

-Testimony of Ambassador Liliana Ayalde

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“The U.S. – Caribbean Shared Security Partnership: Responding to the Growth of Trafficking
and Narcotics in the Caribbean”

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the invitation to testify today. I appreciate and welcome this opportunity to share what the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is doing to advance security and citizen safety in the Caribbean. It is an honor to testify with my colleagues, Ambassador William Brownfield of the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and Rodney Benson of the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Mr. Chairman, during my experience working for USAID in the hemisphere for the last 30 years, and most recently serving as the U.S. Ambassador to Paraguay, I have observed with great concern the security situation in this region. The problem is exacerbated in the Caribbean, where very small economies are confronting frightening levels of drug-fueled crime and the associated violence.

Over the last ten years, there has been an alarming escalation of homicides in the region: in St. Kitts and Nevis, increasing from 5 to 40 per 100,000 inhabitants in the period 2001 – 2011, in Trinidad and Tobago, increasing from 9 to 35 per 100,000 in the same period; and Jamaica has the highest rate in the region with 50 murders per 100,000 inhabitants. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) calculates that the high homicide rate in Jamaica has decreased GDP per capita by 5.4 per cent.

To complicate the picture, in Jamaica, 70 percent of homicides are committed by youth under the age of 30. And in the Dominican Republic, 70 percent of drug related arrests (or 17,000 people) are young offenders.

We at USAID are especially concerned about the situation of Caribbean youth, who like their peers in Latin America, are struggling with high levels of unemployment, are disproportionate victims and perpetrators of crime, and are increasingly anxious about their future. These statistics highlight the need to target youth and young adults with programs that can prepare them for life.

Our mission in the Caribbean and Latin America is to strengthen the capacity of the region's governments, civil society and private sector to improve citizen security, governance and economic growth. We recognize that we will not be successful in advancing this development goal if we do not help our neighbors get a handle on the security problem.

Our agency's citizen security programs in the Caribbean focus, therefore, on addressing the development challenges posed by the escalating crime and violence. We know that crime erodes citizens' confidence in government and weakens public institutions; violence deters investment and economic opportunity; and citizens are left with few licit alternatives.

So through the Obama Administration's Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), USAID is working with our Caribbean partners and other donors on youth-focused crime prevention programs, designed to get at the root causes of crime and lead to long-term solutions to juvenile crime in the Caribbean.

And we are doing so alongside our colleagues from INL, DEA and other U.S. Government agencies. Because the evidence from the successful anti-crime strategies implemented in cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, New York and Rio de Janeiro - and the improvements I witnessed personally in cities like Medellin during my time as Mission Director in Colombia (2005-2008) - tells us that effective crime reduction happens when law enforcement actions are paired with community-based crime prevention, workforce development and violence reduction programs.

Our investments through CBSI are helping build stronger and safer communities where youth can live in peace and have access to greater educational and job opportunities. With our support, the youth at the Gilbert Agricultural Rural Development Centre (GARDC) in Antigua and Barbuda receive relevant job training and internships with local businesses; the Grants Pen community in Kingston, Jamaica, is working closely with the police to identify and address safety and security problems; and out-of-school children and at-risk youth in Santiago, the Dominican Republic, are being provided with informal education opportunities and job skills training.

These kinds of interventions have been previously tested and proven to address the vulnerabilities of youth in the Caribbean. USAID's "A Ganar", a public-private alliance which is a sports-based workforce development program, has been successful in placing vulnerable youth in jobs and other productive activities. In 2011, 85% of students who completed the "A Ganar" program obtained a job, went back to school or started a business. The best aspect of this initiative is that by working in collaboration with the private sector, we can leverage resources and develop sustainable models for youth development.

In the area of juvenile justice, USAID is working closely with national and municipal governments and civil society to promote juvenile justice reform and craft policies that can address youth crime in the long term. Examples include working with the relevant legal authorities to introduce early interventions with at-risk youth and alternative sentencing for young offenders, as well as separating juveniles from adults within a country's correctional system.

Our Caribbean programs have always sought to create more opportunities for the poor and the vulnerable, and CBSI has allowed USAID to replicate and expand successful activities that prevent crime by building stronger communities and supporting at-risk youth.

CBSI has helped target our programs, not just those that fall under the rubric of “citizen security”, toward strengthening communities and improving alternatives for youth. In fact, during my recent visit to the Dominican Republic I witnessed first-hand how USAID’s entire portfolio supports local efforts to prevent crime. Our bilateral programs to train teachers provide out-of-school youth with conflict resolution techniques, link small producers to lucrative markets and support the development of a fully operational and politically independent national Office of the Public Defender with representation in 22 out of 31 provinces; all contribute to building more resilient communities. All of our Missions have been instructed to make sure that they are orienting large portions of their portfolios to addressing this pressing challenge

In addition, CBSI has helped the islands of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Dominican Republic work together to draft and implement a regional security strategy.

Regional coordination under CBSI includes a USAID-led technical working group focused on crime prevention efforts, which has provided a forum for our Caribbean partners to share best practices, coordinate implementation, and refine priorities. This coming year, we hope to use the CBSI working groups to further engage civil society and strengthen public-private partnerships targeting these issues. This kind of regional cooperation is a crucial component of CBSI because no one island can take on the region’s well-armed and well-organized criminal outfits on their own.

Nor can a single sub-region make headway in the absence of complementary efforts underway in other parts of our Hemisphere. That is why the Obama Administration’s investments in the Caribbean are being matched by the work being done in Central America through the Central American Regional Security Initiative (known as CARSI) and Mexico’s Merida Initiative.

Moreover, other donors are currently complementing USAID’s citizen security investments in the Caribbean. For instance, UNICEF is funding juvenile justice programming in the Eastern Caribbean; and the European Union is supporting poverty reduction in Jamaica.

Just as no one country or region can solve the citizen security challenge on their own, neither can a single donor. The United States Government can help, but the primary responsibility lies with national governments.

The CBSI is not charity. The Caribbean and the United States’ security challenges are intertwined. The Caribbean Basin with its open seas and porous island borders is a major transit route for illegal trafficking of all sorts. The crime and violence that afflict those islands eventually flows northwards to the U.S. And the drug-trade and associated violence drain the resources and dynamism out of communities on both sides of the Caribbean – whether they be Jamaica the country, or Jamaica, Queens in New York.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to the committee’s questions.