



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Oversight, Management, & Accountability Subcommittee Chairman Lou Correa (D-CA)

DHS's Efforts to Disrupt Transnational Criminal Organizations in Central America

July 28, 2021

Over the last few months, this Subcommittee has had the opportunity to look closely at some of the factors that push the people of Central America and Mexico to leave their homes and travel to the U.S. border. We have heard about the crippling effects of recent natural disasters and widespread poverty, as well as the pervasive presence of corruption, which stifles progress and maintains inequality.

Today I look forward to diving more deeply into an issue that the Department of Homeland Security is working to combat both abroad and at home: the violence and instability caused by transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). TCOs are far reaching criminal enterprises that seek to profit from a wide variety of illicit schemes including drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, money laundering, and extortion. Their activities affect migration at almost every level.

TCOs are often connected to the local gangs that spread violence and fear in Central America, providing the weapons and legitimacy that allows these gangs to continue preying on vulnerable communities. This is a particular problem in the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, which have some of the highest homicide rates in the world, and where this violence is disproportionately directed toward women and girls. The extortion, kidnapping, and threat of violence perpetrated by these gangs is one of the main reasons why people leave their homes and migrate north. Additionally, TCOs are typically either directly connected to the groups that smuggle migrants across borders or will allow the smugglers to pass through the territory they control for a fee, generating millions of dollars a year from the exploitation of those who seek a better life.

For many who hope to escape violence by leaving their homes, the journey can prove just as perilous. It is estimated that approximately 80 percent of women and girls who migrate from the Northern Triangle face sexual violence along the way. Migrants are also highly susceptible to robbery and kidnapping. The same connections that allow TCOs to guarantee passage free from legal hassles, also allow them to victimize migrants with impunity. Therefore, key to the success of President Biden's efforts to slow irregular migration will have to be a continued focus on the detection and disruption of these TCOs and their many illegal activities.

We have with us today two witnesses from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to outline how they are supporting the President's goal. For years, the Department has undertaken efforts to degrade the influence TCOs have in foreign countries, at the border, and even in U.S. cities. Customs and Border Protection utilizes a combination of personnel, technology, and information gathering to monitor the flow of goods and people across the border, while Immigration and Customs Enforcement seeks to investigate the crimes perpetrated by TCOs and ensure prosecution both at home and abroad.

Additionally, DHS participates in several interagency task forces that coordinate the TCO investigation efforts of DHS, the Department of Justice, and State and local law enforcement.

Under the Biden Administration, DHS will participate in two new interagency task forces to enhance enforcement efforts against human smuggling: Operation Sentinel and Joint Task Force Alpha. These collaborations ensure that DHS is part of a unified effort to attack and dismantle these criminal organizations as effectively as possible. We must remember that it is these nefarious and resilient criminal networks who are the real enemy here, and not those who leave behind impossible situations in the hope for something better.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978