

**U.S.-COLOMBIA RELATIONS: NEW OPPORTUNITIES
TO REINFORCE AND STRENGTHEN OUR
BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN
HEMISPHERE, TRANSNATIONAL
CRIME, CIVILIAN SECURITY,
DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS,
AND GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

—————
SEPTEMBER 18, 2019
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Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Relations



Available via the World Wide Web:
<http://www.govinfo.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

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U.S.-COLOMBIA RELATIONS: NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO REINFORCE AND STRENGTHEN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2019

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE,
TRANSNATIONAL CRIME, CIVILIAN SECURITY, DEMOCRACY,
HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:05 p.m. in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Marco Rubio, chairman of the subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Rubio, Risch, Portman, Cardin, Menendez, Shaheen, and Kaine.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MARCO RUBIO,
U.S. SENATOR FROM FLORIDA**

Senator RUBIO. Good afternoon. Thank you all for being here. I appreciate your indulgence. We just came out of a vote, so we got a late start here, but I appreciate it.

This subcommittee meeting on the Western Hemisphere will come to order.

The hearing today is on the U.S.-Colombia relationship, and it is entitled "New Opportunities to Reinforce and Strengthen Our Bilateral Relationship."

So there are two things I want to achieve with today's hearing, which we have been trying to get for some time now but that we really want to do. First, obviously talk about the U.S.-Colombia relationship—review it, by and large—but second and most importantly, restate our commitment and what we can do to be helpful to Colombia and to the Colombian people.

And at the outset, I would say it is impossible to talk about Colombia today without talking about Venezuela and the destabilizing impacts that that crisis is having, beginning of course with over 1.4 million Venezuelan migrants who are now living in Colombia, reportedly over \$1 billion a year that the Colombian Government is now spending on social services and health care and the like, and also the threat that is posed, the direct threat, to the Colombian state, to peace and security in Colombia by armed narco-terrorist elements operating with impunity just across the border with the open support and cooperation of the Maduro regime. And that poses a threat not just to Colombia but ultimately to our secu-

rity interests and to the region at large. Today that safe haven that the regime has provided is for two organizations that the State Department has designated as foreign terrorist organizations, the FARC and its dissident elements that are now there and the ELN.

So this will be an opportunity to hear from our witnesses who will provide an update on the implementation of the so-called peace accord on the new government now that has been there for over close to a year and the political dynamics, the direct U.S. interests that are threatened and impacted by what is happening there today, and then some ideas about how to strengthen our cooperation on all these issues.

Just some key facts that I want to leave here on the record. It is my view that Colombia is our strongest, most capable ally in the Western Hemisphere on a series of fronts. For me personally, obviously there are many Americans of Colombian descent that reside in the United States, including a substantial portion of my family since my wife is of Colombian descent. But that is not why we are doing our hearing, but nonetheless we are. But it is a very vibrant community, very engaged and involved.

Colombia—I know this issue from having been around it even predating my public service—has a very long history, a very long struggle to restore peace in the country. They have been plagued for decades first by very powerful and murderous drug cartels, by these Marxist and narcoterror insurgencies. And this has been a bipartisan mission under both Republican and Democrat administrations to support Plan Colombia and Colombian-led initiatives to ensure stability in the country. It really began under the leadership of former Colombian President Uribe.

And the important work continues to this day through the current administration. The support for the new Duque administration is paramount for our cooperation on shared diplomatic security, counternarcotics, rule of law, human rights, and economic development.

And so with the combination of the generous support of the American people and the incredible work and sacrifices made by the Colombian people, Plan Colombia became a model for effective and targeted foreign assistance. After many years of negotiations with some of these FARC elements, former Colombian President Santos, President Duque's predecessor, concluded what I personally viewed as—but again, it was not for us to make this decision, but what I viewed as a peace accord with significant flaws with the largest guerilla organization in Colombia, the FARC, which is a terrorist organization. It is well known for plotting against the Colombian Government from its safe haven in Venezuela, and they are frankly responsible for the deaths of Colombian police officers and innocent civilians in just the last year. In just the last year, they have conducted attacks they have claimed credit for.

There is another narcoterror group, which I mentioned: the ELN. They have over 1,000 fighters inside of Venezuela. And now they have been joined by these dissidents of the FARC elements who are also operating in the same area right there in the border region.

And so now thousands of ELN and FARC dissident fighters are newly re-energized by recent defections from some who were cooperating with the peace accord and then defected and, as I said

earlier, by the open support of the Maduro regime. And this presents a very serious security challenge to the region, to Colombia, and ultimately to our nation's interests as well.

Human rights violations against civic leaders are also a concern. Both the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the OAS and the U.N. Office of High Commissioner have reported and verified the killings of human rights defenders and social leaders.

I believe President Duque has taken strong steps to ensure Colombia remains stable. He has even gone to great lengths to preserve aspects of the peace agreement, aspects frankly that were favorable to the FARC. Unfortunately, these efforts were met with high level defections and a return to narcoterrorism for many of the FARC's leaders and followers. So I believe we, indeed, are living a critical moment not just for Colombia but for the region.

Earlier this year, I wrote an op-ed that recommended some steps that the United States could take to support Colombia and the Duque administration specifically that our country should provide strong support and financial assistance to continue this fight against the illicit flows of cocaine through our borders. And this includes things like providing unmanned aircraft or drones that can spray coca crops, increasing intelligence support to operations targeting these illegally armed groups, ensuring additional equipment, funding, and training for riverine units.

I hope that our witnesses today will explain the critical nature of these programs and the challenges that they address and reassure this subcommittee that assisting Colombia remains a top priority for this administration.

I would like to close by recognizing the significant steps taken by the Duque administration not only in welcoming, as I said, over 1.4 million migrants fleeing the manmade catastrophe created by the Maduro crime family, but also for being a strong partner to the United States in the fight against external forces that aim to destabilize our region.

And with that, I now recognize my colleague, the ranking member, Senator Cardin.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND**

Senator CARDIN. Well, let me thank Senator Rubio and his wife for this hearing.

[Laughter.]

Senator CARDIN. This is an important relationship, the United States and Colombia. We have invested about \$10 billion in Plan Colombia. I believe that was a wise investment for U.S. interests. We are now moving towards the implementation of the peace that eluded us for five decades. And there are many reasons why this has been a wise investment to change the relationship to a very strong relationship between Colombia and the United States.

First, combating the narcotics traffic. We know that is a major challenge. It has been a major challenge. We have ended the civil war and implemented an historic peace accord, and today Colombia is helping us meet one of the largest migration crises in our lifetime from Venezuela.

In regards to drug trafficking and the trade, progress has been made. There is no question about that. But there is still a major hub for cocaine production and distribution in our hemisphere. And it is, I think, critically important that we strengthen the partnership between the United States and Colombia to deal with the drug trafficking issues.

The coca farmers need the tools and training to develop alternative sources of income. And when we look at the geography where most of these farmers are located, they are concentrated in areas that are most vulnerable to armed groups responsible for the internal conflict in Colombia. That is going to require our support to be able to deal effectively with that challenge.

Implementation of the peace accord, November 2016, five decades-long civil war with FARC. The Santos Government negotiated an agreement. The Duque government now is charged with making sure that it is implemented. Yet, on August 29, a faction of FARC has indicated that they would be taking up arms. They have not done that yet, but we know that we have to be very attentive so we do not go back to the type of violence that we saw before the peace accord. This is not going to be easy, and it has been made a lot more difficult because of the challenges the chairman mentioned in regards to migration from Venezuela.

We do not know the exact count of how many Venezuelans are in Colombia. We believe it is around 1.4 million. That is an incredible burden to any country, but for a country that is struggling in transition like Colombia, it is an incredible hurdle to have to overcome. And that number could increase. There are indications that as many as 600,000 more could be coming in from Venezuela. Clearly, Colombia cannot deal with that without a strong partnership from the United States.

In April, Senator Blunt and I introduced a resolution reinforcing our commitment to working in partnership with Colombia. This legislation, first and foremost, reaffirms U.S. Government support for the Colombian people as they work towards peace and stability in the territories previously in conflict. It commends the Government of Colombia's progress thus far and recognizes the United Nations verification mission for its role in implementing the 2016 peace accords and disarmament. It asks the Colombian Government to make protecting community leaders and human rights activists a top priority. And finally, it urges the United States Secretary of State to strengthen the U.S.-Colombia partnership by continuing our security and the anti-narcotics cooperation, supporting the peace accord and its Special Jurisdiction for Peace, and contributing to the aid needed to support Venezuelan migrants in Colombia.

I am proud also to co-chair the Atlantic Council's U.S.-Colombia Task Force with Senator Blunt. I want to thank our witness, Jason Marczak, the Director of the Atlantic Council's Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center, for his role in bringing together this bipartisan, binational, multi-sectoral group to increase cooperation and improve outcomes for the goals shared between the United States and Colombia. We look forward to the release of the U.S.-Colombia Task Force report later this month.

I remain committed to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to bolster the U.S. partnership with Colombia, increase U.S. engagement on combating narcotics production and trafficking, uphold the 2016 peace accords, and providing both vulnerable Colombians and Venezuelan refugees the critical help they need in Colombia. But also it is important for the stability of our own Western Hemisphere.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses as we probe these issues.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

I will recognize the ranking member of the full committee who I know has a keen interest in these items.

**STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ,
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY**

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you and Senator Cardin for this incredibly important hearing. I do not always come to hearings of the subcommittees of the full committee. But in this particular case, the hearing on Colombia is of particular importance and interest to me.

Having traveled to Colombia in July for talks with President Duque, his administration, and civil society leaders, I remained convinced that Colombia is our single most important partner in South America. Our strategic partnership stands as a model in the hemisphere.

So I look forward to hearing from today's panel on our long-term vision for strengthening this partnership, as well as how we can best support Colombia in addressing current challenges, including challenges to its 2016 peace accord, challenges related to counter-narcotics and from the Venezuelan crisis.

Without a doubt, the recent move by a former FARC commander to return to arms marks the single greatest setback to Colombia's young peace accord. Press reports indicating that this group of FARC dissidents is operating out of Venezuela underscores the nefarious nature of Maduro's dictatorship.

But this development is not the only challenge to accord implementation. I am deeply concerned about the violence faced by civil society across Colombia. As I heard from Colombian social leaders in July, their heartbreaking stories underscore the fragility of peace.

I hope to hear from INL and USAID about how we can best support our Colombian partners as they address this violence, expand state presence, and implement the accord. And while the 2016 accord is far from perfect, it is the best opportunity that the Colombian people have to heal the scars of decades of civil war.

It is also essential that we remain unwavering in our cooperation to help Colombia combat high levels of coca cultivation and cocaine production. Historic levels of cultivation leveled off this year, and I give that credit to the Duque administration. But we have to expand efforts to help them drive down these numbers.

Specifically, I look forward to hearing a comprehensive strategy from INL that attacks every aspect of trafficking operations, including emphasis on eradication but also increased initiatives to strengthen the rule of law and address money laundering.

I also hope to hear how USAID reinforces INL programs and Colombian initiatives to create programs for transitioning to the legal economy.

Finally, I am deeply concerned about the destabilizing nature of Venezuela's refugee crisis. During my travel to Cúcuta in July, I heard directly from individuals fleeing the humanitarian tragedy in Venezuela and saw its impact on Colombian communities. 30,000 people crossing every day, Venezuelans crossing every day, on the bridge to get basic foodstuffs and essentials that they cannot get in Venezuela. But 10 percent of those stay in Colombia every day. It is overwhelming for any nation.

So I commend the administration for dedicating more than \$300 million across the region to address the Venezuelan exodus, but we need to lead a global response. I have been advocating a donors' conference that matches the magnitude of the crisis.

And if we want to have any credibility in this process, we must provide temporary protected status to Venezuelans in the United States. You cannot have a travel advisory that says do not travel to Venezuela and then send back people to Venezuela who should be here under TPS.

Let me close by saying I caution that comments like President Trump's claim in March that Colombia, quote, "has done nothing for us" are blatantly false and risk undermining our strategic partnership. For two decades, there has been bipartisan consensus on supporting Colombia, and I look forward to reaffirming that support when I host President Duque in New Jersey this weekend.

With that, I want to thank our witnesses, the chairman, and the ranking member. And I appreciate the opportunity.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

We will have two panels. Our first panel is administration officials: the Honorable Kirsten Madison, who is the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs; the Honorable John Barsa, Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean at USAID; and Mr. Kevin O'Reilly, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs at the State Department. We will begin with you, Ms. Madison. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF HON. KIRSTEN D. MADISON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU FOR INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. MADISON. Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before this distinguished subcommittee.

The drug trade in Colombia directly and adversely affects the safety, security, and health of Americans. Colombian cocaine contributes to the rising overdose rates in the United States, particularly when combined with synthetic opioids. In 2017, nearly 14,000 Americans died of cocaine overdose, the highest on record since 2006, and three-quarters of these cases also involved opioids. U.S. foreign assistance to Colombia, and every gain made against the production and trafficking of cocaine, saves American lives.

