

Testimony of Congressman Silvestre Reyes, (TX-16)
Wednesday, April 13, 2011 – SFOPS FY12 Hearing

Thank you Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member Lowey, and members of the subcommittee for allowing me the opportunity to testify today in strong support of U.S. security and economic development assistance for Mexico. Having worked with both the Chairwoman and Ranking Member on Mexico issues in the past, I know of their strong interest in this topic and appreciate their leadership. I also want to express my appreciation to the Chairwoman for inviting me to participate in the recent congressional delegation to Latin America and look forward to continuing to work together on issues pertaining to U.S.-Mexico security cooperation.

Support for International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) and Security Efforts in Mexico

As the Committee is aware, Mexico has seen much bloodshed and violence at the hands of the drug cartels. Since Mexican President Felipe Calderón launched a necessary military offensive against drug cartels in December 2006, more than 34,000 people have been killed. The violence reached an all-time high last year as the Mexican government reported 15,273 drug-related killings. Many of them happened in close proximity to the U.S. border. In response, the United States and Mexico have formed a unique partnership through the Mérida Initiative to fight organized crime and associated violence while promoting respect for human rights and strengthening the rule of law. The Mérida Initiative has become the central framework for regional security cooperation between Mexico and the United States in our bi-national efforts to combat organized crime. It also emphasizes both security and the role of communities in addressing the root causes of criminality and violence. The innovative U.S.-Mexican partnership is built on four strategic areas that guide our cooperation and institutionalize our efforts: Pillar one: Disrupt organized criminal groups; Pillar two: Strengthen institutions; Pillar three: Create a 21st-century border, and; Pillar four: Build strong and resilient communities in both countries.

Since 2008, the Mérida Initiative has promoted U.S.-Mexican security and counterdrug cooperation by providing a counterdrug and anticrime assistance package for Mexico. Thanks to the leadership of this committee, we have appropriated funds for the accounts of both the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Fund and the Economic Support Fund. This has enabled us to assist Mexico as they engage in a fierce battle with drug syndicates across the country. With this assistance, Mexico has made important gains with the arrest or killing of key cartel leaders and disrupted the cartels' operations that for years had gone unchallenged.

This aside however, much work remains to be done and if I can leave you with one key point today, it would be that our economic support for INCLE is vital to our security interests here at home, and we must dedicate ample resources to combat the growing threat posed by drug cartels in the Americas. While we have made some important gains in the past few years under programs such as the Merida Initiative and Plan Colombia, according to the 2010 United Nations World Drug Report, the global market for some of the cartels' key criminal operations involving cocaine, heroin, and human and weapons smuggling is a staggering \$186 billion. We need to understand that what is happening in Mexico and the Americas has a direct impact on our neighborhoods. In the U.S. alone, an estimated one million people are dependent on cocaine, and Mexico's drug cartels now control approximately 90 – 95 percent of the cocaine that enters the United States. Moreover, while Guatemala wasn't included in the original scope of the Merida Initiative, Mexico's drug cartels are now extensively involved in that country and the **murder rate in some central American countries is now higher than Mexico, as drug cartels are fighting to secure drug routes in these critical areas.**

It is my hope that these statements underscore the problem and the need for greater resources and ask the committee to fully fund the President's request for INCLE of \$248.5 million for FY12.

Support for the Economic Development Fund (ESF) and USAID in Mexico City

The unprecedented cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico's law enforcement has been complemented by the efforts of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Mexico City. Under the Mérida Initiative, USAID in Mexico City is working to strengthen the rule of law, support the implementation of Mexico's new justice system, and help build strong and resilient communities through partnerships with the government of Mexico and civil society.

Directly across the border from my district in El Paso, Texas, USAID has worked in Ciudad Juárez to reprogram existing funding, both Mérida and bilateral, in support of an urban mapping project and an at-risk youth program administered by international organizations. In addition, in April 2010, USAID launched a program allowing civic organizations in Ciudad Juárez to submit proposals for grants of up to \$100,000. By October 2010, 17 grants worth roughly \$1 million had been approved to implement pillar four activities in Ciudad Juárez. Those activities include: crime prevention programs; support for human rights NGOs; municipal exchanges to share best practices in reducing violence; and development of community crime prevention strategies.

