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Support Humanitarian, Development and Rule-of-Law Programs for Latin America

Thank you for the opportunity to address the House Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs regarding U.S. funding to Latin America. The Latin America Working Group serves a coalition of faith-based organizations, humanitarian agencies, human rights, policy, and nongovernmental organizations. We encourage U.S. policies towards the region that support human rights and alleviate poverty. Much of this testimony is based upon a March letter to Congress signed by twenty-five faith-based, policy, and nongovernmental organizations.

We urge you not to turn your backs on the most vulnerable people in Latin America nor abandon wise investments that create lasting peace and security for our hemisphere as you make difficult choices on the FY2012 budget.

In Latin America, significant U.S. aid programs protect those at risk from natural disasters, deadly disease, and conflict. International Disaster Assistance saves lives in the immediate aftermath of devastating earthquakes, as in Haiti, or catastrophic flooding, as in Central America. Global Health and Child Survival helps prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other preventable diseases and provides maternal and newborn health care. Economic Support Funds build capacity in Haiti to deliver health care in the midst of a cholera epidemic. In Colombia, they also help provide relief and rebuild livelihoods for the world's largest internally displaced population, while Migration and Refugee Assistance funds

emergency shelter for Colombians crossing borders to flee their nation's conflict.

Well-targeted U.S. aid programs also help impoverished people raise themselves to a better life. Development Assistance supports training so poor farmers can increase agricultural production and strengthen local markets to reduce hunger and grow economies. McGovern-Dole International Food for Education helps provide lunches to pre-school and primary-school children. Peace Corps places Americans in communities to work in partnership on health care, farming, and education. The Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (under the International Development Association) funds U.S. commitments to reduce the debt burdens of some of the hemisphere's poorest nations, allowing these countries to invest more resources in poverty reduction. The Inter-American Foundation's compact budget supports small-scale self-help programs.

U.S. assistance programs can also reduce the threats that come from drug trafficking and drug-related violence that directly affect the communities that you represent.

Development Assistance supports efforts by Andean farmers to abandon growing coca, the raw material for cocaine, and turn to food crops instead. Economic Support Funds help Mexico, Colombia, and Central American nations strengthen courts and prosecute drug trafficking mafias. The U.S. Institute for Peace's innovative programs encourage new approaches to ending protracted conflicts, as in Colombia. All of these programs in the long run are less costly and provide more sustainable solutions than emergency military programs to address drug-related violence.

With the maze of funding categories, sometimes it is hard to understand why cuts to a particular budget will fall so hard. To give an example of Colombia, most members of Congress

say they support assistance to Colombia. Yet to ensure that good programs for Colombia are not eliminated or cut, you have to know that USAID's superior human rights program—which we urge you to continue strong support for—and other rule of law assistance to help Colombia strengthen its judicial system may be lodged in International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement and that very important alternative development programs and assistance to Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities and aid to people violently displaced from their homes, are under Economic Support Funds. If your goal is to reduce illicit drug production, strengthen the rule of law, and reduce the impact of the still-deadly conflict in Colombia, you will support those particular programs.

President Obama's proposed FY2012 budget makes cuts in foreign assistance programs worldwide, including in Latin America programs. Economic assistance to the region is reduced by 5 percent. Sensibly, after over a decade of U.S. investment in Colombia, the proposed budget begins to shift responsibilities, as long scheduled, for military aid and equipment maintenance to the Colombian government. With big-ticket purchases for equipment for Mexico completed, the proposed budget continues substantial, and more effective, rule-of-law assistance to Mexico at a lower cost. **One of the programs we believe is still underfunded in the President's budget is Migration and Refugee Assistance for the Western Hemisphere, which provides aid to tens of thousands of refugees fleeing the conflict in Colombia and living in perilous conditions.**

We understand the need for responsible budgeting and believe that there are programs in the President's FY12 budget that merit further cuts. Hefty military assistance programs to a hemisphere that is largely at peace are excessive and should be reduced. Aid that encourages

militaries to carry out internal security roles is particularly damaging, as is assistance to security force units that commit gross human rights violations with impunity.

We are not just boosters for U.S. development aid programs. Sometimes we see U.S. aid programs that don't work or undermine the goals they profess to accomplish, as when some food aid programs might undermine local markets or judicial programs don't focus enough on the core aim of reducing impunity. But we believe aid programs can often be improved with greater attention to input on design and implementation from local civil society partners, and we have been happy to engage with USAID in particular to discuss ways to improve programs with such input.

I would like to stress in particular the importance of assistance to Haiti to help in recovery from the earthquake. While U.S. assistance has helped to save many lives, a year and a half later, rubble still has not been removed, hundreds of thousands of people remain in precarious conditions in camps, a cholera epidemic has had deadly impact, and many Haitians have not yet been able to rebuild their livelihoods and build a better life for their family. On Haiti, the U.S. government needs to listen harder to the input from Haitian civil society voices about the best path toward recovery. But the United States should not reduce funding or walk away. Those of you who walked past the photos of Haiti in the Rayburn House Office building foyer or who met with some of the Haitian civil society leaders here recently who are working so hard to help their communities know why we must commit to join with them to address this humanitarian crisis.

As the Congress considers tough choices regarding the budgets for this year and next, we urge you to preserve already very limited economic and institution-building programs for

Latin America. **These programs protect the most vulnerable, help farmers grow food instead of coca, provide immunizations for deadly diseases, strengthen courts, and help those fleeing from wars and recovering from disasters. Their impact on the U.S. budget is minimal, but their return, measured in increased goodwill, citizen security, and protection for human rights, is substantial.** These programs strongly benefit U.S. interests by building support from our neighbors in the hemisphere, showing that the United States can be a partner willing to lend a helping hand.