In 2018, the United States and Colombia committed to a 5-year goal to cut coca cultivation and cocaine production levels in half by

2023. Colombia made very early progress in rolling back record high coca cultivation and cocaine production levels with production levels in 2018 decreasing for the first time since 2012, and that is really due to President Duque's aggressive counternarcotics policies and courageous work by the Colombian police, the military, and teams of civilian eradicators. It is also the direct result of our steadfast support.

We have a long road ahead, but I am confident that with robust U.S. assistance, the Colombian Government can succeed. We have a common goal. We have a plan that is yielding results. And most importantly, I think there is political will on both sides to tackle this challenge together.

I was actually on the staff of this committee when Congress was considering whether or not to invest and invest big in Plan Colombia. In those days, the conversation was about the potential for Colombia to become a failed state. How far we have come. Security gains under Plan Colombia led to the end of the region's longest conflict. The recent call to arms by FARC dissidents with strong ties to Venezuela and elsewhere is intended to undermine the nascent peace and the security won by Colombia's police and military, but I think this should only strengthen our resolve to stand by the Colombian people as they work to secure a just and enduring peace, a peace that they deserve.

Colombia's narcotics challenge is linked inextricably, I think, to the Venezuela crisis. The ELN and FARC dissident groups and other transnational organized criminal groups operate from within Venezuela. In many cases, these drug traffickers and armed groups benefit from the enabling environment created by the illegitimate Maduro regime. And I think, frankly, that our investments in the strong partnerships with Colombia, Peru, and our recent restart of the program in Ecuador are critical to counteracting the sort of poisonous effect that Venezuela is having on the crime and drug front.

My written testimony details Colombia's counternarcotics successes and developments through the last year, but let me highlight a few.

President Duque quadrupled the civilian manual eradication groups from 23 to more than 100 groups and brought the cultivation numbers down for the first time since 2012. That is a big accomplishment. In the first 6 months of 2019, Colombia destroyed 56 percent more coca, nearly 70 percent more coca base labs, and 5 percent more cocaine labs than in the same period in 2018. In 2019, the Colombian army captured nearly 2,200 members from the ELN, FARC dissident groups, and Clan del Golfo—nearly double the number arrested in 2018.

INL provides significant support for manual eradication, the backbone of President Duque's eradication program. We intend to support, if the Colombians decide to proceed, the start of a safe and effective Colombian-led aerial eradication program following the Colombian Constitutional Court's clarification on the issue.

Frankly, eradication is only part of the solution. The key to our success and sustainability is supporting Colombia's whole-of-government approach that expands rural governance and development across the country. Among other steps to promote rural security and governance, INL is constructing rural police bases in key nar-

cotics trafficking and historically FARC-controlled areas and working on professionalization of police and on getting them more present in rural areas of the country where they can have an impact on the daily lives of ordinary Colombians.

USAID efforts, as my colleague can further attest, are also critical in partnership with this. INL's rule of law and rural security programs, in tandem with USAID's alternative development and land titling activities, are fundamental to supporting Colombia's effort to meet the basic needs of rural communities and to crowd out criminal actors.

Alongside our eradication, interdiction, and rural security efforts, INL is helping the Colombians to go after the profits of criminal groups by working on anti-money laundering training and support for managing seized assets. Our investments in judicial training and technical assistance can help to build Colombia's capacity to prosecute complex crimes, including financial crimes, illicit gold mining, and crimes against human rights defenders and social leaders. Our efforts to promote the rule of law and the protection of human rights in rural areas are linked directly to our counternarcotics efforts. It is no accident that the killings of human rights defenders are most prevalent where you find armed criminal groups and coca growth.

My January visit to Colombia, days after an attack on the Colombian National Police Academy in Bogotá that killed 22 and left dozens wounded, frankly underscored for me that Colombia's efforts to fight back against criminal elements and violent actors really comes at a great cost. It also underscored for me that our partnership is still very much needed. Reaching our shared goal requires Colombia to eradicate coca at unprecedented levels, to work with its neighbors, and to allocate substantial resources towards counternarcotics, and it requires the United States and others to remain engaged and to support the effort. Our interests in the region lie in Colombia's success, but at its most fundamental level, our engagement and support is also essential to stemming the deadly flow of drugs to the United States and saving American lives.

I am going to stop there, and I look forward to your questions. [The prepared statement of Ms. Madison follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. KIRSTEN D. MADISON

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee; thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the critical importance of our counternarcotics and security cooperation with Colombia. Colombia remains one of our closest allies in the hemisphere. We have worked together for decades to fight narcotics and transnational organized crime, which negatively affect both our nations.

In 2018, the United States and Colombia committed to a 5-year goal to cut coca cultivation and cocaine production levels in half by the end of 2023. As President Trump recently noted in the Presidential Determination on Major Drug Transit or Major Illicit Drug Producing Countries for Fiscal Year 2020, Colombia has made early progress in rolling back the record-high coca cultivation and cocaine production levels. This is result of President Duque's aggressive counternarcotics policies and courageous work by the Colombian police and military. It is also the result of our steadfast support. According to the most recent U.S. government estimates, Colombian coca cultivation and cocaine production levels in 2018 decreased for the first time since 2012, following dramatic increases from 2013 to 2017. We still have a long road ahead to meet our ambitious goal and reduce the amount of cocaine entering the United States, but I am confident that, with robust U.S. support, the Colom-

bian government can reverse the troubling trends of the drug threat President Duque inherited just a year ago. We have a common goal, we have a plan that is already yielding results, and, most importantly, under President Duque's leadership, we share the political will to tackle this challenge together.

I was on the staff of this Committee when Congress was considering whether or not to invest—and invest big—in Plan Colombia. In those days, the conversation was about the potential for Colombia to become a failed state. How far Colombia has come from those days. In the past two decades, Colombia transformed from a near-failed state to a vibrant democracy with a stable, market-oriented economy. Joint efforts through Plan Colombia produced security gains that led to the end of the longest conflict in the region's history. Colombia's police and military now have model units for the region that export their security expertise to other partners, acting as a force multiplier of U.S. counternarcotics investment. The recent call to arms by former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC in Spanish) leaders is troubling, but these latest actions are intended to undermine the nascent peace and security that was won by Colombia's police and military and which the Colombian people want and deserve. We need to stand by Colombia as they press ahead.

At the same time, the global narcotics threat has changed significantly. Illicit armed groups have adapted and transformed from hierarchical, centralized structures to more diffuse, nimble, and interconnected transnational networks empowered by modern technology. That evolution has made responding to transnational organized crime (TOC) harder. Traffickers also exploit encrypted peer-to-peer messaging applications and other emerging communication technologies to circumvent law enforcement. To ensure the success of our counternarcotics investments, we too must adapt. This administration has committed resources and energy toward building a resilient whole-of-government approach to fighting the drug epidemic on all fronts, and my dedicated team, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), is on the frontlines of American diplomacy in this effort. In short, we must build on the successes of Plan Colombia to address the threats of today and the future.

The drug trade is not only a threat to Colombia—it directly affects the safety, security, and health of Americans. Colombia is the world's largest producer of cocaine and the source of over 90 percent of the cocaine seized in the United States. Cocaine originating from Colombia contributes to the rising drug overdose rates in the United States, particularly when combined with synthetic opioids like fentanyl. In 2017, nearly 14,000 Americans died of cocaine overdose—the highest number on record since 2006. Three-quarters of these deaths involved opioids.

U.S. foreign assistance to Colombia and every single gain made against the production and trafficking of cocaine saves American lives.

The Colombian counternarcotics challenge is inextricably linked to and made worse by the Venezuela crisis. The National Liberation Army (ELN in Spanish) and FARC dissident groups, and other Colombia-based TOC groups operate from within Venezuela and use it as a safe haven from Colombian law enforcement. TOC groups bribe corrupt Venezuelan officials to traffic Colombian drugs through Venezuelan territory, with no pushback from the illegitimate Maduro regime. In many cases, these drug traffickers and armed groups, benefit from the covert assistance of Maduro's corrupt regime. The United States has sanctioned many senior Maduro officials for their complicit support of the drug trade, arms trafficking, and systemic corruption. Colombian air force radar data shows the number of narco-flights originating in Venezuela increased from 66 in 2015 to 224 in 2018, with each flight moving hundreds of kilos of Colombian cocaine north. At the same time, more than 1.4 million Venezuelans who fled the oppressive Maduro regime are living in Colombia, placing a significant strain on the Colombian government's resources, including those of the security services. Our investments in a strong partnership with Colombia, Peru and—most recently—the relaunch of our programs in Ecuador are critical to countering the poisonous impact of today's Venezuela.

Colombian drugs fuel the cycle of narcotrafficking violence, corruption, and insecurity in Central America and Mexico that contributes to the migration crisis on our border. We know Colombian drug traffickers forge business relationships with Mexican cartels. Most of the cocaine trafficked from Colombia transits Central America, and it is a significant contributor to the corruption, weak rule of law, and transnational crime plaguing the Northern Triangle, and driving migration from those countries through Mexico to the U.S. border. We are working with our Central American counterparts to address these issues and, importantly, so are the Colombians.

In President Duque we have a partner who has made combating narcotics a top priority for his government, committing resources and political capital to achieve our shared goals. To reach the 5-year goal, the U.S. government is assisting Presi-

dent Duque to implement his whole-of-government counternarcotics strategy that includes reducing consumption, decreasing the supply of drugs, dismantling criminal organizations, disrupting financial flows to criminal organizations, and increasing state presence and economic opportunity in rural areas. The Colombian government will focus efforts in five strategic zones: Catatumbo in Norte de Santander; Tumaco and the Pacific Coast in Nariño; the Bajo Cauca region of Antioquia; Arauca department along Colombia's border with Venezuela; and Caqueta department in southern Colombia. These priority regions account for 65 percent of the country's coca cultivation and cocaine production.

With INL assistance, President Duque has significantly increased Colombia's eradication efforts. Since taking office in August 2018, President Duque quadrupled the number of highly efficient civilian manual eradication groups from 23 to 100. Thanks to this surge, Colombia eradicated more than 86,000 hectares of coca in 2018, the highest amount of hectares eradicated since 2012. This massive effort, achieved with INL assistance, stopped the expansion of coca cultivation for the first time since 2012. Eradication progress continues into 2019. Colombia destroyed 56 percent more coca in the first 6 months of 2019 than during the same period in 2018. In addition to our critical aviation support, INL provides Colombian eradicators with logistics, field equipment, supplies, and life-saving counter improvised explosive device (IED) training and detectors.

On July 18, Colombia's Constitutional Court gave the Colombian government the authority to restart aerial spray of glyphosate on coca once it meets certain administrative and oversight conditions. The unanimous decision assigns responsibility to the government's National Drug Council (CNE) to weigh any potential risks of glyphosate on health and the environment against its responsibility to reduce record levels of coca cultivation. In light of the court's decision and at the request of the Duque administration, INL will work with the Colombian government to restart a targeted, Colombian-led aerial eradication program that meets the administrative and oversight conditions upheld by the court. Aerial eradication is not a silver bullet, but it is an effective and safe tool that along with manual eradication, crop substitution, alternative development, and expanded police presence can help Colombia sustainably reduce cocaine production. Colombia's earlier reduction of coca cultivation, between 2007 and 2012, was due in large part to sustained, high levels of both manual and aerial eradication. Unlike Plan Colombia, the U.S. government will only play a supporting role in a potential Colombian-led aerial eradication program, and INL will continue to support manual eradication as the backbone of Colombia's integrated eradication strategy.

Under President Duque, Colombian police and military forces continue to interdict incredible amounts of cocaine and destroy record number of labs. In 2018, Colombian and third-country security forces using Colombian intelligence interdicted more than 450 metric tons of pure cocaine and cocaine base. INL is helping the Colombian Navy build and operate a chain of radar stations that provide key intelligence to support interdiction operations along Colombia's Pacific coast, the departure point for the majority of U.S.-bound cocaine according to the Drug Enforcement Administration. INL is also supporting the expansion of interdiction operations along Colombia's rivers, particularly in the remote and high-coca-growing area of Nariño. Over the last 6 months, with INL support, Colombian National Police (CNP) launched Operations Resplendor I, II, III, and Osiris, which collectively destroyed more than 821 base labs, 25 cocaine labs, and six precursor production labs. According to official Colombian government statistics, through July, Colombian forces have destroyed 68 percent more base labs and 5 percent more cocaine labs than during the same period in 2018.

With U.S. assistance, Colombia also leads a powerful regional approach to maritime interdiction, producing impressive results by leveraging resources throughout the region. Since April 2018, Colombia has led three multi-national maritime interdiction operations resulting in the seizure of nearly 100 metric tons of cocaine. During Orion 3, the first of these operations planned under President Duque in the spring of 2019, the Colombian navy led 18 partner navies, and leveraged U.S. contributions from INL, the U.S. Coast Guard, and Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF South), that resulted in the seizure of 48 metric tons of cocaine—a jump of 160 percent from the previous operation just 4 months prior.

