

**Statement of Todd D. Robinson
Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics
and Law Enforcement Affairs
before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

**Fiscal Year 2024 Western Hemisphere Budget Request
September 7, 2023**

Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Rubio, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the Department of State's fiscal year (FY) 2024 budget request for the Western Hemisphere. The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) is responsible for nearly \$1.4 billion of foreign assistance globally under the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) account request. This includes \$536.5 million in INCLE funding for the Western Hemisphere, about 38 percent of the total INCLE request.

Countering the flow of fentanyl and its precursors from sources abroad is a top priority of this Administration, the Department, and INL. The State Department is leading a global response to the synthetic drug challenge, including countering the flow of fentanyl, analogues of fentanyl, and fentanyl-related substances into the United States by disrupting the ability of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) to produce, traffic, and profit from these deadly substances.

Since the People's Republic of China (PRC) scheduled all fentanyl-related substances as a class in 2019, most of the fentanyl seized in the United States has been produced in Mexico using diverted precursor chemicals sourced from the PRC. Our relationship with Mexico is critical to the success of our efforts to combat the fentanyl crisis. The U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities is the foundation for our mutual efforts to protect our people and combat fentanyl trafficking and other criminal activities and actors. We also recognize that disrupting the illicit flow of precursor chemicals to Mexico is

crucial to our success. We will continue to seek productive engagement with the PRC to stem production of fentanyl and to work with partners around the world to better track and control the precursor chemicals that fuel drug production.

Under this framework, INL requests a total of \$100 million to combat fentanyl, to include \$48 million in programmatic funds to support our partnership with Mexico. INL has provided more than 500 canines to multiple Mexican agencies to assist in seizures of fentanyl and other drugs and contraband. INL-donated canines have supported over 50 fentanyl seizures including, more than 485,000 fentanyl pills, over 2,013 kilos of fentanyl powder, and 2,700 doses of liquid fentanyl. To assist with preventing the diversion of licit precursor chemicals for fentanyl production, INL is also expanding clandestine lab training and facilitating engagement with the private sector. We will continue to capitalize on these successes 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. We appreciate Congressional support and want to continue to work closely with you on this challenge.

While we direct our focus toward fentanyl, we cannot ignore the other counternarcotics challenges in the Hemisphere, including those posed by methamphetamine and those related to cocaine and other plant-based narcotics. Colombia and Peru persist as the largest global suppliers of cocaine. Our approach to cocaine in these countries has evolved to focus not just on drug supply reduction, but on a holistic approach to address the full spectrum of forces that enable cocaine production and trafficking. INL requested \$160 million for Colombia and \$41.3 million for Peru, which will support a variety of strategic areas to increase security and decrease criminality. These include promoting rural security, justice, and development; addressing corruption; and preventing, detecting, and countering money laundering and other financial crimes in order to deprive TCOs of their profits. INL has facilitated the construction of two rural police stations that bolster Colombian authorities' abilities to stifle illicit activities

perpetuated by TCOs. The co-location of these police stations with successful anti-TCO operations and community-police trust-building activities produces real results in decreasing crime: in early 2022, the Colombian National Police attributed a 42 percent drop in homicides from the previous year in Jardín de Tamaná, Antioquia, to the presence of the INL-constructed police station there.

In Ecuador, a key transit country for cocaine enroute to the United States that has suffered from increased violence including recent political assassinations, INL programs aim to enhance security in critical trafficking zones. INL partners have created several inroads to root out corruption in the national judiciary and to hold accountable TCOs that engage in and profit from drug trafficking and other crimes. In December 2022, 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. Two years of INL efforts and technical assistance to advance legislative changes resulted in the establishment of this court, which issued its first convictions in July 2023. INL will continue supporting Ecuador with a requested budget of \$15 million in FY 2024.

