

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Hezbollah in Latin America - Implications for U.S. Homeland Security***

July 7, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee hearing entitled “Hezbollah in Latin America – Implications for U.S. Homeland Security”:

“For many of us, Hezbollah’s brutality is remembered by the images of the 1983 bombings in Beirut and the 1985 hijacking of a TWA flight. In the 1990s, Hezbollah was linked two major attacks on Jewish targets in Argentina.

These more recent attacks and the group’s well-known fundraising operations throughout Latin America and the Tri-border Area in particular, demonstrate the global reach of this terrorist organization. That is why I led a congressional delegation on a fact-finding trip to South and Central America in 2009. During this trip, we learned first-hand from public officials and law enforcement personnel on the ground about the various terrorist and criminal threats in Latin America and how they thrive.

Because of corruption and a lack of resources, criminal activity has long been a part of the Tri-Border area, and terrorist groups, like Hezbollah, always gravitate to the weakest link. However, we also witnessed the strong counterterrorism cooperation the United States receives from many of our southern friends.

While some countries are certainly faced with challenges, we must remain committed to our partners and provide the resources necessary to dismantle these terrorist and criminal networks. I hope the Chairman will join me in ensuring the budgets for our international security efforts are not slashed by this Congress.

I understand that the Subcommittee will be holding a classified briefing with government officials later this month on these issues, but I urge you, Mr. Chairman, to also hold open hearings with government officials, so the American people can hear the true nature of the threat and the hard work of our law enforcement officials.

Tomorrow, for instance, the House Foreign Affairs Committee is holding a similar hearing on Emerging Threats and Security in the Western Hemisphere with several officials from the Departments of State, Treasury, and Defense.

I respect the need for keeping certain information classified but we must also work to ensure that the Committee is conducting open and robust oversight of our government. We know, for example, from the Administration’s recently released national counterterrorism strategy, that Hezbollah poses “significant threats to U.S. strategic interests as regional destabilizers and as threats to our citizens, facilities, and allies worldwide.”

But we also know, as the Ranking Member mentioned, that the State Department’s most recent Country Report on Terrorism states that “there were no known operational cells of Hezbollah-related groups in the hemisphere.”

With these official statements in mind, I look forward to hearing from all the witnesses and receiving their clear-eyed assessment of Hezbollah, including its intent and capabilities, and the overall threat the group poses to the U.S. homeland. “

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