The Colombian government continues its rigorous pace of high-value target operations against transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). In 2019, the Colombian army alone captured nearly 2,200 members from the ELN, FARC dissident groups, and Clan del Golfo, nearly double the number arrested in 2018. In May, the CNP captured Olindo Perlaza, alias Gafas, for trafficking narcotics from Colombia's Pacific coast through Panama, Guatemala, and Mexico to the United States. Colombian police say Perlaza, who is wanted for extradition to the United States, had the

capacity to ship four tons of cocaine a month, in collaboration with the Sinaloa Cartel.

Beyond counternarcotics and law enforcement operations, INL is helping the Colombians follow the money. Our assistance helps the Colombian government go after the profits of criminal groups by providing anti-money laundering training and support for managing seized assets. Criminal groups often control areas where illegal gold mining occurs and use illegal gold to supplement profits from narcotrafficking and other illicit activities. INL-trained Colombian investigators built cases against Colombia's two largest gold companies for laundering a total of \$1.4 billion in illicit revenue, according to the Colombian Attorney General's Office. The Colombian investigators credited INL training with improving their capacity to trace hidden sources of illegal money and gold. INL supports the Colombian government's efforts to liquidate thousands of seized properties throughout the country, which will generate millions of dollars to bolster Colombia's counternarcotics resources.

These impressive counternarcotics efforts led to the decrease in coca cultivation and cocaine production for the first time in 5 years, but bringing the coca numbers down is just one step. The key to our long-term success in Colombia will be the implementation of a whole-of-government approach that helps sustain our near-term operational counternarcotics results by expanding rural governance and development. The absence of criminal justice institutions and police in key areas of the country creates a permissive environment for coca cultivation and drug trafficking, enabling criminal groups to thrive by generating insecurity and preventing long-term licit economic development. Without long-term support for citizen security and licit livelihoods, our short-term gains on eradication and interdiction will not last.

USAID efforts are critical in this regard, as are Colombian and other international donor investments. INL's rule of law and rural security programs, working in tandem with USAID's alternative development and land titling activities, are fundamental in helping the Colombian government meet the basic needs of rural communities. Poor infrastructure in rural areas makes logistics of accessing markets an enormous obstacle. Willingness alone is not sufficient to overcome development challenges. Communities need roads, business and vocational training, and technological advances.

To promote rural security in Colombia and sustain counternarcotics results, INL is supporting the construction of three rural police bases in key narcotrafficking and historically FARC-controlled areas in Antioquia, Caquetá, and Guaviare, with other expansion sites planned for the coming years. INL supports the CNP stationed in critical rural narcotrafficking areas with training and other technical assistance to enable the police and local communities to jointly address the root causes of criminal activity and resist the influence of criminal organizations. A component of this effort is the integration of women into citizen security and development. In June, the United States and Colombia launched the U.S.-Colombia partnership on women, peace, and security recognizing the pivotal roles Colombian women have played in overcoming conflict, building security, and investing in peace and economic prosperity. The Department will support this initiative through a range of efforts, including INL assistance focused on helping the Colombian National Police recruit more women into its ranks from underserved communities.

To expand access to justice in Colombia and protect human rights, INL is investing in training and technical assistance across the justice sector to build Colombia's professional capacity to investigate and prosecute complex crimes. INL is increasing its support to the Colombian government to address human rights violations, including prosecuting those who threaten and commit crimes against human rights defenders and social leaders. Our efforts to promote rule of law and the protection of human rights in rural areas are directly linked with our counternarcotics efforts. The killings of human rights defenders are most prevalent where you find armed criminal groups and coca growth.

Finally, through the U.S.-Colombia Action Plan (USCAP) on Regional Security Cooperation, Colombia exports its hard-won security expertise to partners in the hemisphere. Each year, INL supports more than 300 USCAP activities implemented by the CNP and the Colombian Navy in 10 partner countries along key narcotrafficking routes for cocaine destined for the United States. Beyond training, this program is creating regional law enforcement connections that reinforce our broader efforts against transnational criminal networks.

Transnational problems need transnational solutions. As our strongest counternarcotics partner in the region, Colombia has the capability and political will to lead a new counterdrug network for the Americas.

My January visit to Colombia days after an attack on a Colombian National Police Academy in Bogotá that killed 22 people and left dozens wounded reminded me that security and justice do not come cheaply. Besides Colombia's significant finan-

cial investment in counternarcotics, Colombian soldiers, police, and eradicators continue to put their lives on the line. In 2019, IEDs have killed nine and wounded 49 eradicators, the same number of deaths and casualties for all of 2018. Despite the cost, during my visits to Colombia and subsequent meetings with senior Colombian officials in Washington, I am encouraged by the unwavering commitment to achieve our ambitious 5-year goal from the highest level of the Colombian government to the campesino manual eradicator risking his life to remove coca from some of the most dangerous terrain in Colombia.

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, we have not even completed the first full year of our 5-year goal to reduce coca cultivation and cocaine production by half by the end of 2023, and Colombia is already demonstrating significant results. I cannot emphasize enough the enormity of the task. The Colombian government is facing serious challenges: near record high coca cultivation and cocaine production levels inherited from the previous administration, the implementation of a complex 310-page peace plan that touches every sector of Colombian society, and strained resources due to the Venezuela crisis. Reaching this goal will require Colombia to eradicate coca at unprecedented rates, to work with neighboring countries throughout the region to combat agile and resourceful criminal networks, and to continue to allocate substantial resources toward counternarcotics. We will continue to encourage the Colombian government and other donor countries to do more, but we must also continue robust U.S. support for our Colombian partners in a joint effort to prevent deadly drugs from reaching the streets of the United States.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you very much.

Before I turn to you, Mr. Barsa, I wanted to just acknowledge the chairman of the committee was here for a few moments, and I want to thank him for coming by as well.

Mr. Barsa, thank you for joining us.

STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN BARSA, ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. BARSA. Thank you very much. Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to testify today. I appreciate this subcommittee's support for USAID's work in Colombia and throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. USAID's work in Colombia advances U.S. national security and prosperity with programs that further a just and sustainable peace, improve rural economic development and citizen security, promote the growth of licit economies, and help the country support the influx of Venezuelan migrants.

As Administrator Mark Green said during one of his recent trips to Colombia, "There is no more important relationship in this hemisphere." I completely agree, which is why last month I chose to visit Colombia as my first international trip.

On that trip, I was able to witness firsthand USAID's work with the Government of Colombia, civil society, and the private sector. I met with key members of President Duque's administration as well as a number of Colombia's courageous social leaders, including leaders of ethnic and minority groups. I also had an opportunity to meet with Venezuelan migrants and Colombian returnees, many who had just fled the horror taking place inside Venezuela. Each Colombian official I met with reiterated the Duque's government commitment to a strong relationship with the United States, and in each of my meetings, I underscored USAID's commitment to helping Colombia advance on the journey to self-reliance and solidify a long-lasting peace.

USAID is collaborating closely with the Duque administration to promote licit economies, inclusiveness, reconciliation, and stability. To foster licit livelihoods, USAID promotes alternative development, increases financial inclusion, and addresses land tenure. A few months ago, Administrator Green and President Duque launched a historic massive land titling program, and just 2 weeks ago, the program announced the distribution of 1,000 land titles, a milestone in peace implementation.

These activities promote stability by giving young people better opportunities, to discourage them from joining transnational criminal organizations, providing former combatants with legal economic opportunities and better futures.

At USAID, we believe that sustainable development must include robust participation from the private sector, and we work to leverage private sector funds to maximize our impact.

We also work to grow the private sector. USAID helps Colombians in rural areas to find legal economic opportunities, especially in those regions affected by violence and illegal activity. For example, USAID helps entrepreneurs and small producers of products like cacao and coffee improve their products and connect to local and international markets.

While we work to foster licit economies, we know that no sustainable development or lasting peace can occur without the full inclusion of Afro-Colombians, indigenous, and other ethnic groups. I was pleased to hear directly from President Duque's High Commissioner for Stabilization Emilio Archila that the Colombian Government is in agreement with this important point.

I am concerned about reports of human rights defenders being targeted and can assure you that the protection of human rights defenders and social leaders is a priority for USAID and the U.S. embassy in Bogotá. To address these human rights issues, USAID programs promote respect for the rule of law, support state and civic actors that provide collective and individual protection, and strengthen the Government of Colombia's capacity to respond to incidents of violence.

We are also committed to fostering greater social and economic inclusion of Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities as a means of advancing peace and reconciliation in Colombia.

Another critical imperative of Colombia's peace is reconciliation among victims, ex-combatants, and other citizens. The Colombian conflict and associated violence created a tragic legacy of millions of victims. USAID is collaborating closely with the Duque administration to build the capacity of key government institutions charged with delivering services and transitional justice to these victims as mandated by Colombian law. On my trip, I had the opportunity to meet with leaders from the USAID-supported Truth Commission and the Unit to Search for Disappeared Persons to discuss the strategies, challenges, and impacts that these two main institutions are making in the reconciliation process. We must continue to support Colombia's path towards a sustainable and stable peace.

As you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, it is impossible to discuss Colombia without discussing the impact of the Venezuelan migrants. This manmade, regime-driven tragedy has forced more than 4.3 million to flee Venezuela. More than 1.1 million of these people are

in Colombia right now. When I visited the city of Cúcuta last month on the Colombian-Venezuelan border, I saw firsthand the dire humanitarian effects this crisis is having on Colombians and Venezuelans alike.

To help the region cope with this manmade crisis, the United States has provided nearly \$377 million since fiscal year 2017, \$213 million of which is to respond to the crisis in Colombia.

We salute Colombian President Duque, who has served as a regional leader in this response, and we thank other countries in the region for their support for the Venezuelan people and the legitimate government of Interim President Juan Guaidó.

We continue to call upon other donors to make or increase contributions to help address the crisis in Venezuela, and we are also particularly grateful to Congress for your bipartisan support on this issue.

In conclusion, USAID is prepared to continue to help Colombia address its most pressing challenges and secure lasting peace.

Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, thank you again for your commitment to USAID and to our work in Colombia. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Barsa follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN BARSA

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to testify today. I appreciate this Subcommittee's support for USAID's work to advance U.S. national security and prosperity through programs in the Republic of Colombia that further a just and sustainable peace, promote rural economic development, promote the growth of licit economies and help the country support the influx of Venezuelan migrants.

As Administrator Mark Green said during one of his recent trips to Colombia, "There is no more important relationship [for the United States] in this Hemisphere." I completely agree with Administrator Green, which is why, as USAID's Assistant Administrator for the Latin America and Caribbean Bureau, I chose to make Colombia the destination for my first international trip last month.

During my August trip, I witnessed USAID's work with the Government of Colombia in a number of different sectors. I also met with key members of President Iván Duque's administration, including Vice-President Marta Lucía Ramírez, Vice Minister of Health Iván Darío González, Presidential Border Manager Felipe Muñoz, High Commissioner for Security Rafael Guarín, and Presidential Advisor for Stabilization and Consolidation Emilio José Archila. I also met a number of Colombia's courageous social leaders, including from ethnic and minority groups.

Each Colombian official reiterated the Duque Government's commitment to a strong relationship with the United States. In each of these meetings, I underscored USAID's commitment to helping Colombia advance on the Journey to Self-Reliance and solidify a long-lasting peace.

To understand USAID's approach in Colombia, it is essential to understand the country's over five decades of violent conflict. Despite this tumultuous history, the country has made significant strides. USAID is collaborating closely with the Duque administration on a multi-sectoral approach that promotes licit economies, inclusiveness, reconciliation, and stability.

For example, USAID takes several approaches to foster licit livelihoods for Colombians, including promoting alternative development, increasing financial inclusion and addressing land tenure. All of these activities aim to promote stability, whether it is giving young people better opportunities to discourage them from joining transnational criminal organizations, or providing former combatants with legal economic opportunities and better futures.

We remain concerned about reports that human-rights defenders are being targeted. The protection of human rights defenders and social leaders is a priority for USAID and the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá. USAID uses a holistic, cross-sectoral strategy to address the situation that confronts human-rights defenders by promoting respect for the rule of law, dignity, and fundamental freedoms; preventing abuses; and strengthening the Government of Colombia's capacity to respond.

In 2016, we launched our Inclusion for Peace (IPA) activity, with the aim of fostering greater social and economic inclusion of Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities as a means of advancing peace and reconciliation in Colombia. By 2020, we expect that this initiative will have provided 12,000 individuals from these marginalized communities access to formal job opportunities. In addition to IPA, USAID has focused engagement with Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities through several other activities, including the Fulbright and Martin Luther King, Jr., fellowships.

We also seek to bring other partners to the equation. At USAID, we believe that sustainable, economic empowerment—all development—must include robust participation from the private sector. Private sector leadership is essential to kick-start economic growth and lower social and economic inequality. The private sector offers technologies, innovation, expertise, and networks that can advance our development goals and those of the Colombian people. The private sector also offers significant resources. In Colombia, we leveraged nearly \$163 million in private sector funds in Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 and the first half of FY 2019.

