



Cartels and the U.S. Heroin Epidemic: Combating Drug Violence and Public Health Crisis

Testimony

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Chairman Rubio, Senator Boxer, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss U.S. government efforts to combat the production and trafficking of heroin and the violence and instability it brings to our communities, our citizens, and the world in which we live.

The flow of illicit narcotics across our shared border with Mexico threatens citizen security in both countries. Recognizing that we have a shared responsibility to address common challenges, in 2007, the United States forged a comprehensive security partnership with Mexico. Through the Merida Initiative, we work in partnership with Mexico to build the capacity of Mexican institutions to counter organized crime, uphold the rule of law, and protect our shared border from the movement of illicit drugs, money, and goods.

The need for effective collaboration is now more important than ever. Heroin and fentanyl-laced heroin is a public health crisis in the United States, and Mexican drug trafficking organizations are the primary suppliers of heroin to the United States. We must aggressively respond to this growing threat in concert with our broader work through the Merida Initiative to counter all illicit drugs and to end the impunity with which trafficking organizations are able to operate, putting their leaders in jail, seizing their weapons, drugs, and money, and dismantling their illicit businesses.

To date through the Merida Initiative, the United States government has provided nearly \$1.5 billion worth of capacity building assistance to our Mexican partners. This includes training and equipment which complements the significant resources the Government of Mexico has dedicated to our shared security goals. Today there are more than \$700 million in bilaterally agreed upon projects with the Pena Nieto administration, which fully support the Merida Initiative's strategic framework that underpins the basis of our security cooperation. Most of these projects fall into three priority areas: professionalizing and building the capacity of Mexican law enforcement agencies; supporting the Government of Mexico's efforts to strengthen border management and security; and helping advance reforms across Mexico's justice sector.

In partnership with the Department of Justice, INL is building the skills of prosecutors, investigators, and forensic experts in Mexico and preparing them for their responsibilities under the oral accusatory system, the transition to which is well underway throughout Mexico. This includes helping enhance the technical capacity of courtrooms throughout the country to host oral trials. We are also assisting in the training of the next generation of Mexican attorneys as they learn crucial oral trial skills in Mexican law schools.

Through Merida, INL is enhancing federal, state, and municipal policing capacity throughout Mexico. These programs provide a full range of professionalization activities including: the development of enforceable police standards; basic training and academy accreditation; continuing and leadership education programs; law enforcement vetting programs; and the development of effective internal affairs units. The continued professionalization of Mexican law enforcement will result in a greater observance of and accountability for civil and human rights, increasing trust in these institutions by the people of Mexico, and making them better partners for other law enforcement organizations both within Mexico and with the United States. This is vital to any effort to stem drug trafficking and reduce the capabilities and influence of drug trafficking organizations.

Strengthening border security capacity on Mexico's borders is a priority for both our nations. Our governments have committed to further enhancing Mexico's ability to interdict illicit narcotics, arms, and money. INL has provided more than \$125 million in inspection equipment and more than 340 canine teams deployed at ports of entry, border crossings, and internal checkpoints throughout Mexico. In Mexico's northern border region, INL has provided equipment and technical assistance to improve communications between the Mexican Federal Police and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). We are working in conjunction with CBP to provide training to Mexico's Federal Police who will be deployed to the northern border region, advancing cooperation between our countries along our shared border.

Through Merida, we continue to make progress with Mexico in targeting heroin production and trafficking. We work with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration to provide training to augment Mexico's ability to identify, investigate, and interdict clandestine heroin labs, and better prepare Mexican authorities to dismantle them. We are improving information sharing between our governments on heroin and fentanyl, working together to better assess poppy cultivation and heroin production in Mexico, and with our interagency partners, continuing our high-level focus on exploring other avenues to enhance our bilateral cooperation when it comes to heroin.

At the last high level Security Cooperation Group held in Mexico City in October 2015, heroin was the group's highest priority. We agreed to continue working in partnership on a bilateral approach for combating the cultivation, production, and trafficking of heroin and to determine how U.S. assistance can best support Mexico's efforts in this area.

Building strong, effective justice sector institutions in Mexico capable of confronting organized crime and the violence and corruption for which it is responsible is a difficult, long-term challenge. Our work across numerous institutions and sectors must be sustained, for it is only with a concerted, committed effort that the capacity to deter the cultivation, production, and trafficking of heroin and other illicit drugs in Mexico will be strengthened. Past investments by the American people in this partnership have produced results, and with your continued support, our collaboration with Mexico on this important work will continue.