

**Statement for the Record before the
United States House Homeland Security Committee
Subcommittee on Border Security, Facilitation and Operations
Hearing Title: Unaccompanied Children at the Border: Federal Response and the Way
Forward
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Introduction

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member, and Members of the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Border Security, Facilitation and Operations – thank you for inviting me here today. As the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Mexico and Central America, I am honored to have this opportunity to speak with you on this important issue. Keeping Congress apprised of our efforts and working with you on how best to tackle the region’s considerable challenges is a key part of my job. I look forward to discussing the State Department’s work on the Root Causes Strategy and Collaborative Migration Management Strategy (CMMS) with you, particularly as they relate to the region’s most vulnerable, its children.

We are dedicated to achieving sustainable solutions to the region’s irregular migration challenges and protecting its children, as reflected in the President’s \$4 billion, four-year plan to address the root causes of irregular migration from Central America. Just this week the Vice President completed a trip to Guatemala and Mexico. Last week Secretary Blinken met with the region’s foreign ministers in Costa Rica. Last month, I traveled to Honduras and El Salvador with senior officials from USAID to engage with government officials, civil society organizations, and human rights leaders. At every opportunity, we are conveying the commitment of the United States to strengthen collaborative efforts to manage migration throughout North and Central America and address the root causes driving irregular migration.

Strategies Background

In order to deal with these long-standing challenges in Northern Central America, President Biden issued Executive Order 14010, directing the U.S. government to prepare a Root Causes Strategy to identify and prioritize actions to address the underlying factors leading to irregular migration in, through, and from the region and a Collaborative Management Strategy to identify and prioritize actions to strengthen cooperative efforts to manage migration.

Root Causes

The Root Causes Strategy will take a coordinated, place-based approach to mitigate the underlying causes that push Central Americans to migrate and “take(s) into account, as appropriate, the views of bilateral, multilateral, and private sector partners, as well as civil society.” Our intent is that the Strategy lay out a framework to use the policy, resources, and diplomacy of the United States, as well as leverage the expertise and resources of a broad group of public and private stakeholders, to build hope for citizens in the region that the life they desire can be found at home, dissuading minors from undertaking the perilous journey and allowing parents to keep their children home.

The Root Causes Strategy will focus on the most commonly cited factors limiting progress in Central America, particularly those related to economic opportunity, human rights, governance and transparency, and crime and insecurity.

CMMS

The CMMS is the first U.S. government strategy to focus on strengthening cooperative efforts across North and Central America to humanely manage migration, and includes a focus on increasing access to protection, assisting and reintegrating returned persons, enhancing access to legal pathways for migration, and fostering secure and humane border management. We and our partners are already engaging on many of the lines of work in the CMMS, and this strategy will focus and expand this work around strategic objectives. The CMMS will also help guide U.S. diplomatic engagements with governments in the region and outside the Western Hemisphere, including through multilateral fora and platforms, such as the Regional Conference on Migration and the Comprehensive Regional Protections and Solutions Framework.

Together, the CMMS and the Root Causes Strategy will guide our efforts to foster a more stable region; strengthen cooperative efforts to manage migration, provide protection, assistance, and legal pathways for those who choose to migrate or are forced to flee; and, ultimately, reduce irregular migration.

Recent Governance Challenges

As we seek to address these issues, we are confronting governance challenges in Central America, specifically in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Democracy and good governance are central to the success of our efforts because corruption and poor governance have fueled the rise in irregular migration. Certain political actors in these three countries have shown an increasing disregard for the rule of law, a fully independent judiciary, and efforts to stem endemic corruption. In April, some members of Guatemala's Congress manipulated the selection of its Constitutional Court in a non-transparent manner. Last month, Guatemalan authorities arrested several prominent former officials and anticorruption advocates critical of the government, including two individuals who collaborated on a corruption investigation involving former President Otto Pérez Molina. In El Salvador last month, President Nayib Bukele's Nuevas Ideas party ousted the magistrates of the Supreme Court's constitutional chamber and the Attorney General and used irregular means to fill those positions. In a positive development, Honduras just passed a long-awaited electoral reform bill in May, which we hope lays the groundwork for free and fair elections.

Next Steps

As we approach the implementation phase of the strategies, we look forward to continuing consultations with Congress as a key stakeholder in managing migration and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and a partner in holding the region's governments accountable to their commitments.

I'll conclude by reiterating that we understand the significance and difficulty of the challenges ahead, and I look forward to working with all of you on these issues and look forward to your questions.