

Press Releases: Briefing on Secretary Pompeo's Upcoming Trip to Santiago, Chile; Asuncion, Paraguay; Lima, Peru; and Cucuta, Colombia

Special Briefing
Senior State Department Official
Via Teleconference
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MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining us for today's on-background call for Secretary Pompeo's upcoming trip to Santiago, Asuncion, Lima, and Cucuta. Joining us today for your situational awareness only and not for reporting is [Senior State Department Official]. For purposes of attribution, he must be referred to as a senior State Department official. Again, today's call is on background and embargoed until the call's completion, and then I'll turn it over to [Senior State Department Official] for some opening remarks, and then he'd be happy to take some questions.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Thank you, and thanks everybody for joining the call. It's a great opportunity for us to preview for you the Secretary's trip down to Santiago, Chile; Asuncion, Paraguay; Lima, Peru; and Cucuta, Colombia April 11 to 14. And this is a trip that reaffirms our commitment to the Western Hemisphere. We're showing up; we're engaged. And we're working with likeminded partners to promote economic opportunity and to promote security for citizens and to defend democracy. These are likeminded governments, and you've seen us in this area of the world and in the Western Hemisphere and elsewhere urge governments to pull their own weight. You've heard us talk about that with NATO partners and in East Asia.

Well, in the Western Hemisphere, these governments and others like them are stepping up. The Lima Group, the work we've done together in the Organization of American States – you may have seen the recent vote at the Inter-American Development Bank: two votes, one to seat a representative of the Guaido administration, and one to insist that that representative have the right to participate freely just like any other IDB member, and therefore that led to the cancellation of a meeting in Chengdu. The governments that the Secretary will be engaging with are run by pragmatic and dynamic leaders, and we're really looking forward to this visit.

Now, this isn't just a Western Hemisphere thing. This is part of our broader approach to the world, and if you take a step back and you think about the

Indo-Pacific strategy of this administration, our Middle East Security Alliance, and the recent Warsaw Ministerial on Peace and Security in the Middle East, you'll see strong through-lines across these initiatives of this administration.

Now, for the Western Hemisphere. We see this as a critical moment for Venezuela, for Nicaragua, and for Cuba. Our cooperation with likeminded nations, like the ones that the Secretary's going to be visiting with, can help the citizens of less fortunate and less free societies in our hemisphere turn the tide towards democracy. This is something that we support, but this is something that is South American-led, that is regionally led, and we're proud to stand with these governments.

Chile, Paraguay, Peru, and Colombia belong to that broad and growing regional consensus that says we must defend our values and disavow those who would deny their own citizens liberty. That's why these governments have been doing and what they are doing and what they're continuing to do: working on behalf of democratic reform in Venezuela from within the Lima Group and extending humanitarian assistance to Venezuelans now scattered across the region by Nicolas Maduro's cruelty and his incompetence.

The U.S. will continue using the full force of diplomatic and economic pressure to make way for an inclusive democratic transition, including an end to Maduro's repression and the release of the over 850 prisoners of conscience that he now holds. We're not going to spare any effort as we continue to help all Venezuelans return their country to a stable, prosperous democracy, to stop the violence, the repression, and the economic and humanitarian crisis that plagues the nation and the region.

Chile, Paraguay, and Peru are excellent models of the kind of transition that Venezuela can achieve. Each of these societies has had to struggle at various times in its – their fairly recent history against dictatorship. Each of them has overcome those challenges, and they have become strong advocates of the kind of societies that they have built – democratic societies, prosperous societies, societies that defend human rights. And they have records to show that this is not only possible but is very much within the reach of the Venezuelan people.

So this trip's an opportunity for us to highlight those issues, but also a chance to talk about other positive developments in the region. And so let me say a few words about our positive economic agenda in the hemisphere and about a number of initiatives that, frankly, leave us very excited – America Crece, for example, which is an innovative initiative designed to facilitate and catalyze private sector energy and infrastructure investments in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The U.S. BUILD Act is going to have huge implications for the region. In October, we launch our new International Development Finance Corporation, and that's going to modernize our development finance capabilities, providing \$60 billion in financing worldwide. In Santiago, we're running a pilot program out of the U.S. embassy there called the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs, and that's going to support the growth of women entrepreneurship in northern

Chile, and that's part of the White House's Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative, and we're very proud of the way that that's – pilot project has been standing up. 100,000 Strong in the Americas initiative and the Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative enhance workforce development and empower young business and social entrepreneurs across our hemisphere. They are vital and exciting exchanges.

