

Remarks of Dr. David M. Zimov
5TH Italy-Latin America and Caribbean Conference
Good Practice for Democratic Security:
Italy's Initiatives in Support of the SICA in the Framework of Central
American Security Strategy

Homicides, lawlessness, social breakdown, and institutional collapse are on the rise in much of Central America, especially among the northern tier countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. To put the issue in perspective, in 2009 Guatemala and Honduras each individually had more murders than all 27 nations of the European Union combined. Although the drug related violence in Mexico gets far more air time, the per capita murder rate in Honduras is actually 4 times higher than Mexico's and 15 times greater than that of the United States. Even in the comparatively safer southern nations of Panama and Costa Rica, violent crime is up across the board over the last 5 year period.

Secretary Clinton reflected on these troubling figures in her June 22 remarks at the Central America Security Conference (SICA) in Guatemala.

“Everyone knows the statistics, the murder rates surpassing civil war levels . . . But 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.”

In March, President Obama reaffirmed that the United States will do our part to assist the nations of Central America in combating criminality and insecurity by launching the Central America Citizen Security Partnership during his trip to El Salvador. This agreement reflects our understanding of the importance of public security and will build upon

our efforts already underway in the region through the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI).

Shared responsibility is obviously the first step, but it will mean little if it is not matched by a shared strategy, so we are working closely with regional partners like Mexico and Colombia and international partners like Spain, the European Union and Italy.

Mexico and Colombia are vital regional partners investing significant resources in supporting the Central American Security Strategy, in part by applying lessons learned and capabilities gained from their engagement with the U.S.

Italy has also enthusiastically engaged on security issues in Central America with programs focusing on the prevention of violence and combating crime. Italy is also currently promoting a regional agreement that would address the confiscation of the proceeds of drug trafficking and organized crime.

We are particularly appreciative of the participation of Vice Minister Vincenzo Scotti and Judge Rosario Aitala in the September 23 meeting with Secretary Clinton and the Group of Friends of Central America on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly.

In this meeting, Vice Minister Scotti's offered to share the best practices his nation developed in its effective campaign to address the scourge of the mafia in Italy as an example of the significant value that it can bring to help address the corrosive impact of transnational criminal organizations in Central America.

We welcome Italy's expertise. We also welcome its increased participation within the Group of Friends and greater coordination with the United States and other donors on the SICA Security Strategy Pillar on Combating Crime.

Secretary Clinton asked Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement Affairs William Brownfield to convene a meeting of the Combating Crime Pillar later this month. We look forward to Italy's participation.

As Italy looks to this meeting and increasing the impact of its assistance in Central America, it may consider working with the U.S. and other donors in the following areas, where Italy, through its experience in battling organized crime both at home and abroad, has a comparative advantage to supporting Central American law enforcement personnel, including through several specific avenues:

- Anti-drug training courses
- Courses for specialized anti-drug units, undercover work, and weapons and currency counterfeiting
- Assistance to Financial intelligence Units

Following up on the successful meeting at UNGA in New York, we now must collectively look ahead to implementation based upon country leads for the donor led technical working groups for the SICA strategy. We look forward to seeing how those leads strategize and identify their next steps.

We have seen donor countries readily assume leadership positions on the pillars of Combating Crime, Prevention of Violence, and Institutional Capacity Building. Still, the Rehabilitation and Reinsertion pillar of the SICA security strategy currently only has one donor lead. Since this remains the least well funded pillar we would urge partners to seek ways to better support this pillar to ensure that we are addressing all facets of the SICA Security Strategy.

To this end, we will build on the successful local donor coordination meetings in Belize, Guatemala and Panama with similar events in the coming months in other nations in the region.

Again, our efforts to combat insecurity in Central America must be a coordinated effort that draws on the unique expertise of different countries and institutions. Secretary Clinton underscored the importance of incorporating the expertise of all our regional and international partners at the June SICA conference.

“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.”

Nonetheless, even enthusiastic international engagement and a shared strategy will mean little if it is not backed by the will and persistence to implement it by every sector of society.

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.

In 2002, the Colombian government knew that it was necessary to increase security resources to ensure the democratic security of a country in the midst of a drug war. Then President Alvaro Uribe established a new tax for businesses and the wealthiest sectors of the country.

With these additional resources, Colombia saw dramatic improvement in security, and the tax not only increased security, but it also led towards increased education, health and social well-being.

Lessons learned a decade ago in Colombia are already being applied in Central America today.

The Honduran National Congress approved on June 22 an emergency “security tax” measure. The legislation establishes a temporary levy on

a range of financial transactions with the proceeds set to support security sector needs. The proposed law will remain in effect for five years. Security tax revenue, estimated by Congress at 500 million Lempira (USD 26.4 million) annually, would flow into a trust fund earmarked for patrol equipment, intelligence and criminal investigation, police training centers, prosecution, and administration of justice.

In El Salvador, President Mauricio Funes estimates that a proposed tax on 2,360 “high net worth” taxpayers and corporations will raise \$120 million a year in the fight against crime.

In Costa Rica, President Laura Chinchilla and Vice-Minister of National Security Issues Mauricio Boraschi agree that if their country is going to fully address security it will require an unprecedented investment. In early August 2011, Chinchilla sent a tax proposal to the Legislative Assembly that would levy an annual \$300 surcharge on every one of Costa Rica’s 485,000 businesses. The tax would raise approximately \$145 million annually, with half that amount going toward improving security forces and acquiring equipment, vehicles and training.

Money alone will not win this war, but without adequate funding, it is surely lost.

In addition to raising the necessary resources, strengthening institutions and broadening citizen participation in security and civic leadership are other prerequisites for success. Secretary Clinton explained our support for this holistic approach in her June remarks in Guatemala.

“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,” She said. “That’s the best way to empower citizens to take their own destinies in hand. The 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.”

The State Department’s support for this approach is the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). CARSI programs are modeled on the best practices gleaned from Plan Colombia, our work with Mexico through the Merida initiative and other experiences. It is important to note that although CARSI programs do include some limited support for traditional law enforcement equipment and training, over 90% of our funding goes directly to citizen safety, good governance, economic assistance and youth and social programs.

Despite no shortage of bad news, there is cause for hope. Barely a week passes now without report of some major trafficker being captured or killed. Many host nations have passed critical asset forfeiture laws and, as I noted, tax collection rates are being reviewed within key countries.

There is a growing agreement that this problem is both existential and solvable. With patience, political will and sustained commitment, the nations of Central America whose people have suffered so much through decades of civil war, may yet live in nations worthy of their sacrifice.