

**STATEMENT BY MARK FEIERSTEIN
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LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN AT THE UNITED STATES
AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
JUNE 29, 2010**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for considering my nomination and for the opportunity to appear before you today. It is an honor and a privilege to be nominated by President Obama to serve as Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean at the United States Agency for International Development. I am grateful for the confidence that President Obama and USAID Administrator Shah have placed in me to oversee U.S. development assistance in the Americas. I am also grateful to have the strong support of Secretary Clinton. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly with the dedicated men and women at USAID to fulfill the Secretary's goal of restoring its status as the world's premier development agency.

I am particularly humbled to be appearing before you, Chairman Dodd. Your commitment to and knowledge of the Americas are without parallel, and you are recognized and appreciated throughout the hemisphere as the leading champion of inter-American interests.

I also want to recognize Janet Ballantyne, who has been serving as Acting Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean. In the history of USAID, there are few people who have made as deep and lasting an impact as Dr. Ballantyne.

For the past three decades, my life has been entwined with Latin America and the Caribbean. I could never have imagined the lifetime impact of my high school Spanish teacher's refusal to allow me to cease my foreign language studies. Two decades later, Spanish was indispensable for me as I courted a beautiful woman from Panama, who would ultimately become my wife. Itzel Sclopis is here today, and without her support, I would not be. We have a lovely daughter, Bianca, whose multilingual range of iPod selections are a testament to her bi-cultural upbringing and our multicultural world.

My Spanish proficiency gave me entrée to much of the diverse and fascinating world of the Americas. As a young man, I studied in Mexico and worked there as a journalist. I traveled to Central America and later embarked on a career that has taken me to every Latin American country, but one.

Latin America and the Caribbean have changed a great deal since my first trip in 1984. Back then, Americans looked south and saw a region still grappling with civil wars, debt crises, and military regimes. Today, we see a hemisphere that is more democratic and more prosperous, and also more independent and more assertive. In short, a set of countries with which the United States can collaborate on an equal basis to confront

common challenges. As President Obama said at the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago last year, “we seek an equal partnership. There is no senior partner and junior partner in our relations; there is simply engagement based on mutual respect and common interests and shared values.”

Since then, as Secretary Clinton noted in Quito earlier this month, the United States has been fostering a community of the Americas that recognizes that no matter where one lives in the hemisphere, we seek the same future for ourselves and our children.

USAID’s work in the region is guided by the visions of President Obama and Secretary Clinton. Whether promoting democracy and economic opportunity, raising health and education standards or combating the drug trade and climate change, USAID is committed to establishing respectful partnerships with governments, independent organizations, and peoples of the Americas.

My understanding of the region has been shaped by the citizens of the Americas themselves. During the past 11 years, I have overseen public opinion surveys and focus groups throughout the hemisphere. There is arguably no better training for development work than to listen systematically to the residents whose lives are most directly impacted by foreign assistance programs. In sessions with people from diverse backgrounds – from indigenous women in Bolivia and students in the Dominican Republic to businessmen in the Bahamas – participants have expressed their hopes and frustrations.

- They talk about rising crime rates and the bravery required to conduct simple acts like sending children off to school every day.
- They lament the dearth of good jobs and the uneven distribution of economic wealth and opportunity.
- They plead for their voices to be heard in the halls of government and condemn public officials who enter politics for personal enrichment.
- And they object to schools that fail to prepare students for 21st century jobs.

If confirmed, these are among the issues that will animate me, because progress on them is imperative not only for the citizens of Latin America and the Caribbean, but for our own country. USAID’s programs are not charity. They may reflect the generosity of the American people; but they are not only from the American people, as the agency’s motto says, they are *for* the American people.

When we help farmers in Colombia grow legal crops and train judicial officials to identify and prosecute criminals, we make U.S. communities safer. When we assist Ecuador and Peru to preserve their rainforests, the environment in the United States is cleaner and healthier. When we provide microloans to Guatemalans to start their own businesses and generate jobs, we create markets for U.S. businesses.

Crime and drug trafficking in the hemisphere are ills that particularly merit our attention and resources. They are growing scourges that undermine all our development goals. Societal violence deters investment and chokes off economic growth, and it drains

resources that could otherwise be dedicated to health and education. Organized crime undermines government institutions and citizens' faith in democracy. That is why USAID is increasing its support for Mexico and our Central American and Caribbean neighbors to fight crime and give their citizens, especially youth, better alternatives.

In taking on this challenge and others, we must operate with a sense of humility. Success will depend not only on the effectiveness of USAID programs. Without political will from partner governments, our efforts will be stymied. If other donors and the private sector are not engaged, our resources will likely be insufficient. Even under the best of conditions, development takes time.

Ultimately, we will know we are successful in a given country when our foreign assistance is no longer needed. As Administrator Shah has indicated, expediting that process will require a greater effort to build capacity overseas to ensure that development gains are sustainable.

I appreciate the challenges associated with development. I served for six years at the National Democratic Institute, including as director for Latin America and the Caribbean, and I directed USAID's global elections office. But development has been more than just a professional field for me. It is a passion driven by personal experience. I have friends who have been persecuted for simply speaking their mind and harassed for trying to organize their fellow citizens. We have a moral obligation, and it is in our national interest, to support those fighting for the rights we enjoy in our country.

As countries in the Americas continue to develop, more will become donors themselves. If confirmed, I will endeavor to forge partnerships with other governments in the region as they assume a greater role in assisting their neighbors. Achieving the scale, impact and focus that Administrator Shah has underscored as principal objectives for the agency will require leveraging resources from other donors, including new contributors.

This is especially important in the current fiscal environment. Administrator Shah has instructed the agency to achieve greater cost-saving and efficiencies, and if confirmed, I pledge to be an accountable and parsimonious steward of your constituents' hard-earned tax dollars.

If confirmed, I will have the honor of advancing such objectives with the skilled USAID staff. Nowhere is there a more dedicated and talented corps of professionals than at USAID. They make personal sacrifices on a daily basis, and their efforts, as we have seen in Haiti in recent months, are often genuinely heroic.

I will also want to benefit from the expertise that exists outside USAID, if I am confirmed. I look forward to collaborating with my colleagues at the State Department, and to coordinating with all the U.S. Government agencies involved in the hemisphere. If confirmed, I am also eager to actively engage NGOs and the private sector.

And, if confirmed, I will seek the counsel of you, your fellow Members of Congress and your staffs. I am confident that the broad support for USAID programs in the Americas will continue.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today. Thank you again, and I look forward to any questions you might have.