

**(U) Deputy Assistant Secretary Eric Jacobstein's
Opening Remarks in the Wilson Center's Webinar "Climate Resilience and
Democratic Governance in Central America's Northern Triangle"
(10 Minutes), April 26, 2024, 11:15-12:30 EST**

OPENING REMARKS

- **Good afternoon, everyone. I want to extend my gratitude to the Wilson Center for hosting this important discussion today. Thank you, Cindy, for the invitation and for your leadership on Central America and so much more.**
- **In my role at the State Department, I cover both Central America and regional migration, so these issues are deeply important to me.**
- **From my vantage point, climate most certainly plays a role in everything we do, especially in Central America where roughly 40 percent of the workforce is in the agricultural sector and where just between 2019 and 2020, up to 80 percent of crops in parts of Northern Central America were lost to climate disasters.**
- **And as many of you know, the UN estimates that based on current trends, by 2050, farm yields will fall by a quarter, worsening food insecurity and forcing millions to migrate.**

ROOT CAUSES STRATEGY

- **So let me now back up and start by discussing the cornerstone of our Central America policy: the U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America (known as the RCS), which was released by the Administration in early 2021.**
- **The Root Causes Strategy is focused on five pillars: addressing economic insecurity, strengthening democratic governance, promoting respect for human rights, countering and preventing violence, and combatting gender-based violence. Climate factors into many of these issues and is a component of our solutions across these pillars. Climate change contributes to and deepens food insecurity and economic insecurity, which in turn leads to an increase of crime and violence, all of which result in increased desires to migrate.**
- **Let's first touch on the economic impacts and solutions. A key component of the Root Causes Strategy is the Vice President's Central America Forward initiative, which to date has mobilized over \$5.2**

billion in private sector investment commitments to Northern Central America.

- This includes over \$253 million in agricultural capacity building and climate adaptation investments for new products, services, and production capacity across the agricultural sector to increase the region's agricultural capacity, production, and exports to provide food security to families in Central America.
- For example, *Deetken Impact*, a Canadian impact investing firm and a partner under Central America Forward, *has* raised over \$16 million in partnership with USAID for financial inclusion and renewable energy investments and has several active deals in progress.
- Through tailored advisory services focused on investment readiness, development impact, and community engagement, their projects are driving climate action, creating jobs, and fostering growth in the formal economy in El Salvador.
- Central America Forward companies like *Acceso*, *Cargill*, and *Nespresso* are also doing significant work to support climate resilient agriculture in the region.

- **Central America Forward’s toolbox also includes an interagency Investment Facilitation Team which I lead, to support clean energy infrastructure development, facilitate private sector operations, and promote sustainable economic development in the region.**
- **We were thrilled that at the March 18 High-Level Economic Dialogue with Guatemala, the United States announced an expansion of the Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils, or “VACS,” to the Western Hemisphere, starting with Guatemala through a new partnership with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). This builds on the U.S. government’s existing efforts in the region through the Feed the Future initiative. The United States and IICA anticipate collaborating with Guatemalan stakeholders to develop a VACS strategy that builds more resilient agricultural systems through a focus on diverse, climate-adapted crops and healthy, fertile soils.**
- **The resulting VACS strategy will propose areas to mobilize resources from across the public and private sectors to make future investments that advance VACS goals in Guatemala. VACS will bolster the Administration’s efforts to combat food insecurity and malnutrition in**

Guatemala through a medium to long term resilience building lens that will support efforts to help build resilient livelihoods and address one of contributing factors to irregular migration.

THE OUTSIZED TOLL ON WOMEN AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

- **Of course, community-based adaptation is critical. We need to recognize that climate change has an outsized toll on women and indigenous communities in the region.**
- **As with the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and conflict disproportionately affect women, girls, and other marginalized populations such as Indigenous communities, fueling increased inequality.**
- **The interconnected phenomena of climate change, poverty, violence, and chronic malnutrition and hunger in Central America, coupled with low investment in jobs for youth, impact young women the hardest.**
- **Furthermore, women and girls are disproportionately impacted by gender-based violence and conflict connected to the scarcity of natural resources, loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, and poverty. For example, climate crises are known to worsen existing drivers of child,**

early, and forced marriage - drivers such as economic insecurity, educational disruption, and displacement of communities.

- Evidence increasingly demonstrates that empowering women—politically, economically, and socially – and meaningfully including their needs and perspectives in decision-making – leads to more equitable and sustainable policies, including those to combat the climate crisis.

In Central America, up to 68.7 percent of urban women are responsible for gathering water, yet only 27 percent of people involved in water governance are women. In August last year, the Administration launched the first-ever U.S. Strategy to Respond to the Effects of Climate Change on Women, which formalizes the U.S. government's two-pronged approach to policy, diplomacy, outreach, and programming related to the nexus of gender equality and the climate crisis: (1) address disproportionate impacts of the effects of climate change on women and girls; and (2) empower women and girls as leaders in addressing climate change.

- **In fact, women and girls play pivotal roles that when coupled with the right tools and knowledge, make them well-positioned to spearhead community-wide climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.**
- **Empowering women and girls with education and resources leads to better crop yield and food security outcomes.**
- **Women's engagement in sustainable farming practices also bolsters environmental conservation and climate resilience.**
- **Women's empowerment in agriculture manifests in tangible community benefits: their active involvement in agricultural collectives enhances decision-making power and control over food production, fortifying individual and collective food security.**
- **Ensuring women's access to land rights, financial services, and diversified income streams underpins community resilience and stability.**
- **Thus, acknowledging and elevating women's roles in agriculture is not only key to their individual empowerment, but also critical for the comprehensive advancement of their communities.**

- **In the same vein, Indigenous Peoples are stewards of the land, and Indigenous women frequently play a central role in preserving and applying traditional ecological knowledge and practices.**
- **Considering the experiences of Indigenous women and girls on issues such as deforestation, biodiversity loss, and related challenges to food production is imperative, as climate change directly impact their daily lives, affecting their livelihoods and culture.**

CLOSING REMARKS

- **It is clear that climate drives and compounds the root causes of migration. Which means that our efforts must take a whole-of-government and whole community approach.**
- **Central Americans need local solutions with support from effective regional and national authorities that are responsive to the needs of their citizens. Under the Root Causes Strategy, we aim to help Central American governments deliver for their citizens. Citizens' lack of hope about governments meeting their needs is a driver of irregular migration, addressing the climate challenge head on builds faith in**

effective, responsive government institutions as well as climate resilience.

- **I look forward to hearing the perspectives of our presenters and hope to collaborate and amplify efforts moving forward.**
- **These discussions will help shape institutions and policies, build new constituencies, and ultimately influence the trajectory of people's lives as they cope with the impacts of climate change.**
- **Many thanks once again for this invitation and for all the work done by those here today to help us achieve our goals.**