My first official event in Colombia was in support of USAID's Rural Financial Alliance, a compelling example of how we want to implement our Private Sector Engagement Policy. For years, USAID has been helping people in Colombia's rural areas to find legal economic opportunities, especially in those regions affected by violence, drug trafficking, illegal mining and armed groups. We have helped entrepreneurs and small producers in cacao, coffee, dairy, rubber, and beekeeping to improve their products, and connected them to local and international markets.

But even as they have found success in these ventures, the people in these regions have lacked access to the financial services that would solidify their progress and grow their businesses.

Since 2015, USAID has co-invested with the private sector under the Rural Financial Alliance to provide these critical services in 197 target municipalities. With support from USAID, financial intermediaries have channeled \$848 million in financial services to those 197 prioritized municipalities. These financial services are mainly productive credits, savings accounts, and micro-insurance—essential tools that are now helping Colombians in rural areas thrive. It is these types of results that exemplify how critical engagement with the private sector is to finding, financing, and implementing lasting solutions.

One crucial program has a particularly relevant role across multiple sectors: land tenure. USAID and the Duque administration have worked together on the formalization of land titles, which is central to addressing inequality in rural areas, promoting socio-economic development and licit economic growth, and advancing peace-building efforts. To signify both countries' commitment to this important issue, in May, President Duque and Administrator Green signed a joint statement of support to encourage the completion of the Mass Land Formalization and Cadaster pilot being developed in the municipality of Ovejas, in Sucre Department. This past August, the program delivered its first 1,000 land titles to Colombians who participated, a historic milestone in implementation of the peace accords.

The Ovejas pilot is an unprecedented initiative in Colombia that seeks to offer viable and proven solutions to the country's land problems by reducing both the time and costs associated with the formalization of clear property rights, especially in the most conflict-affected regions.

Not only does proper land tenure help stabilize communities and decrease conflict, it also promotes licit livelihoods. We have seen that without legal land title, more than 75 percent of former coca growers return to the illicit economy, whereas when they have clear title, the rate of recidivism drops to less than 25 percent.

Another critical imperative of Colombia's peace process is reconciliation among victims, ex-combatants, and other citizens. The Colombian conflict and associated violence created a tragic legacy of millions of victims, including those forcibly displaced from their homes, land, and communities. USAID is collaborating closely with the Duque administration to build the capacity of key institutions in the Colombian government charged with delivering services, reparations, and transitional justice to these victims as mandated by Colombian law.

For example, I had the opportunity to meet with the Truth Commission and the Unit to Search for Disappeared Persons, both of which have received funding from USAID to support engaging victims, civil society, and justice officials in the processes and dialogues of the Truth Commission.

During my meeting with the President of the Truth Commission, Father Francisco de Roux, and Luz Marina Monzón, Director of the Unit to Search for Disappeared Persons, we discussed the strategies, challenges, and impacts that these two main institutions are making in the reconciliation process. This process is not easy, and there will be many challenges along the way.

As reported in the press, a former commander of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) recently called on his followers to take up arms against the Colombian Government.

This is a grim reminder that after decades of armed conflict, it remains necessary to keep supporting Colombia's path toward a sustainable and stable peace. The reintegration of former FARC members into Colombian society is crucial to this reconciliation process as it breaks the cycle of violence and criminality. USAID will not be deterred from promoting peace and encouraging a culture of legality.

Colombia is the focus of today's hearing, but I would be remiss not to mention the Venezuela regional crisis. Venezuela is experiencing a man-made, regime-driven political and economic crisis that has led to severe shortages of food and medicine and has driven more than 4.3 million people to flee their once-prosperous country since 2014.

This outflow of vulnerable Venezuelans is straining healthcare, education, and other social services in neighboring countries, especially Colombia. When I visited the city of Cúcuta on the Colombia-Venezuela border last month, I saw firsthand the dire humanitarian effects this crisis is having on Colombians and Venezuelans alike.

It was during this visit that I also fully recognized the generosity of the Colombian people and the Duque administration for their continued support for and hospitality toward Venezuelans who have fled the tyranny and chaos in their country. The stories I heard from migrants about living conditions inside Venezuela created by the devastating and corrupt policies of the former Maduro regime were truly shocking.

To help the region cope with this man-made crisis, the United States has provided nearly \$377 million—including nearly \$334 million in humanitarian aid and \$43 million in economic and development assistance—since FY2017. Of this amount, \$213 million has been for Colombia—\$37.1 million in development assistance and \$175 million in humanitarian assistance.

We salute Colombia and President Duque, who has served as a regional leader on this response, and we thank the other countries in the region for their support for the Venezuelan people and the legitimate Government of Interim President Juan Guaidó. We continue to call upon other donors to make or increase contributions to help address the crisis in Venezuela. We are also particularly grateful to Congress for your support on this issue.

The partnership between the U.S. and Colombian Governments reaps dividends on both sides. USAID's projects work best when governments, civil society, and the private sector in host countries also invest in our programming. The Duque administration has been an excellent partner in our joint cooperation. USAID is prepared to continue to help Colombia address the country's most-pressing challenges, advance Colombians' progress along the Journey to Self-Reliance and secure a lasting peace.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you again for your commitment to USAID and to our work in Colombia. I look forward to your questions.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.
Finally, Mr. O'Reilly.

STATEMENT OF KEVIN O'REILLY, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF WESTERN HEMISPHERE AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. O'REILLY. Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, members of the subcommittee, thank you for convening this hearing.

Colombia is indeed our highest performing and most cooperative partner in Latin America, and we built this partnership on shared values and common and vitally important shared interests. This is the fruit of decades of U.S. attention and bipartisan congressional support. Your intense engagement has been and will remain vital to our success.

Americans and Colombians work together to make both countries safer and more prosperous. We are working together to expand cooperation on security and support Colombian efforts to slash coca cultivation and cocaine production, promote human rights and democracy, and support Colombia's implementation of the peace ac-

cord, and expand economic opportunity and free, fair, and reciprocal trade. In short, we face common challenges together.

That includes helping Venezuelans recover the democratic rights enshrined in their own constitution, rights honored by Venezuelan Interim President Juan Guaidó and treated with contempt by Nicolás Maduro.

Colombia is a strong democracy and a vibrant economy. It is a diplomatic leader in the Americas. It aggressively confronts terrorists and criminals within its borders, and it helps train security services across the region. For two decades, Colombian authorities kept up sustained pressure on FARC criminals and terrorists. We take pride in having supported those efforts that brought the FARC to the negotiating table, producing the peace accord that ended a 52-year insurgency. And Colombia has made real progress on implementation, disarming nearly 7,000 guerillas.

This complex agreement touches nearly every Colombian institution. Making it all work represents a huge challenge and an admirable commitment to peace. Colombia faces its hardest challenges where government presence remains weak. Killings of social leaders often in these rural communities most afflicted by crime concerns us deeply. We need to remain engaged to help Colombia defeat the illegal armed groups seeking to fill vacuums left behind by the demobilized FARC. We must ensure that human rights protections remain foundational in everything we do in support of Colombia's transformation.

So-called FARC dissidents have scoffed at peace, continuing to break the law, and traffic drugs. Now a few former FARC leaders have quit the peace accord, returning to terrorism, violence, and criminality. The most notable among them all were and all remain deeply immersed in the coca/cocaine economy. We are confident that Colombian justice can and will hold to account those who follow that path, and when they break U.S. law, we reserve the right to seek their extradition.

Colombian authorities and the FARC political party have repudiated those who call for a return to violence and crime. Outlaws such as Iván Márquez and Jesus Santrich joined the ELN and other terrorists and criminals on the wrong side of history, on the wrong side of the law.

Assistant Secretary Madison has spoken about our counter-narcotics cooperation. I can only reiterate that we are working exceptionally well with the Duque administration and our Colombian counterparts.

The crisis in Venezuela remains a significant threat to Colombia and to the region. And Colombia carries the greatest burden of all. More than 3 percent of the population of Venezuela, those 1.4 million souls, resides in Colombia, a statistic that should but will not make even Nicolás Maduro hang his head in shame.

We have been deeply involved in the efforts to address that crisis. Since fiscal year 2017, we have provided nearly \$214 million to help Colombia respond to the influx, in addition to support provided elsewhere in the region.

In facing Colombia's challenges, we must never lose sight of Colombia's progress. Greater security and greater economic oppor-

tunity, an ever more robust democracy, all serve our own national interests in a secure, prosperous, and reliable partner.

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, members of the subcommittee, congressional support has been instrumental in the success of the past 20 years. It remains the foundation of our successful partnership with the people and the democratic institutions of Colombia. Thank you, and I too look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. O'Reilly follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KEVIN O'REILLY

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for convening this hearing.

Colombia is our highest performing and most willing partner in Latin America. Together we have built a partnership based on shared values and shared interests, and our interests there are among the most important in the entire hemisphere. This administration highly values the excellent relationship we have with President Iván Duque and his government.

Today's robust partnership with Colombia is the fruit of decades of U.S. attention to this relationship, including the bipartisan support here in the United States Congress. Your intense engagement with Colombia has been, and will remain, a critical contributor to our success.

Americans and Colombians work together to make both the United States and Colombia safer and more prosperous, while adhering to our values. We support Colombian efforts to expand cooperation on security and counternarcotics. This includes helping Colombians implement their programs to slash coca cultivation and cocaine production, as well as our robust partnership to dismantle criminal organizations. We work together to promote human rights and democracy in Colombia and to implement the 2016 peace accord, despite the recklessness of so-called FARC dissidents who have abandoned the commitments they made to the Colombian people and to the international community. We work with Colombia to expand economic opportunity and free, fair, and reciprocal trade. In short, we face common challenges together.

Our cooperation extends, and we cannot emphasize this enough, to our shared efforts to help the people of Venezuela recover and fully exercise the democratic rights enshrined in their own constitution, a constitution honored by Venezuelan interim president Juan Guaidó and trampled underfoot by Nicolás Maduro. We continue to support Colombians as they and their government have received with immense generosity the many Venezuelans displaced by the corruption, cruelty, and mismanagement of Maduro and the crisis he has generated in their homeland.

We remain Colombia's economic partner of choice, and the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement continues to generate opportunities for economic growth and employment in both countries. Importantly, we registered a trade surplus with Colombia in 2018. U.S. companies increasingly see Colombia as a promising investment destination, and we are attracting Colombian capital to the United States.

Colombia is, in many ways, a model for the region—a strong democracy and an economic powerhouse. It aggressively confronts crime and terrorism within its borders and exports security training. Colombia is a diplomatic leader in the Americas. We intend to continue supporting the inclusive democratic institutions so crucial to advancing peace, security, and prosperity in Colombia and its neighbors.

For two decades, the Colombian government maintained sustained pressure on the FARC, a criminal and terrorist organization, and we take pride in having lent our hand to those efforts. That pressure helped bring the FARC to the negotiating table, resulting in the 2016 peace accord that ended a 52-year insurgency. The sacrifice and heroism of many in Colombia's security forces—and prosecutors and judges too—helped bring this about. Since the signing of the accord, the Colombian government has made real progress on implementation, and nearly 7,000 guerrillas have disarmed. The Colombian congress passed important implementing legislation, three transitional justice institutions have started work to address conflict related crimes and abuses, and two United Nations political missions have deployed to verify FARC disarmament, reincorporation, and security guarantees. On September 12, the United States and other U.N. Security Council members voted to extend the current U.N. Verification Mission mandate for another year, as requested by President Duque. The council's unanimous approval signals the international community's continued strong support for peace in Colombia.

Violence continues, but nationwide security indices have clearly improved. The Duque administration has accelerated efforts to approve individual and collective development projects that support reincorporation of ex-combatants, implemented land titling and registration programs, and enrolled approximately 95 percent of ex-combatants in healthcare.

This vastly complex peace accord—among the most intricate, multifaceted, and rigorous agreement of its kind—touches nearly every institution in Colombia, and the country is in just year three of what the negotiating parties saw as an initial 15-year timeline for implementation. Making all the pieces fit, making it all work, represents a huge challenge, and an admirable commitment to peace by the people of Colombia.

Still, the University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies considers implementation now underway for 70 percent of the accord’s provisions, a level comparable to other successful peace processes. The Department of State funds these Kroc Institute efforts to monitor implementation, resources available to us because you in Congress have appropriated them. We see this as a valuable part of our sustained effort to support Colombians as they work to establish a just and lasting peace for themselves, a way to help them identify and address implementation challenges.

Implementation does face challenges, particularly where government presence remains weak. The killing of social leaders, often in the rural communities most afflicted by crime and narco-trafficking, concern us deeply. We recognize the importance of continued engagement to help Colombia defeat the illegal armed groups seeking to fill vacuums left behind by the demobilized FARC. Helping extend security and state presence in rural areas can make these regions and those who live in them more secure and prosperous, and deny these spaces to criminals, to narcotics traffickers. Of course, this requires a sustained commitment, and resources.

