

**Statement of Christopher A. Landberg  
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and Law Enforcement Affairs before the  
Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee for the Western Hemisphere,  
Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and  
Global Women's Issues**

**Hearing on Countering Transnational Criminal Networks and Corruption in  
the Western Hemisphere**

**Thursday, April 11, 2024**

Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Rubio, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the causes of, and the Department of State's responses to, corruption and transnational criminal networks in the Western Hemisphere. Together with Department of State and interagency colleagues, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) works to combat international crime across the region by bolstering the rule of law, uprooting corruption, strengthening the capacity to confront transnational criminal organizations, and deterring the production and trafficking of illicit drugs.

**Deterring the Production and Trafficking of Illicit Drugs**

Countering the flow of illicit synthetic drugs and their precursors is a top priority of this Administration. The Department is leading a global response to this challenge, working to include partners from the Western Hemisphere to further our objectives. INL also continues to employ a comprehensive counternarcotics approach, aiming to dismantle criminal networks profiting not only from synthetic drugs but also from trafficking cocaine, other illicit drugs, and precursor chemicals, and sowing violence and instability throughout the Hemisphere.

Through training, equipping, technical assistance, and bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, INL works to counter the flow of illicit drugs into the United States by building our partners' capacity to disrupt the ability of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) to produce, traffic, and profit from these deadly substances.

Our relationship with Mexico is critical to the success of our efforts to combat the fentanyl crisis and the criminal networks that profit from it. The U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities is the foundation for our mutual efforts to protect our people, prevent transborder crime, and pursue criminal networks. To assist with preventing the diversion of licit precursor chemicals for fentanyl production, INL facilitates engagement with the private sector and works with security partners to improve border and maritime port security to disrupt the transport of illicit precursor chemicals by transnational criminal networks. The United States, Mexico, and Canada, under the auspices of the Trilateral Fentanyl Committee (TFC), completed reviews of respective legal frameworks to identify gaps and recommendations for strengthening regulations and engaging the private sector in preventing the diversion of licit precursor chemicals. The TFC is exploring options for a roundtable with private sector companies to explore potential for voluntary standards to identify and report suspected diversion.

INL will capitalize on these initiatives and expand areas of mutual cooperation with our Mexican counterparts, including working with Mexican regulators and public health agencies as we seek to tackle the challenge of synthetic drugs from all angles. INL funds training for and has donated protective equipment to Mexican Attorney General and Mexican Navy personnel to assist in identifying and safely dismantling clandestine laboratories. INL has also provided more than 500 canines to multiple Mexican agencies to assist in seizures of fentanyl and other drugs and contraband. Since 2019, INL-donated canines have supported over 50 fentanyl seizures, including more than three million fentanyl pills, 240 kilos of fentanyl powder, and 2,300 doses of liquid fentanyl.

Throughout Central America, INL supports specialized units and efforts to strengthen interdiction capacity, including by fostering interagency coordination through technical assistance, training and mentoring, and providing critical equipment. For example, the newly created Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) vetted unit in Costa Rica dismantled the first fentanyl trafficking ring identified in the country through a series of operations in November 2023.

In Argentina, one the most forward-leaning partners on synthetic drugs in the hemisphere, INL-trained officials seized over 30 metric tons of precursor chemicals in 2023. Additionally, in June 2023, INL supported the Argentine government in creating a code of conduct for its chemical industry to prevent the diversion of precursors to produce illicit drugs.

Additionally, the United States leads the global response to the public health and security threats posed by synthetic drugs. The Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats, launched by Secretary Blinken in July 2023, convenes over 1,500 participants from 151 countries and 14 international organizations on this critical issue. Of those, 29 countries from the Western Hemisphere have been active participants, with Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago serving as Co-Chairs for the Coalition's Working and Sub-Working Groups. During monthly Sub-Working Group meetings, participants have identified challenges, shared best practices, and connected with international organizations on initiatives to prevent the illicit manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs, detect emerging threats, and promote public health interventions.

While we direct our focus toward fentanyl, we cannot ignore the other counternarcotics challenges in the hemisphere – primarily those related to cocaine and other plant-based narcotics. Colombia and Peru persist as the largest global suppliers of cocaine. INL's approach to cocaine in these countries has evolved to focus not just on drug supply reduction but on addressing the full spectrum of forces that enable cocaine production and trafficking. These include promoting rural security, justice, and

development; addressing corruption; and preventing, detecting, and countering money laundering and other financial crimes to deprive TCOs of their profits.

Ecuador is a significant transit country for cocaine en route to the United States and Europe that has suffered from increased violence, including political assassinations. INL partners with key institutions to build the capacity and ability to cooperate across agencies to monitor and interdict maritime and land-based drug trafficking. For example, this February, INL Assistant Secretary Robinson inaugurated a joint Navy and Police task force, GOMAR, that integrates intelligence and operations to effectively respond to organized crime on Ecuador's waterways.