So here's our economic vision for the hemisphere: private sector-led engagement; trade based on fairness and market access with transparency and strong legal frameworks, particularly involving projects and investments in education and entrepreneurship that can benefit every member of society.

We well know that China doesn't always follow these principles because China, frankly, does not share the region's commitment to democratic values. And so the United States is not going to ignore unfair trading practices. They're not going to ignore them in manufacturing, in trade investment, worker rights, or the protection of intellectual property. On this, we make the same arguments in the Americas that we make all around the world: Economic engagement in China should meet the same high standards – in terms of transparency, adherence to anticorruption standards, debt – excuse me – debt sustainability, labor rights and environmental best practices – that we'd expect of any other fair competitor in the world's markets.

The Secretary's trip is going to emphasize our commitment to remain the partner of choice in the Western Hemisphere for building peace and prosperity in a region that in recent decades has overwhelmingly embraced freedom and democracy. Just this week, we've had two other major trips to the region. Secretary of Commerce Ross and State Department Counselor Brechbuhl are in Mexico for the U.S.-Mexico CEO Dialogue to encourage greater trade and investment. And Deputy Secretary Sullivan will travel to Miami April 11-12 to participate in the U.S.-Caribbean resilience partnership ministerial to strengthen our ability to respond to disasters throughout the Caribbean.

If you look back over the last six to 12 months, you will note that the President, the Vice President, the Secretaries of Transportation, of Defense, of Health, of Energy, Secretary of the Treasury – all have traveled to the region; all are engaged. This is a crucial part of the world for the United States and for United States interests. These high-level trips show our commitment to the region. And the democratic consensus that exists in our hemisphere spans the region, and it does cast in stark relief the authoritarian outliers in the region – Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba – and those malign actors who prop them up.

Now to wrap up, I'll give you a little rundown of the trip itinerary, and we'll start with Chile.

On April 12th, the Secretary will arrive in Santiago. Now, Chile is really an exemplar in the region. It's achieved tremendous economic growth, and it's done a really impressive job in reducing poverty, following that historic plebiscite 30 years ago that ushered in a peaceful return to democratic government. And today, Chile is one of the strongest democracies and one of the strongest economies in the region.

We have a longstanding friendship with Chile and the Chilean people, and that's based on shared values, deep commitments to democratic governance, to human rights, the rule of law, and free, fair, and reciprocal trade. The Secretary in Santiago is going to meet with President Sebastian Pinera and Foreign Minister Ampuero to build on those strong bilateral economic ties that we've established, to build on partnerships in science and technology, security cooperation, including cybersecurity.

They'll discuss our robust economic relationship underpinned by our free trade agreement with Chile that has helped drive economic prosperity in both countries, and they're also going to talk, looking forward, to the APEC 2019. Chile is the host this year, and we share priorities in free, fair, and reciprocal trade. And that will be a – very much a part of the conversation as well.

We have signed an energy infrastructure *America Crece* agreement with the Chileans last year, and that is also going to be part of the agenda, along with the U.S.-Chile Council on Science, Technology, and Innovation.

Of course, we will talk about the challenges we face in the hemisphere, including the collapse of democracy in Venezuela and the challenges faced by the people of Nicaragua, and of course, Cuba. We have really very much admired the leadership President Pinera has shown within the Lima Group to keep pressure on Maduro and to support the Interim President of Venezuela Juan Guaido.

We also welcome President Pinera's leadership in increasing regional integration through *Prosur*, which is a regional group that facilitates cooperation in areas such as infrastructure development, health, energy, combatting transnational crime, and managing natural disasters. It's the kind of straightforward, practical, pragmatic approach to governance which we very much admire.

