

Press Releases: Background Briefing on the Second Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America

Special Briefing
State Department Officials
Via Teleconference
October 10, 2018

MODERATOR: Thank you. Hi. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us. Welcome to this background call to preview the second Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America, which is going to happen here in Washington tomorrow and Friday, October 11th and 12th. As a reminder, today's call is on background.

So for your situational awareness only and not for reporting, we welcome two speakers. Number one is [State Department Official One]. Hereinafter, please refer to him as State Department Official One. Our second official is [State Department Official Two]. Hereinafter, please refer to her as State Department Official Two.

Again, this call is on background and the contents of this call are embargoed until the end of the call. Reporting should not reference these individuals by name but rather as State Department Official One and State Department Official Two.

I'll now turn it over to State Department Official One. He has some opening remarks, and then State Department Official Two would like to make some opening remarks, and then we'll open it up to questions and answers.

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: Thank you, [Moderator]. Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for joining us today. First off, I would just like to send our condolences and our wishes to all those in Central America who have been affected by the recent flooding. Our hearts go out to the loved ones and those killed in recent torrential rains across Central America as well as to the thousands who have been evacuated or otherwise impacted. And I'd just like to state that the United States stands with our Central American friends during these difficult times.

In terms of the conference, we are pleased to welcome Vice President Pence to the State Department tomorrow to open the second Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America, just as he opened the first one in Miami a little over a year ago. And we thank the Government of Mexico and our

colleagues at the Department of Homeland Security for again co-hosting the leaders from Central America.

Tomorrow we will welcome President Hernandez of Honduras, President Morales of Guatemala, and Vice President Ortiz of El Salvador at the State Department. The U.S. Government collaborates closely with the Mexican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran governments to address the underlying conditions driving illegal immigration to the United States. We do so because we believe we can help foster a strong, vibrant, prosperous, and secure Western Hemisphere by reducing crime and violence, addressing corruption, disrupting the activities of transnational criminal organizations, and helping these countries create greater economic opportunities for their citizens.

The conference will continue our joint efforts to strengthen prosperity, security, and governance in Central America, this time with particular attention to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, known collectively as the Northern Triangle.

Our first goal will be to review our progress in these critical areas since we met in Miami in June 2017. The United States will examine advancements in our joint projects with Mexico in the region, as well as progress under our strategy for Central America. Under that strategy we have committed more than \$2.6 billion in foreign assistance over Fiscal Years 2015 to 2018 in Central America. We expect the Northern Triangle governments to discuss advancements under their own reform initiative, called the Plan for the Alliance for Prosperity. They have committed to a combined \$8.6 billion from 2016 to 2018 under that plan.

Our second goal is to identify new steps to enhance progress on prosperity, security, and governance in the region. That will help us address the drivers of illegal immigration and other challenges in the region. A more prosperous Central America benefits our region and the entire hemisphere. Therefore, on prosperity day, which the Department of State will host tomorrow, October 11th, we will explore ways to expand our joint efforts to promote economic opportunity, infrastructure, economic integration, and energy markets.

On security day, on October 12th, the U.S. Government will lead a discussion on security cooperation, combating organized crime and gangs, and enhancing regional and citizen security. A more secure and stable Central America contributes to a safer and more prosperous United States by helping to secure our borders, protect U.S. citizens, and increase U.S. opportunities for our businesses.

Since last year's conference in Miami, the region has made important strides in multinational collaboration to combat international criminal organizations whose activities cross all borders, and in addressing the security-related drivers of migration.

Now my colleague from INL can describe in greater detail what this collaboration looks like.

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO: Thank you, [State Department Official One]. And good afternoon, everyone. As [State Department Official One] mentioned, INL will lead the department's discussions on security day, which is being hosted by the Department of Homeland Security. We plan to focus on the progress made to date in the region in combating transnational criminal organizations, or what I will henceforward call TCOs, as well as gangs, both of which drive the insecurity in the Northern Triangle countries and contribute to the number of individuals illegally immigrating to the United States.

The conference's discussions on security day will focus on combating organized crime, enhancing regional security cooperation, and improving citizen security. This event is an opportunity to highlight the success we've had with the Northern Triangle, as well as the maturation of our cooperation with Mexico in Central America. We've been able to take the successes from Mexico on issues such as improving information sharing, forensics, and accreditation of judicial institutions and expand them to partners in the Northern Triangle.

Our efforts focus on building the capacity of these governments to combat criminal threats effectively and efficiently. This includes a whole-of-organization approach to ensure we are addressing all aspects of TCOs' operations.

Our programs are focused on addressing the security-related drivers of migration. Through them we've seen sustained reductions in homicide rates throughout the Northern Triangle, but even more acute reductions in areas where the United States is working on improving citizen security and community policing programs.

Our goal for this conference is to both highlight the progress we've made and to push the region to do even more. The programs that INL worked on in the region are more successful when the host governments are investing similar resources. We've seen this in El Salvador, where our community policing efforts combined with our efforts under the Salvadoran Plan Seguro have contributed to higher than national average reductions in homicides.

All the efforts we plan to discuss this week have immediate impacts on the security of citizens in these countries, as well as U.S. national security. Over the past year, the conversations we've had with these countries are maturing, showing that this is truly a shared problem that we can address best by working together. This conference will reiterate our commitment to addressing these issues by enhancing our cooperation within the region.

Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you both for your opening comments. We can now open this up to question and answer. I'd ask everyone to please identify your media outlet and to limit your questions to one. Thank you.

OPERATOR: All right. And again, ladies and gentlemen, if you do have a question, it's * and 1. Okay, our first question is from Carol Morello,

Washington Post.

QUESTION: Hi. Thanks for taking this call. State Department people have consistently said throughout the world that corruption is the enemy of prosperity and security. Yet when Guatemala – the president of Guatemala decided to scrap the commission on impunity in Guatemala, which was really good at fighting corruption, the United States said basically nothing. Do you plan to raise that – raise that issue and talk with him about it at all when he is here? And how much harm do you think that does to the widespread corruption in Guatemala?

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: Thanks for the question. I am not going to preempt what Vice President Pence and Secretary Pompeo and others may be discussing there. I can tell you, however, that our policy with regard to CICIG in Guatemala has not changed. The United States supports CICIG reforms, as has been noted previously, and we maintain that position.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: All right. We have – next question is from Mitzi Macias with Voice of America.

QUESTION: Hello, good afternoon. My question may be directly to Official Two. It's related that all the changes that is applied during the recent months about the immigration status for TPS holders. Are you thinking maybe in reestablish that status for the Central America people?

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO: Yes, thank you for your question. Regarding that, I would refer you to the Department of Homeland Security.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: All right. Our next question is from Conor Finnegan with ABC News.

QUESTION: Hey, thank you for having the call. I was wondering if you could provide an update on the U.S. proposal to provide \$20 million to Mexico to deport migrants from that country. I know the Secretary went ahead and transferred that money or at least initiated the process to transfer that money to DHS. But have there been any discussions with Mexico on this, and do you expect it to come up?

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: Again, I cannot say whether that will come up in the conference. It's not something that is directly on the agenda. But I can tell you we continue to work closely with the Government of Mexico on the common challenges posed by illegal immigration and will continue to work with Congress and the Government of Mexico on this effort in order to protect our national security interests. And the department will continue to work with the Government of Mexico to ensure that this project complements our broader efforts to bolster the capacity of Mexico's immigration enforcement.

We will not move forward with implementation until we reach agreement with the incoming Mexican administration on this.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Okay. Our next question is from Ana Langner with La Jornada Mexican.

QUESTION: Hello. Good afternoon. I wanted to know if you are going to talk about the Safe Third Country Agreement with Mexico. I know that you have already answered a part of the question, but I want to insist in that. Are you going to talk with Mexico about this agreement?

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: I'm sorry, can we please have the question repeated back one time? Is that possible?

QUESTION: Yes. Are you going or – tomorrow is going to talk about the Safe Third Country Agreement with Mexico?

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: Again, that is not something that is on the agenda at the moment, but I – and I can't really say whether that might come up or not. We'll just have to see.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Okay. It's from Pedro Marroquin with the La Hora Guatemala.

QUESTION: Hi. Thanks for taking our questions. And I know the first one was made about the decision of President Morales regarding CICIG. And I heard the answer, but I just have one question. In 2015 when this Alliance for Prosperity was being discussed, the former vice president said that the renewal of CICIG was going to be one of the conditions if Guatemalan people wanted support and help from the American people. President Morales has announced that the mandate of CICIG is not going to be renewed. At some point is that going to be a condition in order to continue in the Alliance for Prosperity?

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: I'm not going to speculate on that. I think this is a matter that will be discussed between our governments at some point, but I won't speculate on any conditions. As I said previously, we maintain our support for CICIG reforms, and we hope that the Guatemalan Government and the United Nations can work out a mutually agreeable mechanism for CICIG to continue. But I'm not at liberty to get into details about these conversations.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: All right. And if you do have a question, it's *1. All right, the next question is from Conor Finnegan with ABC News.

QUESTION: Hey, thanks for taking a second question. Just more broadly, you talk about investing more in the Northern Triangle in order to alleviate the circumstances there and prevent illegal migration. But if you look at the fiscal year numbers, last year there was less than half – cuts of more than 50 percent for all three countries. Can you address how you believe you're investing more in those countries if you're actually cutting the funding?

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: I don't have the exact figures in front of me, so I'm not sure I can address exactly your point about the cuts, and I believe they weren't quite as drastic as you've mentioned there. But part of – a large part of this strategy is to ensure that all countries – the United States, Mexico, and the Northern Triangle countries – that we all invest resources into this because the drivers of illegal migration are things that affect all of our countries, that the criminal elements that are behind these networks do affect the Northern Triangle countries, they do affect Mexico as well as ourselves. And this conference and the process that has led to this conference shows that there is a common interest in engaging and cooperating on this, and all of us are putting our resources into it. So I wouldn't obsess too much on the dollar figures. It has to do with using our resources wisely and in a cooperative manner.

MODERATOR: Great, and now time for one last question, please.

OPERATOR: Okay. We have Jose Diaz with Reforma.

QUESTION: Thank you for having this. The question is a very specific one: Are there any representatives of the incoming Mexican administration participating in the summit? And what's the nature of the conversations we have – you've had with them regarding migration from Central America?

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: I'm afraid I'll have to refer you to the Mexican Government on that one. They will – they should be the ones to respond concerning those questions.

MODERATOR: Thank you. That concludes for questions now. Thank you very much for joining us today. To repeat this, today's call was on background. The embargo is now lifted. Please refer to both speakers as State Department Official One and State Department Official Two. Thank you all for joining us.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.