### **Strengthening Capacity to Combat Transnational Organized Crime**

Transnational organized crime remains a top concern for our partner governments in the Hemisphere and poses national security threats to the United States. Now more than ever, TCOs are utilizing global networks and technology in new ways to diversify and expand their activities. This so-called "criminal convergence" grows TCOs' profits and complicates efforts to disrupt criminal activity. INL, in support of the U.S. Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime, works to build the capacity of law enforcement and justice sector authorities throughout the Western Hemisphere to investigate and prosecute criminal networks involved in drug and arms trafficking, human smuggling, financial crimes, cybercrime, and nature crimes.

In Haiti, the Department remains acutely focused on the violence and instability stemming from criminal gangs. We are working to support the Multinational Security Support Mission to Haiti, or MSS, in close consultation with this committee and other Congressional partners. Bipartisan Congressional support is critical to enable this multinational security mission to strengthen the Haitian National Police, or HNP, in order to reestablish security in Haiti and build security conditions conducive to

holding free and fair elections. With Congressional approval, we plan to fund essential MSS equipment, subject matter expertise, personnel costs, and pre-deployment training. As we work to support MSS deployment, INL continues its partnership with the HNP to build their capacity to counter gang violence. INL vets, trains, equips, mentors, and provides logistical support to specialized HNP units who bravely serve the people of Haiti.

INL's strategic programming under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) seeks to reduce the flow of illicit narcotics and illicit firearms, disrupt organized crime, bolster citizen security and the rule of law, and promote regional cooperation. By working collectively to mitigate and contain these and other emerging threats, partner nations and regional institutions can develop the capacity to address them before they reach the United States. Recently, through support from the INL-supported CARICOM Crime Gun Intelligence Unit, Trinidad and Tobago authorities brought charges against three members of a Caribbean arms trafficking ring who unlawfully exported firearms from Florida to Trinidad and Tobago.

INL support has yielded successes throughout the region in the fight against money laundering and financial crimes. In Colombia, where authorities estimate \$15 billion in illicit proceeds pass through the country annually, an INL-supported anti-money laundering task force closed 2023 with 24 arrests and 202 seized assets for the year. The multi-year bilateral effort received a boost after the Colombian National Police assigned it 20 investigators in 2023. In Panama, INL supports a Federal Bureau of Investigations- (FBI-) mentored Anti-Money Laundering/Anti-Corruption Task Force, which since its inception in May 2021 helped Panamanian authorities arrest over 140 suspects, seize or freeze more than \$7.613 million in assets, and helped Panama leave the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list in October 2023.

INL also collaborates with U.S. and local law enforcement agencies to advance the fight against transnational organized crime. In Guatemala, for example, INL partners with the DEA, FBI, and the Department of Homeland

Security, Homeland Security Investigations, respectively to train, mentor, and advise vetted units to pursue counternarcotics, anti human trafficking and smuggling, and anti-gang investigations with a U.S. nexus, which helped the United States secure the extradition of a record number of defendants from Guatemala to the United States for prosecution of narcotics trafficking and human smuggling related offenses during 2020-2024. In Honduras, INL sponsors and supports the Gang Resistance Education and Training program (known as "GREAT"), which trains Honduran National Police officers to work with at-risk youth in resisting gang influence. Since 2012, INL has certified 111 GREAT instructors currently on active duty and graduated more than 880,000 at risk youth from the program.

### **Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption**

It is a top priority for INL to bolster the rule of law and judicial capacities of our partners throughout the Western Hemisphere, as they often serve as the first and final lines of defense of democracy. The U.S. Strategy on Countering Corruption is a cornerstone of our foreign policy and a key part of INL's mission. In support of the strategy, INL promotes accountability through sanctions and visa restriction authorities. INL preserves, strengthens, and enforces global anti-corruption architecture, including treaty obligations and international standards. INL also delivers foreign assistance that prevents and addresses corruption. In 2023, the Department publicly restricted the visas of 90 corrupt actors, including their immediate family members, from all over the world, leading in several cases to removals from public office and prosecutions in their home countries.

As a top priority, INL works to combat endemic corruption and impunity by strengthening institutions and the capacity of partner nations to better identify, dismantle, and prosecute the main drivers of corruption. We have seen the consequences when endemic corruption and impunity are allowed to run rampant, like what we have witnessed in Venezuela: organized crime grows stronger, public infrastructure and services crumble, and the country becomes inhospitable for the much of the population.

We work diligently across the region through programming with justice sector partners, including judges, police, and prosecutors, among others, INL is committed to aiding our Western Hemisphere neighbors in protecting and serving their communities through the delivery of impartial and equitable administration of the law.