USAID also supports efforts such as the Scholarships for Education and Economic Development (SEED) program. SEED trains student teachers from Mexico and other Latin American countries at the El Paso Community College and community colleges around the United States. The training prepares them to return home and contribute in significant ways to the economic and social progress of their countries. SEED scholars implement action plans in their countries aimed at improving infrastructure, literacy, and economic development.

I would also like to highlight USAID's efforts to support needed constitutional reforms to Mexico's criminal justice system. The reforms to strengthen the rule of law put pressure on law enforcement agents to carry out more professional investigations and address endemic corruption. These reforms are essential to improving the country's ability to identify, prosecute

and sanction criminals. Yet progress in implementing this critically important reform has been slow. Approximately 98 percent of crimes in Mexico are not prosecuted. Additionally less than half of Mexico's 32 states have implemented the reform. Several additional state governments have requested assistance from USAID to implement the reforms; however, USAID's capacity to attend to these requests will depend on future funding provided to them for these activities.

This brings me to my next point: while much has been done with the funds appropriated through this committee to help expand judicial and economic reforms in Mexico, the country had a low designation of ESF funding in FY10. So far, of the roughly \$1.5 billion appropriated to Mexico through the Mérida Initiative, only \$44 million^[1] has been allocated directly through the ESF account (three percent of total funds), as compared to a little over \$1.034 billion in INCLE (approximately 70 percent of total funds). Many members from both sides of the aisle have expressed concerns regarding the delays in the delivery of Mérida assistance in general, but I also urge the committee to closely examine the level of funding for ESF and consider providing a more robust allotment for this account.

The committee's previous assistance for USAID's efforts in places like Ciudad Juarez have shown significant promise and are critical to our objectives in Mexico to provide an alternative to the lucrative drug trade that continues to entice a large segment of the population. Recently, USAID initiated a major expansion of its Mexican border development programs, forging partnerships with U.S. institutions to address the poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and health care needs of border residents; however, additional resources are needed to support and expand the impact of these innovative programs. Through these and other efforts, it is my hope

^[1] \$50 million total was initially designated for Mexico through the ESF account, but \$6 million of the ESF funds from FY10 (P.L. 111-117) were later reprogrammed for global climate change efforts. Total ESF funds designated for Mexico through the Merida Initiative includes: \$20 million in the FY2008 Supplemental (P.L. 110-252), \$15 million for FY09 (P.L. 111-8), and \$15 million in FY10 (P.L. 111-117). This figure does not include a portion of funds channeled to USAID by INL from the \$175 million in INCLE funds appropriated by Congress for Mexico in the FY2010 supplemental.

that Ciudad Juárez will become a model city, moving beyond its notoriety as one of Mexico's most dangerous cities, and that with El Paso, it will transform into a regional example of how U.S. security and development support can help our partner strengthen its institutions and economic development.

I believe that \$75 million for ESF would be an ideal amount to support the current efforts in places like Ciudad Juárez. At a minimum, Mexico's ESF account should be funded at the President's FY12 request.

Support for the International Boundary and Water Commission

Finally, I also request \$152 million to support the work of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC). As the Committee is aware, the mission of IBWC is to provide bi-national solutions to issues that arise during the application of U.S.-Mexico treaties and maintain and rehabilitate more than 500 miles of levees on the Rio Grande River along the U.S.-Mexico border. The Commission operates and maintains international storage reservoirs, diversion dams, wastewater treatment plants, and boundary monuments on the U.S.-Mexico border. The IBWC has a backlog of needed project assessments and maintenance repairs, and due to insufficient funding in the past (\$76 million in FY2010), the IBWC has not adequately completed the project assessments and maintenance repairs that are needed to rehabilitate the levee system along the border.

I would like to conclude my remarks by again thanking you for giving me the opportunity to testify on behalf of my community in support of these important efforts and for your consideration of my requests in the FY2012 State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill.

Thank you.