In Haiti, INL requests \$45 million to support a targeted approach to develop the capacity of the Haitian National Police (HNP), and to implement the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability 10-year Plan for Haiti. The July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse exacerbated an already precarious security environment. INL and its interagency partners have surged support and resources to Haiti to help stabilize the security situation. This effort is complementary to the international community's initiative to establish a multinational force (MNF) in Haiti. An MNF would support the HNP as Haiti's primary law enforcement institution in its efforts to counter gangs. Continued support for the HNP to lead counter-gang operations during this time is crucial to bringing stability to Haiti and protecting citizens.

The evolving security situation in Haiti reaffirms the importance of maintaining stability and combating transnational organized crime in the Caribbean, America's "third border." For the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), INL requests \$29 million in program funds to support collective and regional approaches to address shared threats. Strategic programming under 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. Due in part to INL's work building partner law enforcement capacity, CBSI countries participated alongside U.S. government agencies in a September 2022 joint operation that led to the seizure of 350 weapons, 3,300 rounds of ammunition, and 10 tons of cocaine in the region.

INL also is supporting the Administration's efforts to address the record number of irregular migrants reaching the southwest border. INL leverages its strong interagency partnerships with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ), in particular, to strengthen law enforcement cooperation; detect, investigate, dismantle, and prosecute migrant smuggling and human trafficking networks; and promote accountability for those involved. In Northern Central America, consistent with the security and governance related pillars of the U.S. Strategy for Addressing Root Causes of Migration in Central America, INL efforts focus on community engagement and, where possible, security and justice sector professionalization, modernization, and training to address underlying causes of violence and insecurity. Programs to improve community policing complement youth engagement activities to deter gang influence. INL has requested \$191.2 million for the Central America Regional Security Initiative to support the aforementioned programs. In FY 2022, the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program reached over 100,000 at-risk youth in Northern Central America. These efforts are generating optimism as recent data has shown significant reductions in homicide rates from record highs only a few years ago.

Combating endemic corruption and impunity by strengthening institutions and the capacity of partner nations to better identify, dismantle, and prosecute the main drivers of corruption is a top priority. Unfortunately, in across many countries in our hemisphere the space for productive engagement with willing traditional government partners is constrained by anti-democratic governments and corrupt actors. We work increasingly with our interagency partners to develop the capacity of local civil society, the private sector, and independent media actors and organizations to equip them with tools to shed light on the corruption, crime, and impunity threatening their communities and dragging down their countries.

Corruption, insecurity, weak institutions, and lack of economic opportunities have dimmed the perception of democracy and the rule of law to many people in the region. This has allowed opportunities for external actors with nefarious interests or undemocratic values to exploit these challenges for greater influence and acceptance. In particular, the PRC seeks to capitalize on these factors to increase its presence in the hemisphere and outcompete the United States as the security partner of choice.

In response, INL priorities ensure our partners in the region remain committed to the rule of law, democratic governance, human rights, responsible citizen security, and the rules-based international system. It is essential they are aware of the risks to partnering with the PRC and continue to favor the United States as the partner of choice. We seek to counter the inappropriate or negative influence, actions, and messaging of the PRC and affiliated entities acting on its behalf that are detrimental to U.S. national security interests and those of our allies and partners. The threat from malign external actors is constantly evolving and growing and requires additional creative and innovative thinking. Working with our like-minded partners in the region, in the interagency, and in Congress, helps us ensure we are successfully countering this threat to our national security interests and to those of our allies and partners.

Chairman Kaine and Ranking Member Rubio, the challenges and issues INL is confronting in the Western Hemisphere cannot be solved overnight or alone. Getting ahead of these threats requires strategic and innovative thinking, including pursuing new partnerships with non-traditional actors, such as the nongovernmental and civil society community and potentially the private sector, and conceptualizing new creative ideas that are rooted in evidence and data to address continued and persistent challenges. At the same time, we can only affect meaningful change in places where we have willing partners. Where partner nations are not willing to cooperate, we must be proactive and creative so we can continue to advance regional priorities. The challenges before us are immense, but I am confident we can address them together to keep our country and people safe and secure.

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