For example, INL's Transnational Anticorruption Partnership (TAP) program, implemented with the FBI's International Corruption Unit, has assisted counterparts with opening and effectively investigating transnational corruption and money laundering cases throughout the region. By building partners' capacity to collaborate with U.S. law enforcement, this program has facilitated coordination between regional partners and the United States on more than 30 new investigations with a nexus to the United States. This program has also demonstrably improved the number, efficiency, and effectiveness of corruption-related investigations and partners' use of human intelligence and sophisticated investigative techniques.

Through INL-funded programs like the Department of Justice's Judicial Studies Institute (JSI) in Puerto Rico, INL supports the professionalization of judiciaries throughout the hemisphere. JSI Alumni bring these lessons to the courtroom, exemplified by a Salvadoran alumna who used her training to convict fourteen members of a violent criminal organization, leading to its disbandment.

INL programming goes beyond solely supporting judges themselves but also works to reform the judicial institutions in which they serve. With technical assistance and advocacy from INL, Ecuador launched a specialized court with national jurisdiction over drug trafficking, corruption, crimes against humanity, human trafficking, illegal mining, kidnapping, fraud, money laundering, and TCO cases. In just over a year since the court's inauguration, it successfully convicted 165 individuals in 59 cases, including high-profile TCOs such as Tren de Aragua and Los Choneros.

Similarly, INL is supporting partners in the region with implementing their obligations under international standards, benchmarks, and treaties such as the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (OECD's) Anti-Bribery Convention. Through a partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and a regional hub based in Mexico City, INL supports nearly two dozen countries from the region in coming together with technical assistance providers to develop and operationalize regional anti-corruption roadmaps. INL's ongoing support to the OECD's Latin America and Caribbean Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Network strengthens cooperation amongst law enforcement agencies throughout the region and bolsters compliance with the OECD's Anti-Bribery Convention and other integrity standards.

An additional way INL promotes anti-corruption priorities in the Western Hemisphere is through multilateral engagement, changing laws, improving practices, setting up or reforming institutions, and ensuring authorities are better able to cope with corruption at all levels than ever before. For example, in December 2023, in Atlanta, the United States hosted the Conference of the States Parties (COSP) to the UN Convention against Corruption—the largest, most inclusive, and most productive COSP in history. INL also participates in the OAS' Follow-Up Mechanism for the Implementation of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption, or MESICIC, where member states evaluate one another in their compliance with international obligations. These are great tools to ensure countries are taking positive steps. Of the more than 650 total recommendations reviewed since 2015, MESICIC experts found that 67 percent of them were satisfactorily addressed.

The rule of law in Latin America and the Caribbean is under threat. INL has demonstrated the ability to rapidly respond to rule of law challenges as they arise and engage when opportunities to collaborate emerge. In Guatemala, we welcome the initial steps and clear political will demonstrated by President Arevalo to make rooting out corruption a top priority of his



administration. The U.S. government has been an active leader within the international community to privately engage with the Government of Guatemala, publicly denounce antidemocratic actions, provide emergency assistance to individuals under threat, designate and sanction hundreds of corrupt and undemocratic actors and their family members, and direct capacity-building support via INL and USAID toward long-term structural reforms that will increase transparency and accountability, reduce impunity, and expand the space for civil society and independent media to function as pillars of a healthy democracy. During the High-Level Economic Dialogue in Guatemala last month, our delegations discussed the importance of good governance and combating corruption to create conditions for investment, job creation, and inclusive economic growth for the Guatemalan people.

Unfortunately, in many countries in our hemisphere, the space for productive engagement with willing traditional government partners is closing as anti-democratic governments and corrupt actors have gained power. As a result, the Department also works increasingly with interagency partners to develop the capacity of local civil society, the private sector, and independent media actors to shed light on the corruption, crime, and impunity threatening communities throughout the hemisphere.

In Colombia, for example, INL has joined forces with the government and civil society to increase the focus on preventing and mitigating corruption. INL also partnered with Transparency International to host a large-scale conference on best practices in government procurements, whistleblower protection, and training.

Across the Western Hemisphere, INL has supported the Pan American Development Foundation to empower civil society organizations to vet judicial nominees and provide flexible, on-demand capacity building to public sector officials. The project exposed TCO-connections among several high-profile judicial candidates, resulting in the revocation of their nominations.

## **Conclusion**

Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Rubio, transnational criminal organizations and corruption in the Western Hemisphere are deeply rooted challenges. In order to counter their detrimental effects for citizen security, economic prosperity, and democracy in our region, we must continue to support our partners wherever possible and pursue innovative solutions through civil society in less receptive environments. While these issues pose a serious threat to regional stability and our own national security, INL is and will continue to be committed to advancing a just and secure future in our hemisphere.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, and I look forward to your questions.