So-called FARC dissidents—FARC guerrillas who rejected the accord and retained their control of various illegal economies, notably drugs—have been a problem since the signing of the accord. More recently, a few former leaders of the FARC chose to abandon the FARC’s peace accord commitments and return to terrorism, violence, and criminality.

The most notable among them all were and all remain deeply immersed in the coca-cocaine economy. We strongly repudiate their actions, and the peace accord makes clear that those who commit serious crimes after the signing of the accord can and will be held accountable to the full extent of the law, including the possibility of extradition as appropriate. Importantly, both the Colombian government and the FARC political party have rejected this call by a small group of individuals to return to violence and crime and have reiterated their commitments to peace.

Writing in the *Washington Post* on September 3, President Duque explained that, “Colombia stands united in the face of a small number of criminals who want to sidetrack the historic transformation that is underway.” We stand resolutely with Colombia and its efforts to secure the peace.

Colombians know that to implement the peace accord successfully they must also confront narcotics production and trafficking and help Venezuelans resolve the crisis that has cast Venezuela itself into chaos and threatens to destabilize the region.

You will hear from Assistant Secretary Madison about our efforts to strengthen counternarcotics cooperation. Our governments are pursuing a comprehensive approach, including eradication, interdiction, law enforcement cooperation, extraditions, and integrated rural development so families immersed in the coca economy can have a legal, decent way to make a living. In 2018, we agreed with Colombia to work together to cut coca cultivation and cocaine production by half by the end of 2023, and we have already seen the Duque administration follow through on this commitment. We know that they will need unity of effort across their security and civilian agencies, and our continued cooperation and support, to drive down cultivation and production, and that doing so can enhance the health and security of us all.

As for restart of aerial eradication, we recognize that Colombia itself must make that call, but we’ve seen it work in the past and we’re confident that it could work in the future. At the request of the Duque administration, we will work with the Colombian government to restart a targeted, Colombia-led aerial eradication program as part of a broader comprehensive approach.

The political, economic, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela and its spillover effects into the region remains a significant threat to Colombia’s economic growth and political stabilization efforts. Colombia carries the greatest burden of any of Venezuela’s neighbors as this hemisphere deals with the effects of the tyranny, the cruelty, and the incompetence of Nicolás Maduro.

He and those who support him have provoked a regional stability crisis. As we speak, more than 3 percent of the population of Venezuela resides in Colombia, a statistic that should—but won't—make even Nicolás Maduro hang his head in shame. Venezuela's porous border with Colombia, coupled with Maduro's decision to harbor groups like FARC dissidents and the ELN in Venezuela, has generated new security challenges.

At the latest estimate, Colombia hosts over 1.4 million Venezuelan refugees and displaced Venezuelans, imposing outsized burdens on Colombian taxpayers and generating outsized demands on Colombian social services. Lay those costs at the feet of Nicolás Maduro, not at the feet of those forced to flee his tyrannical rule. Each of those individuals has a story to tell of oppression, deprivation, and suffering. Desperate and vulnerable Venezuelans are susceptible both to exploitation by criminal groups and, in some cases, to recruitment by illegal actors. We commend Colombia for its humanitarian contributions and for its generosity.

The United States has been deeply involved in the humanitarian and diplomatic effort to address the crisis. Since FY 2017, we have provided nearly \$214 million to help Colombia respond to the influx, including nearly \$175 million in humanitarian aid and more than \$37 million development and economic assistance. In addition, we have twice deployed the U.S. Navy Ship COMFORT on medical missions to the region. During stops in Colombia in November 2018 and in August, COMFORT personnel treated more than 17,000 patients.

While helping Colombia confront these challenges, we must never lose sight of the real progress it has made. Through steady economic stewardship over the past two decades, and with our assistance, Colombia has doubled the size of its economy and the number of Colombians in poverty has fallen from 1-in-5 to 1-in-25. Our Trade Promotion Agreement underpins a strong trading relationship with two-way goods trade of \$29 billion in 2018. The United States supported Colombia's accession to the OECD, based on its significant efforts over the past 5 years to meet the OECD's technical standards. We look forward to formally welcoming Colombia to the OECD once it formalizes its accession.

We have a fully committed partner in the Duque administration. As President Duque told President Trump when he visited the White House in February, he and his administration are supporting efforts to secure a just and lasting peace by extending stability, legality, and opportunity in Colombia's conflict-affected regions, aggressively increasing counternarcotics efforts and confronting the threat of a destabilized Venezuela.

Our FY 2020 funding request for Colombia reflects the administration's focus on advancing these priorities. Building on effective prior-year programs, bilateral U.S. assistance will focus on:

- Security, including counternarcotics and reintegration of ex-combatants;
- Expansion of state presence in conflict-affected areas; and
- Justice and support to the Colombian government for victims.

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today to discuss our relationship with Colombia.

We all know that congressional support has been instrumental in the successes of the past 20 years, and we know that it remains the foundation of our successful partnership with the people and the democratic institutions of Colombia. I look forward to your questions.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

I will defer my time. I know members have to be in other places. So we will start with the ranking member.

Senator CARDIN. Well, let me thank all three of our witnesses.

Mr. O'Reilly, I want to start with your observations. And as I said in my opening statement, I strongly support the progress that we have made on the relationship between the United States and Colombia. It is in our national security interests, and I am proud of the progress that we have made. It is based upon shared values, and you mentioned specifically promoting human rights.

So how can we explain so many human rights and social leaders who have been attacked in recent times in Colombia, and that we see a rise in the safety and protecting human rights in that coun-

try? What are we doing to hold the government accountable to protect the rights of its citizens?

Mr. O'REILLY. Senator, we all have seen this over the years. This is a problem of long standing.

Senator CARDIN. There seems to have been a spike recently.

Mr. O'REILLY. In Colombia, and indeed, it has been a severe problem in the short term. Over the longer term, I think the country has done a substantial job in improving the general long-term trajectory, but indeed it is incredibly important to focus on the areas where they have been under the most pressure. In these rural areas, as Assistant Secretary Madison was saying, often where the trafficking is most severe, we have—

Senator CARDIN. Are you satisfied that the Duque government is paying enough attention to this problem?

Mr. O'REILLY. I am, sir. It is an immensely large country. It is a severe problem.

Senator CARDIN. Four hundred seventy-nine human rights leaders and social leaders have been assassinated since 2016. You are satisfied they are doing enough?

Mr. O'REILLY. I am satisfied that they are working hard to confront the problem, sir. If one of these people suffers that sort of violence meted out against them, if they are murdered, it is one too many. And it is, in that sense, clearly unacceptable. The challenge, of course, they face is vast and complex. We have engaged with them consistently through the embassy. It has been a regular topic of conversation when we meet with their senior authorities here in Washington as well.

Senator CARDIN. Are we engaging the Colombian military and police about this issue?

Mr. O'REILLY. Yes, sir.

Senator CARDIN. What type of response are we getting for their protecting the rights of citizens that are raising concerns about their own country?

Mr. O'REILLY. We have seen—and I will commit to getting you the most precise numbers I can. We have seen a relative increase, as I understand it, in the number of closed cases and investigations, but that of course is post facto, after the fact of these attacks. We have seen them move resources into some of these rural areas even in a period of economic austerity. The relative focus of their budget across the board in security and in other social expenditures tends to be focused more towards rural areas and more towards these areas identified as being hot areas of conflict. And there is obviously much more that has to be done.

Senator CARDIN. So Mr. Duque was originally not a supporter of the peace process. He now has the responsibility as the leader of Colombia. He has been implementing the peace process. We have seen significant concerns as to the implementation including, as pointed out, the FARC sources starting to come back to life.

How do you judge how we can be helpful to make sure the peace accords are in fact implemented?

Mr. O'REILLY. When President Duque took office, he put forward about a half dozen different concerns, mostly focused on procedural issues, with the structure of the peace accord, and he brought those forward in his political system. When it finally came to the Con-

stitutional Court and his position did not prosper within, I believe it was, 3 days, he signed the implementing legislation.

Senator CARDIN. I know that, but we are seeing it getting off track. What are we doing to work with the Duque government to get this aggressively implemented?

Mr. O'REILLY. The messages that our former chief of mission, Ambassador Whitaker, the messages that our current chief of mission, Phil Goldberg, have brought to the administration, our engagement with them here all is in support of helping them bring this agreement forward where they have made an emphasis—and I think it is a correct emphasis—on a firm line against those who would stand against peace and working as aggressively as possible to support those who have put down their arms and are working towards integration into the society. They have had significant success, particularly in those areas where ex-FARC combatants have concentrated their efforts or concentrated themselves in communities and keeping those people safe and keeping them engaged in politics as the FARC party. And I think our fundamental mission is helping them advance that message of a firm line with those who cross the line and being as supportive as possible in implementing what is going to be a long and difficult process of bringing this peace process to a successful conclusion.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Portman.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you, Chairman Rubio and Ranking Member Cardin, for having the hearing, and I appreciated the testimony today.

I was involved back in the day with the Free Trade Agreement with Colombia. I negotiated with President Uribe directly, who rolled up his sleeves and jumped into it and was very enthusiastic. I see now that our trade with Colombia, although significant, is not growing as fast as their trade relationships with China. In fact, the Chinese investment and trade with Colombia has grown exponentially, being now their second largest trading partner and their second largest exporter.

So I guess one question I would have for you all—and I know Mr. Marczak is coming up for the Atlantic Council. He talked about this some in his testimony. But I wonder if you could talk a little about the trade relationship. I do not know. Mr. O'Reilly, maybe you are the right one or AID, Mr. Bursa. But how is it working, one? And are you concerned about the Chinese influence in Colombia and the stronger economic relationship there?

Mr. O'REILLY. On the whole, it has been a success—the process of economic reform over these last 20 years, the greater stability in the country. We are drawing more Colombian investment into this country. U.S. firms are making substantial commitments in foreign direct investment. I was the Colombian desk officer 15 or 16 years ago. The economy in Colombia now is more than twice the size of what it was then.

They do trade with China and that trade is growing. We all trade with China. The question is how fair and how open and transparent that trade is.

Senator PORTMAN. But also there is more and more Chinese investment in the country. And I guess my question to you is are you concerned about that from a national security point of view, particularly because it seems to be displacing some of our investment, if you look at the numbers.

Mr. O'REILLY. Thank you, Senator.

We have made it clear with our counterparts in Colombia that they should look closely. And it is a message that we have shared with others in the region as well, that they should look very closely at the character and quality of the relationships they enter into with Chinese counterparts. Many of them are state-owned firms. Many of them do not necessarily have the same commitments to openness and transparency that we would expect from our firms, that Colombians expect from their own. So, yes, indeed, we have asked them to take a very close eye at the quality of those and the nature of the security implications of any investments that they might consider accepting from Chinese sources.

Senator PORTMAN. We talked about some of the good news, and there is a lot of good news on the economy, on the stability in the country. What President Duque has done is really—you know, the third of fourth president who has brought that kind of stability, particularly with regard to the peace agreement. Things are in better shape.

And yet, I saw just late last month, even a few weeks ago, one of the splinter groups from FARC called for returning to arms and armed conflict with the government. I think it was in relation to the number of people who had been resettled or who had left FARC who had been assassinated.

Are you concerned about that? And what, if anything, should we be doing after spending significant amounts of American taxpayer money, about \$10 billion I think over a period of a couple decades with regard to Plan Colombia? Should we be concerned that this is starting to unravel, or do you feel as though it is just a splinter group without much significance?

Mr. O'REILLY. Sir, I am sad to say I am very much concerned, but I am not surprised. The leading figures who participated in that announcement on August 29th had been distancing themselves from the FARC political party and from the commitments they had made to the international community, to the Colombian people for some time. Mr. Márquez had stepped back significantly. Mr. Santrich was under criminal investigation in his own country and under indictment in our own. They continued to engage in criminal activity.

Senator PORTMAN. It did not surprise you that those individuals would have been unhappy with the process of the peace agreement in effect, but what should we do? And my time is coming to a close here. But what should we do in relation to that?

And second, with 1.4 million Venezuelans in Colombia, I know you are going to talk about this in response to other questions, but we would love to hear for the subcommittee's purposes what should we do at this point that we are not currently doing? So if you could maybe take those questions for the record, that would be great.

My time has expired, and I appreciate all three of you being here, to the witnesses on the second panel as well.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Kaine.
 Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.
 And thanks to the witnesses.

You know, people wonder whether the United States' foreign policy or investments can make a difference. I hold up Colombia as an example. And the fact that it is still fragile and it still needs work I think does mean that we need to continue to be involved. I think we have been persistent. We have been willing to invest over a long haul. We have been bipartisan. It began with Presidents Clinton and then Bush and then Obama and then President Trump. And that has been really important. It has had great support from bipartisan Members of Congress. And I do think we have high stakes in maintaining it.

