



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Stakeholder Perspectives on Addressing Migration Push Factors

May 6, 2021

As I mentioned during a hearing on unaccompanied children last week, the situation at the southern border is not a new challenge. Neither are the reasons people try to come to the U.S. Instability in Central America, especially in the Northern Triangle, has been a key driver of migration to the southern border since 2014. High rates of poverty and violence have led thousands of families and children to leave in search of a better, safer life. Rather than continue efforts to improve living conditions in the region, the Trump Administration repeatedly sought to scale back funding for Central America.

Following a surge of migrants from the Northern Triangle in 2019, President Trump cut \$400 million in U.S. assistance to the region and suspended the remaining aid for more than a year. Similar to his other cruel immigration policies, this did little to deter migration. Instead, it made conditions in the Northern Triangle even worse. The COVID-19 pandemic and an especially bad hurricane season in 2020 caused further devastation—leading to greater poverty and economic inequality. It is no wonder why the flow of migrants began to increase over the last year. While Republicans insist on calling the situation at the southern border a crisis, the real crisis is the conditions in some Central American countries that are pushing people north.

I applaud the Biden Administration for committing to addressing the root causes of migration as part of a broader plan to overhaul our broken immigration system and implement more humane policies. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will be a key partner in carrying out this plan and the Committee stands ready to support its efforts. Reducing the flow of migration to more regular and manageable levels will allow DHS to focus on its other vital missions, such as strengthening cybersecurity and combatting domestic terrorism. But progress will not be made overnight.

As Vice President Harris—who is leading the Administration’s effort to engage with Central America—said: “If it were easy, it would have been solved a long time ago.” Meaningful change will require long-term investments, effective partnerships, and cooperation from leaders who have benefited from systemic corruption. But it can be done. And the last four years has shown us, that doing nothing to address the push factors of migration will only make conditions worse.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on possible ways Congress and the Administration can best address these push factors in the short- and long-term.

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