

Dick Lugar

U.S. Senator for Indiana

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Statement by Senator Lugar for field hearing on 'U.S.-Mexico Border Violence'

U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Dick Lugar submitted the following statement for the record. The committee's field hearing in El Paso, Texas on U.S.-Mexico border violence will be Monday, March 30. Lugar is not attending the hearing.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for chairing this important hearing on U.S.-Mexico border violence.

Since entering office in December 2006, Mexican President Felipe Calderon has moved to improve public security in his country and has recast U.S. -Mexico relations on the basis of equality and mutual respect. The Mexican government has committed billions of dollars to combat drug trafficking, launched aggressive anti-drug operations, replaced numerous high-ranking federal police officers in anti-corruption campaigns, and created a unified national crime database.

In addition, the Calderon government has strengthened law enforcement cooperation with the United States, extradited drug suspects to the U.S. and made record seizures of cocaine, methamphetamine precursors, cash, and other assets.

The Merida Initiative signed into law by the Administration of President George W. Bush is an attempt to seize the opportunity created by Mexico's invigorated anti-crime campaign by funding key programs and building stronger cooperation between Mexico and the United States. It recognizes that 90 percent of the cocaine entering the United States transits Mexico and that our efforts to combat this drug flow and associated criminal activities depend on a partnership with the Mexican government. In Mexico, President Calderon has laid the groundwork for the upcoming visit of President Barack Obama, on April 16-17, articulating a message that makes clear that coordination in sensitive areas will require more compromise, mutual trust, and respect for each nation's sovereignty. One area that requires more cooperation is arms trafficking.

As much as 90 percent of the assault weapons and other guns used by Mexican drug cartels are coming from the United States, fueling drug-related violence that is believed to have killed more than 7,000 people since January 2008, according to estimates by Mexican and U.S. law enforcement officials.

In the run-up to the passage of the Merida Initiative last year, the Mexican Government officials I met with consistently relayed their concerns about the flow of guns and explosives from the

United States into Mexico. American Embassy officials confirmed that the U.S. was a major source of weapons for Mexican gangs and drug runners, as well.

If we are going to effectively fight drug cartels and prevent violence from spilling into the United States, one very important element is to curb the flow of guns from the United States to Mexico. Last year, in an op-ed I coauthored with the Mexican Ambassador to the United States, Arturo Sarukhan, we highlight the importance of this issue [Politico, May 15, 2008]. In addition to supporting efforts to manage firearms under the Merida Initiative, we should consider ratifying, during this Congress, the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and other Related Material (CIFTA), which calls for cooperation among members of the Organization of American States (OAS) to control illegal weapons. CIFTA has been signed by 33 countries in the Western Hemisphere and ratified by 29. The U.S. was an original signer in 1997, but ratification is still pending.

I am encouraged by Secretary Clinton's pledge to seek \$80 million from Congress to provide Mexican authorities with three Black Hawk helicopters to help the police track drug runners and deploy 450 more law enforcement officers at the border. I am concerned, however, by statements made by Secretary Clinton regarding withholding funds for the Merida Initiative - conditions on the border and in Mexico demand that we put our best efforts forward to help fight drug cartels and prevent violence from spilling over into the United States. Funding the Merida Initiative at previously agreed levels strengthens the institutional framework for effective, long term cooperation on safeguarding the security of both countries. I encourage Secretary Clinton to support funding the Merida Initiative at previously agreed levels.

The basis of U.S.-Mexico ties is a strategic relationship that goes far beyond the problems of drugs and violence. Our nation is inextricably intertwined with Mexico historically, culturally, and commercially. The flow of goods and people across our borders helps drive our economy and strengthen our culture. But our land borders also serve as a conduit for illicit activity. This is a problem that bears shared responsibility and requires cooperative action. I am glad to see serious commitment from both governments to confront these difficult challenges.

I look forward to the insights of witnesses on these and other issues related to this initiative.

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