across three presidential administrations, addressing the root causes of irregular migration in Central America, primarily El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, has been an important priority with significant investments in foreign assistance, defense cooperation, private sector engagement, and diplomacy. Additionally, we believe that Belize, as a key strategic ally committed to transparent democratic governance and under threat from foreign malign and criminal actors, should see increased attention and investments.

Belize is experiencing a rise in the same risk factors that have negatively impacted its neighbors including: transnational criminal activity, high homicide rates, large swaths of ungoverned territory including porous and sparsely-populated borders, and ineffective law enforcement and judicial institutions. The discovery last year of coca plantations and clandestine laboratories, combined with the recent seizure of fentanyl test strips, are troubling new developments.

The government of Belize has demonstrated a strong willingness to work with the United States and the international community to address these vulnerabilities. According to the INCSR, Belize “significantly strengthened its legislative base for countering transnational organized crime,” updated its extradition law to provide reciprocity with the U.S. and Mexico, and implemented a 9% budget increase for public safety and citizen security. Similarly, Belize is committed to resolving their border dispute with Guatemala through the International Court of Justice, and the importance of resolving the dispute and asserting State control over the ungoverned space has become even more vital with the recent discovery of coca fields.

Belize continues to demonstrate a commitment to shared ideals and global alliances with the United States, making it a partner that is increasingly rare in the region. Belize’s continued diplomatic ties with Taiwan show its shared values of democracy, self-determination, and respect for international law; with democracy in decline in so many countries throughout the world, we must not take these values for granted and work with the government to counter the People’s Republic of China’s continued efforts to negatively influence the region.


The moderate increases in support to Belize to combat violence and corruption in recent years demonstrate that small investments in a country where there is will and alignment on values and objectives can make notable progress. We feel that now is a critical time to increase our cooperation to ensure that Belize continues to be a stable partner in the region.

We believe there are a number of ways the Administration could signal our ongoing partnership and commitment to the relationship, including a Security and Strategic Dialogue, support for a multi-year national security strategy, and a U.S. commitment to support its implementation. We were pleased to see an intent to negotiate a Millennium Challenge Compact with the government of Belize, and would like information on what other cooperation tools can be used, including the Development Finance Corporation, the Countering the PRC Malign Influence Fund, and the William Perry Center for Hemispheric Cooperation. We have an opportunity to proactively support Belize and stave off another front in our ongoing challenges with transnational organized crime, drug trafficking, and irregular migration dangerously close to our borders.

We stand ready to work with you to develop and implement these and other efforts to support Belize and regional stability. Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,


Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator


Tim Kaine
United States Senator