

Remarks by the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, at the Central American Security Conference

Thank you very much, President Colom, and let me also thank Foreign Minister Rodas and Secretary General Aleman for hosting this very important international conference. I think from what we've already heard, the speakers have captured the scale of our common challenge and the urgency of our common response.

The turnout today is an expression of shared responsibility and a testament to the shared sense of crisis and an acute and growing concern over the violence and criminality affecting our friends and neighbors in Central America. Everyone knows the statistics, the murder rates surpassing civil war levels, the citizens who rank in security as their top concern, the violence that burdens economic development and foreign direct investment, the threats to democracy, the impacts on society's most vulnerable populations, especially women and children.

But we don't need to go through the statistics, because many of you around this table are living these brutal facts every single day. And by coming here for this important conference, we're acknowledging a very basic truth, that no single country can overcome these facts on its own. It will take concerted action from all of us. That is why when President Obama visited Central America in March; he pledged that the United States would do our part through a new partnership that puts the focus where it should be, on the security of citizens.

And today, I am here and privileged to speak about how we intend to move forward with that partnership and make good on the promise of shared responsibility. Shared responsibility is obviously the first step, but it will mean little if it is not matched by a shared strategy, and even a shared strategy will mean little if it is not backed by the will and persistence to implement it by every sector of society and by all the international partners.

The strategy must reflect the transnational nature of the challenge we face. The cartels and criminals are not contained by borders, and so, therefore, our response must not be either. SICA's declaration points the way forward: Strengthening the rule of law, attacking criminal organizations head-on, rehabilitating those who do fall into criminality while preventing young people from doing that in the first place, rooting out corruption, and ensuring accountable and effective institutions are essential. Building police forces and courts that are well-funded and well-equipped and capable of protecting human rights and earning the trust of the communities they serve is also.

It's clear that in order to do so the countries represented around here and the extraordinary leaders who are here on behalf of their countries must have the resources they require. Businesses and the rich in every country must pay their fair share of taxes and become full partners in a whole-of-society effort. True security cannot be funded on the backs of the poor. Civil society must be a full partner in defining and implementing long-term solutions. And yesterday, the civil society groups here issued their own declaration, which is as crucial as what the commitments are made by SICA and governments.

And yet even in these tough economic times, as we take on the threat of criminality and violence, we also must continue to invest in education and jobs. That's the best way to empower citizens to take their own destinies in hand.

United States will back you with sustained support for this strategy, and let me add that we do so because we care about the citizens of this region and our sense of obligation to our neighbors, but also because we know that the wave of violence sweeping Central America also threatens our own country. And therefore, we see this not just as an obligation, but as a mutual responsibility.

We know from the work that the United States has supported in Colombia and now in Mexico that good leadership, proactive investments, and committed partnerships can turn the tide. When President Obama visited San Salvador, he said we would start by investing more than \$200 million in Central American-led efforts to address deteriorating citizen security. In fact, the U.S. funding for the Central American Citizen Security Partnership will go even further than that. You have identified your priorities, you have set your strategy, and we will respond with almost \$300 million this year, backed up by an action plan that is focused on high-impact investments to help you build new capabilities and create the reforms you need from within.

Our investments will support special vetted police units, initiatives like the SICA Regional Crime Observatory to bring technology, data, and intelligence together, support to train judges and prosecutors, a fund to encourage fiscal reform, and a new challenge grants program, starting with \$20 million this year to support initiatives to bolster the rule of law. And as always, we will support efforts to protect and empower women and girls who are too often the targets of so much of the violence.

We will also support proven programs to keep young people away from criminal activity. And to that end, I challenge the private sector in the region to join us. In a new program in El Salvador, we have private sector partners who have pledged that for every dollar the United States commits to crime prevention, businesses in El Salvador will invest three dollars. I would welcome the private sector across the region to join in such an innovative approach.

We know the demand for drugs rests largely in my own country. So for the third straight year, President Obama is seeking more than \$10 billion to fund demand reduction through education, treatment, and prevention in the United States. At the same time, we are accelerating our law enforcement efforts to root out the U.S. affiliates of transnational criminal organizations and stepping up the targeting of weapons trafficking networks.

Now crucially, United States support is just part of a larger and growing commitment. The assistance that comes from the Group of Friends totals nearly a billion dollars this year. And for the first time, we will coordinate that assistance in a systematic way. We intend to establish an ongoing, effective, high-level mechanism to ensure sustained coordination to make every dollar count by reinforcing each other while avoiding duplication. Today's conference must not be a one-time effort.

A number of the institutions and countries represented here today have unique roles to play. The IDB has taken a lead. Both it and the World Bank bring crucial expertise and resources. Colombia and Mexico, guided by their own experiences, are providing invaluable leadership and assistance. Central American governments who have successes to share are also supporting their neighbors. Chile, Canada, and our European friends have stepped in with an even greater commitment.

And of course, SICA will be crucial to coordinate this regional strategy. That's why I'm pleased to announce the United States will seek observer status in SICA. It is another demonstration of the Obama Administration's commitment to partnership and working closely with regional institutions.

So we do have shared responsibility and now we have to see it in action. But I will underscore that the leadership must come from Central America itself, and not only from governments but also private sectors and civil societies. We will all be your ready partners, but we want and need to follow your lead.

There are models here that point the way. In Guatemala, CICIG has worked with the government and citizens to confront corruption and impunity head on. The Police Reform Commission, under the brave leadership of Helen Mack, has begun a major institutional overhaul. President Obama saw other encouraging examples on his recent visit to El Salvador. I'm impressed by your successes, President Funes, with community policing and your push to pass a special tax to fund citizen security efforts.

There are many other examples from every country, but the important thing is let's coordinate those, let's learn from those examples, let's take what works, put the best practices in the effort to follow and implement the strategy that's adopted. So the United States and the Group of Friends will be with you, and with the right leadership, cooperation, we will make progress.

As Foreign Minister Jimenez said in her remarks, two decades ago it was Central Americans working closely together on a regional basis who ended civil wars, and it will be again Central Americans working together on a regional basis who will defeat the criminality and violence that renders your citizens insecure. And we will be your partner as you define and lead the way forward.

Thank you very much.

US Department of State, June 22nd 2011.