

**Statement of Kerri Hannan
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Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs
Before the
Senate Foreign Relations Committee:
China's Role in Latin America and the Caribbean
March 31, 2022**

Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Rubio, distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Department's efforts related to the PRC's engagement in the Western Hemisphere. The issue remains one of our most pressing challenges and one that requires close coordination with our interagency colleagues, international organizations, and allies and partners around the world. Just as important, it requires strong cooperation between the Administration and Congress, so I welcome continued engagement on these issues with the Committee and the chance to be with you today.

Our strategic goal remains promoting a more democratic, inclusive, secure, prosperous, and climate-resilient Western Hemisphere, aligned with U.S. values and interests. The pandemic has exacerbated the hemisphere's longstanding challenges of inequality, corruption, and weak democratic institutions, rendering the region more vulnerable to the PRC's aggressive and coercive practices. We do not respond to this challenge by trying to force countries to choose between the United States and China, but rather by proving that we are better partners committed to advancing shared interests and values. We work with our allies and partners to help their democracies deliver for their people. We insist the PRC respect our hemisphere's democratic values and international labor, social, and environmental standards as it engages in the region.

As the Secretary laid out in his speech in Quito last October, we're helping the region's democracies deliver across all fronts. Our efforts seek to deliver mutual benefits for our partners, not one-sided deals. The Summit of the Americas in June – whose theme is “Building a Sustainable, Resilient, and Equitable Future” – will provide a critical opportunity for the President to gather the region's democratic leaders and agree to concrete outcomes to promote a prosperous and democratic hemisphere. The Summit will provide concrete solutions to challenges that our partners face on issues like recovering from the pandemic, creating good paying jobs, and transitioning to green future.

We also work with likeminded democratic allies and partners from outside the hemisphere. The European Union, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan all help promote stability and growth in the region. With eight of Taiwan's 14 official diplomatic partners in our hemisphere, one of our top goals remains countering the PRC's aggressive campaign to induce countries to switch recognition to Beijing.

On the economic front, we focus on ensuring competitive and transparent investment environments that help level the playing field for U.S. companies. We sent more than two dozen U.S. technical delegations to the region since 2018 to share best practices on procurement

reform, foreign investment screening, and other initiatives that make countries attractive, competitive business environments. These trainings help our partners ensure their engagements with the PRC meet high standards on transparency. We need to work with partners to help ensure regional investment remains transparent, competitive, and private sector driven, while upholding environmental and social safeguards.

On security, the proliferation of PRC-linked telecommunications and surveillance equipment in the region highlights risks to human rights, national security, and privacy. Many of our technical delegations and engagements have focused on ICT and cybersecurity. While the PRC's military presence in the region remains limited, we must maintain our position as the region's principal security partner, including in military cooperation, from training to equipment sales.

We must also counter the PRC's propaganda and disinformation campaigns in the region. We saw and countered PRC-affiliated social media accounts attempting to redirect concerns about COVID-19 toward bogus claims of its originating in the United States. We are doing the same as we see PRC efforts to spread disinformation about Russia's further invasion of Ukraine. The Global Engagement Center (GEC) works with us and our field-based officers to address propaganda and disinformation. We build resilience through targeted support to independent civil society organizations and journalists.

We are also laying a foundation so that rising generations in the hemisphere know PRC disinformation when they see it and can reject it. The Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLAI) expands ties between emerging entrepreneurs and U.S. counterparts to support job creation and economic growth. The Department's Academy for Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) provides women the tools they need to turn their ideas into successful businesses. And the 100,000 Strong in the Americas (100K) Innovation Fund supports educational exchanges that strengthen the links between education, workforce development, and social inclusion to address opportunity gaps.

The Western Hemisphere's commitment to democracy has never appeared more urgent, as Russia tramples on Ukraine's democracy and threatens to export the Ukraine crisis to the Americas by expanding its military cooperation with Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Our region has, with a few exceptions, condemned Russia and supported our efforts to urge Russia to immediately cease its war against Ukraine and seek a diplomatic resolution. Our allies and partners have seen the stark contrast between our position on Russia's further invasion and the PRC's position, as PRC diplomats elevate the Kremlin's propaganda and seek to protect Russia from condemnation in international bodies.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward to your questions.