In Paraguay, the Secretary is going to travel to Asuncion and he will meet with President Abdo Benitez and Foreign Minister Castiglioni. Now, this is the first visit a Secretary of State has made to Paraguay in a while. In fact, it's the first one since 1965. This administration is recognizing our deepening relationship with Paraguay and the tremendous potential we see as a partner, and the impressive transformation from dictatorship to thriving democracy that Paraguay has shown and which is an inspiration for everyone in the region.

The Secretary will discuss with them Paraguay's strong commitment to increase transparency and to fight corruption, make Paraguay an even more attractive destination for regional and U.S. businesses and their efforts to reduce tax evasion. They're also going to be taking the opportunity to discuss our cooperation to improve security in the region by combatting threats of terrorism, drug trafficking, and transnational crime in what is known as the tri-border area, the border region that Paraguay shares with Argentina and Brazil.

Paraguay has been a great leader as well in the Lima Group and on Venezuela,

and it's an opportunity to recognize that as well. We are pleased that Paraguay continues to strengthen its relationship with Taiwan, and the Secretary will reiterate our opposition to unilateral actions that would alter the status quo across the Taiwan Strait, including switching diplomatic recognition.

Later that day, the Secretary is going to travel up to Lima, and he will meet there with President Vizcarra and Foreign Minister Popolizio and reaffirm our close partnership with Peru. We work together on a broad range of issues, including transnational criminal organizations and narcotrafficking, illegal logging and mining, human trafficking, and counterfeit currency.

Vizcarra, President Vizcarra, has been out in front of the issue of corruption, and not only at home but in the leadership he showed in the most recent Summit of the Americas, and we look forward to continuing to work together on (inaudible) capacity building and regional anticorruption issues.

They have also been incredibly generous in how they have received over 700,000 Venezuelans in – migrants and refugees in their countries displaced by Mr. Maduro's man-made humanitarian crisis. And it's called the Lima Group for a reason, because they have been really a leading force in organizing efforts to confront both that humanitarian crisis and the causes of it.

The Secretary is going to wrap up with a dinner with American business leaders in Lima. Our trade arrangements with Peru have almost doubled the amount of trade between the two countries, and we look forward to doing even more.

The President – or the Secretary, rather, is going to wrap up, going to stop in Cucuta. And that's the primary point of entry in Colombia for those forced to abandon Venezuela, and he is going to see some of the resources we've brought to bear there, and he's going to meet with some of the organizations doing the hard work to provide assistance to the people who have been forced from their homes. And it's a great opportunity to say thank you to the people and the Government of Colombia, who have received over \$1.5 million Venezuelans expelled by Mr. Maduro's misgovernment and incompetence.

So this is an opportunity to focus on positive engagement in the region and to demonstrate this government's, this administration's commitment to working with likeminded regional partners to achieve a more prosperous, secure, and democratic future. This is, frankly, in contrast with those nations who do not share such values, and who would support dictators like Mr. Maduro and unfair trade practices.

And with that, I'd be happy to take your questions.

OPERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, if you'd like to ask a question, please press * then 1 on your touchtone phone. You will hear a tone indicating you have been placed in queue. You may remove yourself from queue at any time by pressing the # key. If you are using a speakerphone, please pick up the handset before pressing the numbers. Once again, if you have a question, please press *1 at this time. And one moment, please, for your first

question.

Your first question comes from the line of John Hudson from *The Washington Post*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thanks for doing the call. I was just wondering if there are any specific asks when it comes to shoring up regional support when it comes to Venezuela and moving a step forward in terms of increasing pressure on the regime that the Secretary is going to be focused on. And then can you also explain a little bit more about the cybersecurity cooperation with Chile, what exactly you're working on?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Let me take the cybersecurity first just because it's a short – it's a shorter question. We've been engaged in discussions with them over the last six to eight months because they've had some cybersecurity challenges that they've identified. We, as the two governments, signed a defense agreement some months back, and the two foreign ministries – the State Department and their foreign ministry have – we've worked closely in trying to build up a framework to help them just modernize their cybersecurity systems and to identify more effectively some of the risks that they might face, particularly in their financial sectors.

