Remarks By

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"Threats posed to Mexico and the United States by organized criminal networks."

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Thank you, Representative Cummings and distinguished Members of Congress for the opportunity to appear at this forum on behalf of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholar's Mexico Institute.

The Woodrow Wilson Center is a living, national memorial to President Wilson established by Congress in 1968. It is a nonpartisan institution, supported by public and private funds, engaged in the study of national and world affairs. The Center establishes and maintains a lively, neutral forum for free and informed dialogue. It is our hope that the research we conduct and the information we gather can be useful to Members of Congress from all political parties as they seek to better understand the world we live in.

In that context, I appreciate your inviting the Mexico Institute to this forum to share our perspective on crime and violence in Mexico. We are happy to respond to requests for briefings from Members of Congress from both parties and both chambers and to summarize some of the results of our work.

Over the last five years, the Mexico Institute has engaged in extensive research, published significant works and organized numerous conferences and meetings on issues such as the nature and working of organized criminal groups in Mexico and Central America, border issues, the police and justice system in Mexico, and money laundering. We have worked closely with officials and law enforcement on both sides of the border throughout. Last year I co-edited a report entitled, "Shared Responsibility: U.S.-Mexico Policy Options for Confronting Organized Crime." One of the chapters in this report dealt specifically with the problem of firearms trafficking. The lead researcher and author for that chapter is my good friend and colleague Colby Goodman, appearing with me today. He will focus more specifically on trafficking, and I will focus on the violence in Mexico.

It is now common knowledge that Mexico has experienced a dramatic increase in crime-related violence and homicides in recent years. Official government statistics are available through the end of 2010 and show that just over 35,000 people were killed between 2007 and the end of last year. While government statistics have not been updated since the beginning of this year,

other reliable studies indicate that 2011 is on track to surpass 2010 as the deadliest year yet in crime-related violence. According to a database compiled by Mexico's "Reforma" newspaper, and analyzed by the Trans-Border Institute at the University of San Diego, there were 6,439 cartel-related homicides between January 1 and June 24, 2011. If the trend continues – and we don't know that it will – 2011 will be the deadliest year yet with a possible increase over last year of about 15%. Also, using the same data set, we estimate that just over 500 people have been killed in organized crime related incidents since the Full Committee hearing on June 15th. The violence is concentrated in several key states and localities, and some previous hot spots have seen violence level off while others have experienced an important increase in violence so far this year.

But the statistics don't tell the whole story. For instance, it is clear that the erupting violence caused by organized crime in Mexico has been exacerbated by the relatively easy access criminal groups have to military-style firearms like AK-47s and AR 15s, and even .50 BMG caliber rifles. Let me provide you with two examples. On Monday afternoon, 15 masked men entered the police station in Santa Catarina, a municipality just west of Monterrey, and gunned down Police Chief Germain Perez Quiroz in his own office. During the attack, three municipal police officers were abducted at gunpoint as well. Later that same afternoon, in Monterrey, four young men were lined up against a wall in the back of a shopping center and shot execution-style.

Well-armed organized crime groups are more likely to attack their rivals, law enforcement, and government officials when they have superior weapons and can act with total impunity, and journalists and innocent bystanders, too, often pay the price. Last year, Colby and I and 4 other colleagues were in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico the day after 15 young people were gunned down while they celebrated a victory by their sports team. They celebrated at their homes in a working class neighborhood on the edge of town. We went to express our condolences the next day and what we were told was that the hit men were looking for a rival gang member but apparently found it easier to spray the room with bullets and kill many innocent youth than one specific target. Outside the home of one victim we found a hand written message that said, "What do you want us to do? Arm our children?" One of the weapons used in this heinous crime was traced back to the United States.

According to government and independent research it would appear that the vast majority of the 40,000+ cartel related homicides in Mexico are the result of conflicts within and amongst criminal organizations. These are what the government of Mexico calls "narco-executions." By some estimates this accounts for roughly 90 % of all cases. Some of these cases are the result of competition and changing alliances amongst the cartels, but another portion is the result of government action; the results of network fragmentation when a drug lord is either killed or arrested. The process of fragmentation is often violent as the organizations seek to reestablish control of a particular territory or access point into the United States.

A smaller number of homicides are the result of direct confrontation between the government and cartels. Here the estimates are about 10 %, with the number of government authorities directly targeted and killed by the cartels at around 2%. Despite the comparatively small number of authorities killed, the impact of these deaths – such as the brazen murder of the police chief from Santa Catarina – can have an enormous impact.

We do not have precise numbers on how many of these deaths are the result of firearms, but it's safe to say that the vast majority of these cases involve gun fire. Other weapons – such as grenades, tools such as hammers, blunt objects and knives – are used as well, but these are definitely in the minority.

As you are aware, Mexican President Felipe Calderón has made combating drug cartels a priority for his Administration. One element of that strategy is to focus on disrupting the flow of weapons from the United States into Mexico. He has raised this in every trip he has made to the United States in the last year, including before a combined session of Congress in March 2010. While the President has been clear that Mexico must do more to combat gun trafficking in its territory – both north and south – he has also called on the United States to assume its responsibility for the flow of weapons that are fueling the violence.

Ultimately, it seems that organized crime, the enormous profits it generates, and the violence it uses has shaken the Mexican people and has paralyzed the government's ability to effectively protect its citizens in specific areas of the country. In a meeting with the victims' movement last week, President Calderon expressed sadness at the government's inability to secure more people but he did not apologize for undertaking his strategy of confronting the cartels.

The institutions of government, particularly in some states and municipalities, have been weakened and rendered ineffective. Fortunately this is not the case in all of Mexico and I am still optimistic that the Mexican state can withstand and overcome its problems with organized crime. Nevertheless the threats and dangers are real and require constant attention and diligence by the Government of Mexico.

And for obvious reasons, what happens in Mexico has a major impact in the United States. There are enormous cultural, historical, and economic ties between our two countries that suggest that the countries are bound together in many ways. Furthermore, the United States is the primary market for the illegal drugs trafficked through Mexico, and the United States is the source of most of the weapons being used in drug-related violence in Mexico. As Secretary Clinton and President Obama have said on numerous occasions, the U.S. shares in the responsibility for what is happening in Mexico.

A troubled and weakened Mexico is not in the best interest of the United States and, as such, both President Bush and President Obama have been committed to a policy of security cooperation with Mexico that has led to increased intelligence sharing, training, equipment

transfers, and social investments designed to strengthen the capacities of Mexico's law enforcement and military forces engaged in the struggle with organized crime.

Finally, probably the most important policies the United States can pursue, in addition to supporting Mexico and disrupting the flow of weapons, is to increase its efforts to combat money laundering and reduce and prevent consumption of illegal drugs, especially cocaine, in the United States. These are complex issues requiring a long term strategy, but they also may be the most effective way for the United States to help reduce violence in Mexico and thereby lower the risks to the United States posed by organized crime and violence in Mexico.

Thank you and I am happy to answer your questions.