

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Mérida Part Two: Insurgency and Terrorism in Mexico***

October 4, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Oversight, Investigations, and Management subcommittee joint hearing entitled “Mérida Part Two: Insurgency and Terrorism in Mexico”:

“Over the past few years, the Committee on Homeland Security has conducted several hearings on violence occurring on the Mexican side of the southwest border.

We have also examined the numerous efforts undertaken by our government to assist our Mexican allies in disrupting and dismantling Mexican drug trafficking organizations – otherwise known as DTOs.

This examination has included continuous oversight and monitoring of the progress and implementation of the Merida Initiative.

In recent years, violence in Mexico has reached an all-time high; however, despite dire predictions, statistics and concrete evidence show that this violence has not spilled over into the United States.

Fortunately, there are brave men and women in the United States, as well as in our neighboring countries, who make it their mission to combat DTOs on a daily basis. I thank them for their tireless service.

The title of this hearing gives the impression that the battle for a safe and secure Mexico involves combating terrorism and terrorist ideology. However, the facts on the ground indicate otherwise.

The violence perpetrated in Mexico at the hands of DTOs has one motive: money. The violence is centered on drug lords seeking to expand their territory, kill their competitors, and take control of Mexico's billion dollar drug industry.

It requires a different set of tools and authorities than the fight against al Qaeda and other ideologically-based terrorist organizations.

Confusing the two could result in dire consequences and significantly impact our relationship with Mexico.

Notwithstanding this fact, Mexico, Central America, and the U.S. have a shared interest in combating DTOs.

Therefore, it is fitting that we are combining forces with the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere and holding this hearing today and continuing to monitor the status of U.S. participation in Mexico's counterdrug operations.

Since Fiscal Year 2008, the United States has appropriated \$1.6 billion worth of assistance to Mexico for vital equipment and training as part of the Merida Initiative.

Fortunately, U.S. assistance provided under Merida has shifted from providing expensive equipment toward a focus on institution-building, strengthening Mexico's judicial and law enforcement operations, and addressing underlying societal problems that have allowed the drug trade in Mexico to flourish.

As part of this new approach, thousands of Mexican police, penitentiary staff, and judicial personnel have received valuable training and technical assistance.

This “train the trainer” model should result in a more cost-effective approach for the United States and ultimately improve the Mexican government's long-term counter-narcotic strategy.

In the past, I expressed my concern regarding the rate at which Mexico received the funding that the U.S. had pledged for the Initiative.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses on whether progress has been made on that front. Next year, both the United States and Mexico will conduct presidential elections. The outcome may impact Merida as we now know it.

However, as we establish a way forward we must remain mindful that Mexico is not only an ally it is also our third-largest trading partner, while the United States ranks first among Mexico's trading partners.

To put this in perspective, we do as much business in goods and services with Mexico in just over a month as Mexico does with all 27 countries of the European Union combined in a year. As a result, our commitment to helping to create a safe and secure Mexico must remain constant.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not mention the significant budget cuts proposed by the Republican Majority in its current budget proposal. This Congress, the Majority passed H.R. 1, which cuts \$350 million from the Department of Homeland Security budget for border security, fencing and technology. If enacted, these cuts will also reduce the number of border patrol agents on the Southwestern Border. I would encourage my Republican colleagues to show a real concern for border security by fully funding border security efforts. Moving us backwards by slashing funds and decreasing our human and financial resources will almost certainly result in a less secure border.

Again, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and having an honest discussion about the future of our border security efforts and maintaining our bilateral cooperation with our neighbor to the South."

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