I have heard the names of President Uribe and President Duque mentioned often. I have not heard anybody mention President Santos, who won the Nobel Prize for his work, and so I want to put his name on the record because it has involved successive leaders who do not see eye to eye on everything, but it has involved leaders who have been willing to do very hard work.

I also went to Cúcuta and to Bogotá in March. And one of the reasons I went was primarily to follow up on the Venezuelan issue, but I was worried that I was hearing in this room from witness tables relatively rosy scenarios about what might happen and how quickly it might happen. I was hearing that from others as well. And I was struck, when I went in March, and visited both with Colombian leaders, governmental leaders and leaders in the sort of NGO space, and then when I was at the border in Cúcuta, I was not hearing such rosy optimism about the likely timing of developments in Venezuela.

This is a hearing about Colombia, not Venezuela, but as I look at the challenges that Colombia has, I share Senator Rubio's opening statement about the value of Colombia as a partner in this hemisphere and around the world. I remember going to the Sinai and looking at Colombian troops who were there as peacekeepers in the multinational force of observers protecting the border between Egypt and Israel. To see Colombia assert itself as a peacekeeping nation around the world, what a wonderful thing. So we need to do what we can.

But there are significant challenges with the peace process, with trying to integrate parts of the country that had not been invested in for decades back into the country. But I still think the thing that poses the most risk to the peace process is this massive humanitarian and security crisis in Venezuela, the refugee effect in Colombia and others.

So I just would sort of like you to give your thoughts to the committee as of right now, mid-September 2019. To help Colombia, what should we be doing, this committee and Congress? What should we be doing more to hasten peace efforts, negotiation, and other efforts to bring stability to Venezuela? Should we be doing more bilaterally? Should we be engaged with the CARICOM process of Caribbean nations? What would your advice to us be?

Mr. O'REILLY. I too have been frustrated—and my colleagues—with the difficulty in bringing definitive change and an improvement of conditions in Venezuela. Mr. Maduro may not know the

time nor the hour, but I think it is clear that his ability to continue this is not infinite.

I think the best way that we can help Colombia deal with this is work in concert with Colombia and other likeminded governments in the region to make it harder and harder for Nicolás Maduro to evade the inevitable. All it does is drag out the suffering of the Venezuelan people and those people that you met in Cúcuta and you, Senator Menendez, and others who have been forced to be expelled effectively from their own homelands. That includes economic sanctions not on the country, but on those who are oppressing the country. And it means ever closer cooperation.

This is one reason that we joined the Guaidó administration recently in calling for a meeting of the Rio Pact not for any other reason but to more effectively coordinate our humanitarian and our sanctions regimes and have a practical discussion with our counterparts in other governments as to how we can provide relief and how we can do a better job hedging in Mr. Maduro because, yes, indeed, these externalities are coming at a stiff cost not just for the Venezuelan people but for the people of the rest of South America and indeed the Caribbean.

Senator KAINE. My time has expired, but I may submit the question for the record to try to get witnesses on both panel one and panel two's responses. Thank you.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you all for being here.

I wanted to talk really about the importance of women in the peace settlement with the FARC and whether you see that being important going forward and what we can do to continue to ensure that women have an important role to play in further negotiations and in the future of Colombia. And I do not know. I guess, Mr. O'Reilly, that I would direct that first to you.

Mr. O'REILLY. We absolutely do, ma'am. And it is clear, although I may defer to Mr. Barsa for more of the programmatic aspects of this, ma'am, but it is clear to us that where people successfully protect the role of women in this process in the communities where that is most effective, the degree of backsliding or recidivism is less. It knits together families. It knits together the communities and creates a totally different kind of a circumstance. These are not just individual actors. Along with the 7,000 or so demobilized combatants, the Colombian authorities have recognized a nearly equal number of people who were supporting, and many of those were women.

Senator SHAHEEN. You are absolutely right, and I think it is important to point out that research has shown a direct correlation between peace and security and a society's treatment of women. That more than levels of wealth, democracy, or ethno-religious factors, that the best indicator of a state's peacefulness and stability is how well it treats its women. And we have, as I am sure you all are aware, legislation that passed in 2017, signed by the President, called the Women, Peace, and Security Act, that encourages us to partner with other countries to ensure that women continue to be part of the political process and be part of any conflict negotiations.

So can you talk about how you see that continuing to be implemented? Maybe you, Mr. Barsa, would be better to address that from USAID.

Mr. BARSÁ. Thank you very much, ma'am.

So it was very important to me when I was in Colombia to meet with human rights leaders, leaders of indigenous groups, and leaders of women's groups as well because, as you state, you cannot have any stable peace or development without the inclusion of all sectors of societies, including women. So when I was in Bogotá, I met with people like Marino Cordoba, the Director of the National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians.

And later on when I was in the field meeting with human rights leaders, I met with Dora Cortes, who is a coordinator of a women's roundtable in Tumaco. And we were discussing just how USAID programs to support human rights inclusiveness have been helpful for these groups and had a dialogue to see how we could do better.

Overall, in conversations I had with the members of the Duque administration, we were in agreement on all these points. So we have programs in place, and we are constantly looking to refine them and improve upon them.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Ms. Madison, you pointed out the Colombian effort to reduce cocaine cultivation and production by 50 percent, I think, by 2023. Can you talk about the interconnectedness of the illegal drug trade from Colombia through Mexico to the U.S., what we are doing to try and address that and how we are working cooperatively with those countries in their counter-drug efforts? As coming from a state where the opioid epidemic has really taken its toll, the more we can do to keep drugs out of this country, the better we can help people who are struggling with substance use disorders.

Ms. MADISON. Our program in Colombia is a very longstanding program. It covers everything really from the coca field and demand reduction to working with law enforcement on interdiction, on investigations, targeting the assets and infrastructure of transnational organized criminals. You know, you have seen ebbs and flows in the success of eradication. That has to do, I think, with some shifting realities. I think in the process of securing the peace accords, there were certain incentives that were created actually to increase cultivation. You had the end of aerial eradication. And we saw the spike begin to rise.

I think what is important now is that the curve is flattening, which is absolutely critical. It is not enough. And over the next couple of years, we need to work with the Colombians directly to continue to drive that down. 90 percent of the cocaine in the United States comes from Colombia. So while there is production in Peru and there is production in Bolivia, Colombia really is the core of the effort.

And just as an aside on the peace agreement, I think the Colombians have to continue to take this issue on because this is how they will be able to put deep roots down in the rural parts of Colombia. The FARC is off the battlefield by and large, and they are no longer fighting an insurgency while they try to do this eradication and try and take this on. But now they actually have to get out into these communities, take it on, do the eradication, do the

kind of things that John and his team work on, which is alternative development. It is a key plank of President Duque's game plan, the rural security piece, and we are supporting it from INL.

The challenge that we have, of course, is that the cocaine moves, it sweeps up the isthmus, it goes through Mexico. The paths cross sometimes with opioids, which dramatically increases the lethality. I would say Mexico and Colombia are really the two poles of our efforts in the Western Hemisphere. Again, in Mexico, it is a different relationship and a different program, but we are also working with the Mexican Government to start in the field, target ports, help on interdiction. And I think it is a constant effort because these groups continue to evolve their tactics and their skills. But these two countries working together is an absolutely essential piece of it.

I am quite worried actually about what is going on with the synthetic opioids in Mexico. It is a very specific issue that we need to take on with them and figure out a game plan on.

But I think these two countries' very expansive programs, much more expansive in Colombia, are the key.

The other thing I would say which has fundamentally changed from even a decade ago is the fact that we now have Colombia leading in the hemisphere. They are leading complex, 18-nation missions to do interdiction. They are out working. They are working with Ecuador, which was not happening even just few years ago. So we have the Colombians actually helping us fill the space and helping us build the capabilities of other partners. So I think we are trying to connect the dots up the isthmus from Colombia to Mexico.

There is a lot there and there is a lot of complexity to it, and I think the key is that we just cannot let up. And when I say the Colombians have done spectacular things with eradication in this first year, I mean it. It is amazing. But it is not enough. It has to continue. It has to expand. We are right there with them. And I think if we get it right in Colombia, we begin to really change the calculus all the way up the isthmus with the exception of synthetic opioids in Mexico, which I think is a separate issue and a really critical one.

Senator SHAHEEN. And at this point is what is really killing people—the synthetics.

Ms. MADISON. I think that is right. As I said, the statistics show that of the 14,000 cocaine deaths in 2017, three-quarters of them involved opioids. And it is because opioids are cheap. They are easier to produce. You do not have to worry about somebody eradicating your fields. And the agility of the synthetic opioids business model is actually really dangerous. I am not surprised we are seeing proliferation. What is most concerning, of course, is that it is proliferation right on our border. And so this requires time and attention. I am actually headed to Mexico in October really to talk about this.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RUBIO. Senator Menendez.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to all the witnesses.

Mr. O'Reilly, you know, a dissident faction of the FARC announced that it will rearm and it is believed their operations are supported by the Maduro regime and conducted on Venezuelan territory. President Duque has backed this claim about the location of the FARC dissidents.

What do we know about the location of the FARC dissidents, and can you confirm President Duque's claims?

Mr. O'REILLY. Senator, we know that people have moved in and out across that border. In fact, indeed, the Colombian authorities have stated that some of these people are now lodging themselves there. To the extent that this continues, it creates a circumstance which is quite a challenge for the Colombians.

Senator MENENDEZ. I appreciate what you are saying, but that is not my question. My question is, what do we independently know about FARC dissidents and those who have called back to arms being in Venezuela, and does that coincide with the Colombian assertions that the FARC dissidents are now inside of Venezuela?

Mr. O'REILLY. I can say that I know that they have moved back and forth and that on occasion they have settled in there. For the rest of it, if it is okay with you, sir, I will take the question and we can discuss it offline.

Senator MENENDEZ. Are you telling me it is a classified answer that you need to give?

Mr. O'REILLY. I will tell you I have to investigate that, sir, before I can give you a definitive answer.

Senator MENENDEZ. Okay. But you come to a hearing on Colombia where we know we are going to talk about Venezuela, and it seems to me a simple enough question to have been prepared for. Anyhow, I want to know what the answer is to that.

Mr. O'REILLY. Absolutely understood.

Senator MENENDEZ. What steps is the administration contemplating to hold the Maduro regime accountable for its willingness to allow foreign terrorist organizations like the ELN and now this dissident group of the FARC to operate out of Venezuelan territory if our assertion is, along with the Colombians, that they are in Venezuelan territory?

Mr. O'REILLY. Sir, we are constantly assessing the activities or their support for these sorts of activities of any foreign terrorist organization and any international acts of terrorism linked to that. And we, in terms of dealing with the Colombian authorities, are regularly sharing whatever information we have and as much as we possibly can in coordinating with them so that when they are operating inside Colombian territory, the Colombian authorities can respond effectively to that. It is unacceptable that Nicolás Maduro and those who support him would offer any top cover for these people or any safe haven to them at any time.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, excuse my impatience, but I have limited time.

So the question is, are we considering particular sanctions beyond what we have done in Venezuela because of what Maduro has done? Are we looking at designations here of terrorist organizations? Are we looking at others that have given refuge and are part of facilitating these terrorist organizations operating out of Ven-

ezuela? Some suggest the Cubans have something to do with that. Are we considering any of those things?

Mr. O'REILLY. We are constantly assessing the question of designations.

Senator MENENDEZ. All right. But you cannot give me any designations that you are contemplating right now. No. Okay.

Now, let me ask you. Maybe this one will be simpler. I appreciate what the administration did. As a matter of fact, legislation that several of us on this committee have promoted is to actually advance a more robust amount of money because of the realities that Colombia is facing every day with over 1.4 million Venezuelans that have now stayed in Colombia, not just transited through but stayed in Colombia, and growing. So while \$350 million is a good thing, it is nowhere near the magnitude of the crisis.

Why has the administration not engaged in creating a donors' conference to have others—this is going to rival Syria at the rate that it is going in terms of the displacement of people. So I am not suggesting we should bear it all, though I am suggesting we should do more. But why is there not a donors' conference that has been pursued. Either you or Mr. Barsa maybe can help me with this.

Mr. BARSÁ. Senator, it was heartening for me to learn how other countries have assisted with humanitarian assistance, as well as some of the aid that was trying to get through Cúcuta when you were there. But certainly we called for other countries to increase their assistance in this area. Regarding the specifics of planning for a donors' conference, I have no information I could share.

Senator MENENDEZ. Mr. O'Reilly, any plans for a donors' conference?

Mr. O'REILLY. The question, apart from the conference, sir, is that we are constantly arm-twisting our other colleagues from other governments to step up and do more.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, it seems that if we convene a donors' conference, number one is we are going to invite countries to join. They are going to have to say what they are willing to do or not do. And it would be far more significant in resources than what we have given and what is needed. And so, you know, we talk about the Colombians being responsible to do a series of things, which I agree with, but we need to help them. They are in our own hemisphere. This is one of the largest refugee crises that we have had in our hemisphere in quite some time. We need to help the Colombians be able to achieve this goal. They have been incredibly good neighbors. You know, they have not done what some other countries have done of closing the border. So we need to help them. I do not understand why there is a reticence on creating a donors' conference.