On the question of Venezuela, the main focus really is on how to expand the ability of the Guaido administration to establish its position in multilateral institutions to work together with the region's governments – and the Lima Group has been great at this in recent months – in coordinating as effectively as possible their relief efforts, coordinating as closely as possible the increased pressure campaign of the region against the Maduro administration, and to make it clear that the fundamental challenge here is not some unwillingness to have a lack of dialogue, but rather the unwillingness of Mr. Maduro and those who support him to allow for free and fair elections, to release political prisoners, to allow for the active and unrestricted participation in public life and in political (inaudible) that every other citizen of South America enjoys.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Lesley Wroughton from Reuters. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah, hi. Yeah, good morning. You spoke about the expansion – or in the multilateral, getting Guaido's representatives in the multilateral institutions, so you've got that in the IDB. What is – what are you preparing or what resolution is going to be voted on today by the OAS? And number two, you've got the IMF, World Bank meetings this week. What have you managed – as far as I understand that, their boards have not decided to take on the representatives. What are – what have your discussions been with those institutions?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Well, this – the governments we're meeting with I think all share – and you can see this from the records that they've established in recent weeks and months – the – they all recognize the

legitimate administration of Interim President Juan Guaido. They recognize that as the effective – as the actual government of Venezuela, and they've all supported these – the recognition of that government and that government's control of Venezuela's resources throughout the – in any international body, in any international institution. This is a step-by-step process. We're going to continue talking to these governments about how to secure that recognition and support that they by right deserve, both at the OAS today, in the meetings we have with – this week in Washington and during the Secretary's trip.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Your next question comes from the line of Courtney McBride from *The Wall Street Journal*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you. Just a quick question on the Cucuta stop. You mentioned some of the groups that the Secretary is going to meet with. Is there any anticipated participation or visit from a member of the Guaido administration as part of that stop? And beyond these conversations, is there any other objective as part of that visit? Thanks.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: I think the main initiative here or the main purpose of the trip is to simply demonstrate very clearly and to draw attention to very clearly what's going on down there – the human want, the pressure placed on other governments, the externalities of this chaos and that has been imposed on Colombia and Peru and Ecuador and many other governments, and the generosity, frankly, with which they've been receiving these people. There will be opportunities to meet with Venezuelans who are working in Cucuta in support of their own government and their own people, and also with many of the non-governmental organizations.

It comes on Palm Sunday, the visit. It's kind of a notable date in the calendar in – all throughout the Western Hemisphere and in Latin America, and it's an opportunity to focus on the sacrifices that people are making to help their neighbors.

MODERATOR: Final question, please.

OPERATOR: Your final question comes from the line of Franco Ordonez from McClatchy. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thanks so much for doing this. I wanted to ask you, in addition to providing kind of awareness of the want that is happening, what more can these countries, the likeminded countries, do? They have legal limitations to do their own sanctions. They've said they – their – that, in many cases, they can't do the same kind of thing that the United States can do. So beyond rhetoric, what concrete actions can these countries take to put more pressure on the Maduro government?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Hey, Franco. It's not a question of means. We recognize that every government, every sovereign government, has its own mechanisms and its own legal frameworks for pursuing objectives. It's about

ends, each of them, and I think you can see this particularly, for example, in how they've responded with sometimes very different legal frameworks to the health crisis that has accompanied the collapse of the Venezuelan health system and people becoming, through no fault of their own, the disease vectors because their health has collapsed under the stress of hunger and poor public health frameworks. And governments with very different approaches have all worked together to figure out the mechanisms to achieve the ends of heading off health – public health crises and caring for people who are sick and in need.

The same kinds of principles go in the financial pressures and the other mechanisms. We each participate in different institutional fora around the world – multilateral, bilateral compacts from the OAS to *Mercosur* to *Prosur*, and the goal here, I think, is to focus on the objectives of how to increase that pressure and to work through with the governments how they can increase – they can use the mechanisms at their disposal both domestically and in the institutions to which they belong in order to meet the challenge.

MODERATOR: Thank you all for joining today. This concludes today's on-background briefing. The embargo is lifted and thank you to our senior State Department official for participating.

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