If I may, just one last question to Secretary Madison. You know, during my recent meetings with President Duque in the U.S. embassy in Bogotá, I stressed the need for a truly comprehensive approach to counter narcotics. And while I understand the administration's priority on eradication, given the alarming levels of coca cultivation, we certainly cannot expect to achieve long-term success without a balanced approach. And I heard you refer to a balanced approach.

As an example, I would like to see INL place greater emphasis on money laundering and financial crimes. While the Department submitted congressional notifications for \$250 million in fiscal year 2018, only \$4 million, or 1.5 percent, of the funding will address money laundering. What steps are you taking to ensure a comprehensive approach and ensure that adequate funding for issues, including money laundering and the rule of law, are part of it?

Ms. MADISON. Senator, I do believe that we take a comprehensive approach to the reality of the drug issue in Colombia. We are working really on all fronts in supporting the efforts of the Government of Colombia to reduce demand, to reduce supply, to disrupt TCOs, to push out on rural security and improving rural security and all the sort of elements of that. And the rule of law and anti-money laundering efforts and asset forfeiture efforts are an important piece of it.

I will say I arrived at INL last year thinking that actually we needed to modernize and think more creatively about our anti-money laundering programs in general because I think money laundering has continued to evolve and our training and other things had not evolved in the same way that the money laundering tactics of the criminals have.

In Colombia specifically, we have had training with IRS and UNODC to build investigative skills. We have had ongoing efforts to build the capabilities of judges who actually look at asset forfeiture in these financial cases. And looking forward, we formed an actual technical working group with the Attorney General's Office, which owns a financial investigative arm. It owns an anti-money laundering unit. It owns an asset forfeiture unit. And we think that that will continue to generate ideas on what else we can do.

We have also brought in the FBI to do an assessment to look at other things that we could put on the table to be helpful to the Colombians. And more recently I took my team over to sit down with FINCEN and talk a little bit more about what else we can do.

Senator MENENDEZ. I appreciate it, but if 1.5 percent of your total monies for Colombia are going to money laundering, it seems to me that if I get your money and I squeeze you, it is one of the ways in which I harm you the greatest. And so I would just urge you to be looking at a more robust engagement in this regard so that we can actually get to the traffickers' monies at the end of the day, which I think can be enormously debilitating and help fuel some of the things we need.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your indulgence.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

And I will take my time now here at the end unless there are any more questions.

I want to narrow in, Secretary Madison, on the drug trade that we keep focusing on. There is no doubt that coca is grown, maybe even being processed in these labs out there. But then it has to be moved, and some of that is maritime movement. Is that correct? Some of it is put on these boats.

Ms. MADISON. I think they move it any way that they can, but a big part is maritime.

Senator RUBIO. Right.

So let us talk about the flights because there are airplanes that land in these fields in Central America and then are trafficked up across the border. There are others that go into the Caribbean, and some of it leapfrogs from the Caribbean into the U.S., but some of it leapfrogs from the Caribbean to Europe. There is a growth in the cocaine that is being shipped to Europe. Correct?

Ms. MADISON. In fact, there is growth in the cocaine market around the world. I was recently in London, and I was recently in Australia. And in both places cocaine is actually an enormous issue, and it is coming from this hemisphere.

Senator RUBIO. Right. And those would have to be aerial routes. I imagine they are not taking these little fake submersibles all the way over there. Right?

Ms. MADISON. Actually they do get boats that cross the southern ocean and go to Australia.

Senator RUBIO. Fast boats.

Ms. MADISON. But I am assuming that that is not the preponderance of it.

Senator RUBIO. The point I am trying to raise is when those flights happen, where are those flight originating? What is the path those flights are taking?

Ms. MADISON. There are a number of pathways, but we have noted, which I imagine is an issue of concern to you in particular, a pattern of flights leaving Venezuela. There is also a maritime vector through Ecuador up the East Pac, which is actually pretty significant. A lot of them are Venezuelan.

Senator RUBIO. And the flights to Venezuela—how many of those that we know of have the Maduro regime interdicted and stopped and called up and said we have these drug traffickers here that we caught?

Ms. MADISON. Because I am not on the operational side, I cannot answer you with absolute certainty. I am not aware that we are getting substantial cooperation out of Venezuela on the issue of narcotics. In fact, I think it is quite the opposite.

Senator RUBIO. Is it fair to say that these people who are flying these drugs are deliberately flying through Venezuelan airspace to avoid radar detection by either the Colombians or otherwise and certainly taking off from airfields in Venezuela? That is fair to say.

Ms. MADISON. What I think is always fair to say is that narco-traffickers will take the path of least resistance, and if there is a place where enforcement is not done, where there is not sort of a denial of use of airspace and where there is no official effort to block them, they will take it. The other instance where they can take it is when there is not capacity, which is also the case in some places.

Senator RUBIO. Well, Venezuela has the capacity to control its airspace. We have seen them do it when they have to.

The point being is one of the paths of least resistance—there are air flights leaving Venezuela with Colombian cocaine, a significant portion.

Ms. MADISON. As I said in my testimony—let me just reiterate—I think Venezuela is an enormous problem on the counter-drug issue. I think the fact that Venezuela does not work with us or its neighbors in the way that it once did is very damaging to the larg-

er effort to take these issues on in South America. It is why it is so important that we are working with the Colombians, working with the Peruvians. We brought Ecuador back online. In some respect, it is about the objective realities of a place like Colombia, but it is also about the failures in Venezuela.

Senator RUBIO. Well, I know there was a question asked earlier by Senator Menendez. The Deputy Secretary of State, Mr. Sullivan, has said on the record that Venezuela acts as a safe haven for criminal organizations, and he was referring to the ELN and these dissident FARC's. They are criminal organizations because what criminal enterprise were they involved in beyond murder and kidnapping and things of this nature?

Ms. MADISON. I mean, obviously, there is a narcotrafficking nexus into Venezuela.

Senator RUBIO. And if the Deputy Secretary of State is saying they have safe haven and the Colombians are saying the same also, we have these narcotrafficking organizations operating in Venezuela.

Ms. MADISON. I believe that is correct.

Senator RUBIO. I will tell you where I am getting at that point. So all this eradication stuff is important. And by the way, there was a direct correlation between the ending of the aerial eradication under a court order and the spike in production. And that was under a court order, and now I know they have worked through it.

The point I am trying to get at is all these things we are doing with the Colombians are important. What they are trying to do is important as well. But as long as you have two major drug trafficking organizations, if not more, operating openly with little to no formal resistance and often I believe—I think the evidence is clear—cooperation of a neighboring regime in a neighboring country, there is no way to deal with this. As long as there are these criminal elements operating with impunity across their border, trafficking these drugs, operating in this way, I do not know how we wrap the bow and really deal with this problem.

Ms. MADISON. I certainly think it makes it much harder, as I have said. I will say even at a time when we had more cooperation out of Venezuela, it was still absolutely critical that we were present and working with the Colombians and with others.

Senator RUBIO. Of course.

Ms. MADISON. But this is, most assuredly, not making it easier, and in fact, it is really undermining a lot of the good work that is going on.

Senator RUBIO. Well, not only do you have these narcotrafficking organizations operating out of Venezuelan territory, they also have as a side intent to overthrow the government of Colombia. And so you have these two things—I guess the point I am trying to raise is I personally do not believe—and I believe the evidence supports this—that we could ever truly address the production and sale and trafficking of cocaine out of Colombia without addressing the fact that these groups are operating with impunity from a neighboring territory, and the Colombians, right now anyway, cannot do anything about it because of what the implications of that would be.

I want to talk about the peace deal because I think it is important to bring some clarity into that.

One of the guys that showed up in the video the other day, by all accounts, certainly was not in Bogotá. So he was probably in Venezuela when he put out that video about how he is going to take up arms again. This is an individual who after the peace deal had been signed, after he had been handed a seat in congress, was caught, along with his nephew shipping 10 tons of cocaine. And he was indicted and the DEA went after him. His nephew is now a cooperating witness, so we are going to learn a lot more about all this. The guy, Santrich, was able to fight extradition, and then winds up on a video a few weeks later saying, "I am out of the peace deal because they are not being nice to me." He was a drug dealer, and he is a drug dealer after the peace deal was in place. And all of a sudden, the peace deal does not make sense.

Look, I guess we should have expected it because I imagine he took a major pay cut going from drug dealer to congressman. It was a huge pay cut I imagine. It was very lucrative to be in this business.

But I think it is important to point out that this peace deal that people now say is falling apart is not taking up arms because people are being mean, not that there are not problems in implementation—that is always the case. But many of these elements broke away initially because they do not want to give up the money that it produces. And this guy, after the deal was signed and he was supposedly a congressman, tried to ship 10 tons of cocaine, and the DEA went after him. So I think that is really important.

On the violence issue, you know, we have had seven candidates for local and municipal elections assassinated, and they were from different parties across the board. And there is all kinds of causation.

In fairness, President Duque announced, I believe yesterday or the day before, that he is providing security to some of these candidates. Some of it appears to be regional in nature, a regional dispute of some kind. Some may be related to these groups and so forth. You have a candidate that says they are for aerial eradication. All of a sudden, people are taking shots at you.

But what I want make clear is we are talking about violence against—certainly at least in this administration and the previous, we are not talking about the state. We are not talking about the army or the police assassinating these people. We are talking about political candidates and human rights activists being assassinated by paramilitary groups from the left, the right, gangs, the criminal gangs and the like. But just to be clear on the record, we are not talking about Colombian authorities murdering people. And I think the question is whether enough is being done to provide them protection.

I will wrap this all up in a second.

On the diplomacy front—I know that has been mentioned—last week, Mr. O'Reilly, is it not the case that the United States and Colombia, along with 10 other countries, invoked at the OAS the beginning process of raising what is commonly known as the Rio Treaty, which took a significant amount of diplomatic work. I know it was under-reported, but that took a lot of diplomatic work. And

I think one of the things that has been lost in a lot of the discussion about the region, because the focus is on U.S. policy, is I think a pretty unprecedented, certainly in the last decade, regional diplomatic commitment on this issue of Venezuela. Obviously, that impacts Colombia. Am I correct? There were 12 countries that helped bring that to the forefront.

Mr. O'REILLY. Yes, Senator, absolutely. And it took an immense amount of work, and most of that work was done by South Americans. We, of course, follow this closely. We are members of the Rio Pact. We are signatories to the Rio Treaty, and we are deeply engaged in this. But it was Colombian diplomacy. It was Chilean diplomacy. It was Brazilian diplomacy and many other governments besides, all working together to try to figure out how they can protect their interests. They are the ones who are receiving millions of people expelled by Nicolás Maduro into their territory. They are the ones who are having the health risks imposed on them by this migration and the security risks and the whole gamut of challenges.

Senator RUBIO. And I guess just to be fair, you can talk about other parts of the world and what role diplomacy has played in other parts of the world and other policy challenges. But when it comes to the issue of Venezuela and Latin America, I think it is truly under-reported and largely unknown that there has been significant diplomatic work done, honestly, with no modern precedent. If you look at the Lima Group that we are not even members of—we accompany them, we attend meetings, but that is a Latin American initiative that we have been fully supportive of, and of course, the work at the OAS, which has taken 2 years of consistent diplomacy by the United States, by others to get to that point. And that is an important thing to point out.

And I think the point that I am trying to make here is the following. One of the problems I have with U.S. foreign policy under administrations of either party is sometimes I worry that we are not good to our friends. We are sometimes nicer to adversaries than we are to friends. And that is troubling to me. You know, you are North Korea. You put people in camps. You do all these sort of atrocious things, and you get meetings. And you can fill in the blank and mention other places.

I do not know of any nation that has been more cooperative in this hemisphere on virtually anything we have ever asked them to do with us than Colombia. And if you look at what they are facing, it is pretty daunting. They have not one but two well-funded criminal organizations operating with impunity out of a neighboring territory without the cooperation of the regime that controls that territory. These drug trafficking organizations that want to overthrow the government have an ideological bent, but largely, even though they are Marxist, they apparently like money because they like selling drugs. And then you have your neighboring regime mobilizing troops. He says 150,000. That is maybe a bunch of people holding broomsticks, but he has got people and he is moving stuff and assets in the region and mobilizing it. You are facing 1.4 million migrants in the country, spending over \$1 billion a year on social services and on education and the like, on top of all the other challenges you have trying to develop your economy.

And by the way, all the donor stuff is important. Mr. Barsa, I do not know how much money the international community has given to this. But I also know that, for example, some neighboring countries, good friends at the OAS, are now requiring visas for the entry of Venezuelans, which only pushes even more Venezuelan migration towards Colombia.

This is an untenable situation that they are facing. They have got this pressure on eradication, pressure to deal with political violence, and on top of that, have to deal with the costs, \$1 billion or more a year, of dealing in a humane way with these neighbors that have come over, a hostile regime next door with equipment provided by Russian arms dealers and others, drug trafficking organizations not one but two that actually control territory and operate with impunity. This is a lot of pressure on one country.

And I know we have been very helpful, but I also think we need to recognize the sheer volume of challenges that face Colombia. And that does not mean that we cannot be critical and that does not mean we cannot point to things that they can be doing better. But I also think we have to be fair in acknowledging that they are facing an extraordinary array of challenges.

And I will end with this. It is very simple for these countries to go around and criticize Colombia on this, that, or the other. I do not know of any nation certainly in the world and even in this hemisphere that would tolerate or could tolerate for an extensive period of time armed elements operating with impunity from a neighboring territory without the cooperation of a regime that controls theoretically that territory and sit there with their arms crossed and do nothing about it. We would not tolerate it. We would not tolerate it. We would not ask anyone else in the world to tolerate it.

So I think it is really important for us—I am not saying any of you have not done this—but for everyone to recognize that the sheer volume of challenges facing Colombia knows no precedent in this hemisphere. None. And it is amazing in my view that they have been able to do what they have done up to this point given all these challenges hitting them all at once.

Senator CARDIN. Mr. Chairman, if I might. I certainly share your frustration.

The Venezuelan issue is not going to be resolved in the next couple weeks or next couple months. I think all of us had hoped that we would see a transition to a democratic, elected government by now. The circumstances in Venezuela have become more complicated because of the criminal elements and the outside support that the Maduro government has received. So it is a reality that we have to deal with. Today's hearing is on Colombia.

I could not agree with you more. The leadership of Colombia is dedicated to the principles that we have set out in Plan Colombia, and that is democracy, protection of human rights, peace, economic progress, et cetera. The capacity to deal with these issues is challenged because it has transitioned from a near-failed state to a state that is making great economic progress. But now you put into it the challenges presented by Venezuela that you have already mentioned, and then the burden of 1.4 million migrants, that is why I questioned earlier as to what we are doing and—Senator

Menendez—what the international community is doing in order to support the leadership in Colombia, to support the democratic process, the implementation of the peace process, the challenges related to the drug trafficking, and the circumstances of the border with Venezuela and the migrants. And as pointed out by our witnesses, they are moving in both directions and using Venezuela as a headquarters potentially for the resurgence of FARC elements to try to disrupt the peace process.

So I appreciate our governmental panel. This is sort of a transition to the next panel. I hope that the private panel will have some concrete suggestions for us as to how we can increase the capacity of Colombia to deal with these challenges and where the United States can play a critical part in making that a reality.

But I just really wanted to share your frustration as to the external factors that have made it much more difficult for Colombia that was on a path with obstacles now becoming even more challenging.

Senator RUBIO. And my last point on this is I would encourage, as I have privately and publicly, the administration to view our relationship with Colombia no longer simply in the vacuum of its own territory but all of those external factors that are facing it. It is in my view impossible to address the fundamental challenges we are talking about here today and not address the complexity created by the fact that some of the prominent groups behind many of the groups operate with impunity from a neighboring territory and a mafia acting as a government-under-arms controls that territory. So that is going to have to be addressed as part of this. There is no way to do one without the other.

So I appreciate all of you and the time you have given us here today. Thank you very much.

And we are going to call up our next panel. When we make that transition, I will introduce them.

And I appreciate again the time all of you have given us.

Our second panel: Christine Balling, Senior Fellow for Latin American Affairs at the American Foreign Policy Council; and Mr. Jason Marczak, the Director of the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center, Atlantic Council.

Probably a shameless plug here while we make this transition. Ms. Arsht—I do not know if she is still a resident of Florida. She was a longtime resident of Miami, Florida, and a big benefactor. I know she spends a lot of time here in Washington and has invested in the Atlantic Council's work as well.

So I want to welcome both of you here. Usually we have like four people on the second panel, and by the time I am done introducing everybody, it is all set up. But today we had to move much quicker.

Ms. Balling, we will begin with you. Thank you for being here.

**STATEMENT OF CHRISTINE BALLING, SENIOR FELLOW FOR
LATIN AMERICAN AFFAIRS, AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY
COUNCIL, WASHINGTON, DC**

Ms. BALLING. Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, members of the committee, thank you very much.

First, I would like to make a brief mention of my background as it relates to U.S.-Colombian relations.

For 6 years, I operated a nonprofit organization that promoted democracy and youth leadership in areas where the FARC and the ELN were recruiting young people. I worked closely with the Colombian armed forces and U.S. Army civil affairs teams downrange.

Additionally, in 2013, I was hired to serve as a subject-matter expert to the Special Operations Command South commander on demobilization and counter-recruitment issues. My work included interviewing newly demobilized FARC and ELN fighters and creating the Colombian army's first tactical guide for individual demobilization.

I have two specific recommendations as to how the U.S. can better help Colombia.

With regard to the Venezuelan refugee crisis, to date the Colombian people have been incredibly welcoming of the Venezuelan refugees. It is relatively easy for Venezuelans to obtain a temporary border card to enter Colombia and have access to emergency health services as long as they enter at an official border checkpoint and remain in the four of the departments bordering Venezuela.

However, as hundreds of Venezuelans seek refuge in Colombia every day, the Colombian authorities will need more assistance in order to maintain security and good relations with the civilian population.

To this end, the United States should increase funding for U.S. Army civil affairs efforts that support the Colombian army's acción integral teams in the border region. Acción integral teams work for and with the local communities. Their initiatives include relatively low cost community engagement and infrastructure projects. In addition to fostering a trusting relationship between soldiers and the people they protect, successfully executed acción integral projects lessen the influence of bad actors who rely heavily on civilian cooperation in their day-to-day operations. The more unstable a given area is, the easier it is for bad actors to wield influence and recruit from the local population.

For example, given their dire economic circumstances, Venezuelan refugees are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by bad actors, especially if they feel government presence is lacking. In some border areas, the Colombian army is all there is in terms of state presence. Therefore, it is crucial for a soldier to win the trust of the community by working alongside civilians to improve it. Additionally, unchecked xenophobia can destabilize a community to the point where it becomes a security issue. Executing acción integral projects that engage Colombians and their new Venezuelan neighbors could lessen tensions between them.

A note about improving Colombian army intelligence networks. No doubt members of our intelligence community have been working this issue, but it warrants a mention in this forum.

The United States should support the modernization of Colombian intelligence networks. Each Colombian army division has its own regional intelligence team known as a RIME. The RIME teams are highly effective in gathering human intelligence within their respective areas of operation. However, intelligence sharing mechanisms between army divisions and across other branches of the armed forces are lacking. If Colombian military intelligence is to be prepared for an increasingly complex security situation, continued

investment in overhauling existing databases and intelligence sharing networks is warranted.

I mentioned about the peace accord implementation. In 2016, when the Santos administration and the FARC representatives signed the peace accord, they did so knowing that implementing it as written would be very difficult to do. As an example, it was known that the Colombian Government could not fully finance it, as estimated costs over a decade are in the billions. It was also known that certain FARC fronts would never demobilize and that the highest ranking commanders might not be fully committed to abandoning their old ways.

As it happens, Iván Márquez and three other FARC commanders recently announced a renewed call to arms. Not surprisingly, these former peace negotiators blamed the Duque administration for failing to meet its accord-related commitments. Iván Márquez's call to rearm, based on deep-seated grievances, is a disingenuous and a mere excuse to return to narco-trafficking and other illicit activities. It is therefore crucial that a, quote, "FARC 2.0" be stripped of political legitimacy if indeed it turns to violence.

A note on the political situation. Unfortunately, the Duque administration's political rivals are also critical of its accord implementation efforts, going so far as to say that it is intentionally sabotaging the peace accord. The Duque administration must more effectively counter this narrative and publicize its successes while explaining how it is addressing the challenges.

In sum, Colombia continues to be one of the United States' strongest allies in the western hemisphere. While most Americans are not aware of what the United States and Colombia have accomplished together for the betterment of both our nations, I thank Chairman Rubio and the members of the subcommittee for dedicating a hearing to this important bilateral relationship.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Balling follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHRISTINE BALLING

PEACE ACCORD IMPLEMENTATION

In 2016, when the Santos administration and the FARC representatives signed the peace accord, they did so knowing that implementing it as written would be difficult to do. As an example, it was known that Colombian government cannot fully finance it, as estimated costs over a decade are in the billions.¹ It was also known that certain FARC fronts would never demobilize and that the highest ranking commanders might not be fully committed to abandoning their old ways.

As it happens, Iván Márquez and three other FARC commanders recently announced a renewed call to arms. Not surprisingly, the former peace negotiators blamed the Duque administration for failing to meet its accord-related commitments. Iván Márquez's call to re-arm based on legitimate grievances is disingenuous and a mere excuse to return to narco-trafficking and other illicit activities. It is therefore crucial that a FARC 2.0 be stripped of political legitimacy if it indeed turns to violence.

Unfortunately, the Duque administration's political rivals are also critical of its accord implementation efforts, going so far as to say it is intentionally sabotaging the peace accord. The Duque administration must more effectively counter this narrative and publicize its successes while explaining how it is addressing the challenges.

Notes

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-rebels/peace-will-cost-colombia-44-billion-over-10-years-senator-says-idUSKCN0HX1KC20141008>.

VENEZUEALAN REFUGEE CRISIS—SUPPORTING COLOMBIAN ARMY EFFORTS

To date, the Colombian people have been incredibly welcoming of the Venezuelan refugees. It is relatively easy for Venezuelans to obtain a temporary “border card” to enter Colombia and have access to emergency health services as long as they enter at an official border check point and remain in four of the departments bordering Venezuela. However, as hundreds of Venezuelans seek refuge in Colombia every day, the Colombian authorities will need more assistance in order to maintain security and good relations with the civilian population. To this end, the U.S. should increase funding for U.S. Army Civil Affairs efforts that support the Colombian Army’s acción integral teams in the border regions. Acción integral teams work for and with local communities. Their initiatives include relatively low cost community engagement and infrastructure projects. In addition to fostering a trusting relationship between soldiers and the people they protect, successfully executed acción integral projects lessen the influence of bad actors who rely heavily on civilian cooperation in their day-to-day operations. The more unstable a given area is, the easier it is for bad actors to wield influence over and recruit from the local population.

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IMPROVING COLOMBIAN ARMY INTELLIGENCE NETWORKS

No doubt members of our intelligence community have been working this issue, but it warrants a mention in this forum.

The United States should support the modernization of Colombian Army intelligence networks. Each Colombian army division has its own regional intelligence team—known as Regionales de Inteligencia Militar (RIME). The RIME teams are highly effective in gathering human intelligence within their respective areas of operation. However, intelligence sharing mechanisms between army divisions and across other branches of the armed forces are lacking. If Colombian military intelligence is to be prepared for an increasingly complex security situation, continued investment in overhauling existing databases and intelligence sharing networks is warranted.

In sum, Colombia continues to be one of the United States’ strongest allies in the Western Hemisphere. While most Americans are not aware of what the United States and Colombia have accomplished together for the betterment of both our nations, I thank Senator Rubio and the members of this subcommittee for dedicating a hearing to this important bilateral relationship.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF JASON MARCZAK, DIRECTOR, ADRIENNE ARSHT LATIN AMERICA CENTER, ATLANTIC COUNCIL, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. MARCZAK. Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, it is my privilege to address you on the critical importance of the U.S. partnership with Colombia.

First, I would like to thank you for your longstanding continued bipartisan support of Colombia, one of the United States’ strongest, most reliable partners in the entire world.

I will be summarizing my written testimony.

Colombia today shows how long-term U.S. commitment can pay incredible dividends, but as discussed today, it is facing major headwinds. Partnership with the United States at this moment is pivotal. We must double down to support our ally and capitalize on the broader potential of deepened U.S.-Colombia ties. The issues of historical focus must continue to be addressed: security, counter-

narcotics, human rights, among them. But Colombia is and can increasingly be a partner for the United States on issues ranging from trade and investment to partnering in solving other regional challenges.

It is for this reason the Atlantic Council's Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center convened our U.S.-Colombia task force, and I thank Senator Cardin and Senator Blunt for co-chairing this effort.

Today given rapid changes in the Western Hemisphere, U.S.-Colombia security, economic, and geopolitical interests are more intertwined than ever before. We work together to fight international drug trafficking and transnational organized crime while promoting democracy, rule of law, and economic prosperity in the region. Through its leadership in the Lima Group, Colombia is spearheading efforts to address the crisis in Venezuela.

While the ratification of the peace deal in 2016 represented the opening of a new chapter for Colombia, it has also led to new challenges, among them securing and directing the necessary financial resources to implement the accords, expected to easily surpass \$30 billion. The recent call to arms by Jesus Santrich and Iván Márquez, both former FARC commanders, marks a worrying new development in the accord's implementation.

As this subcommittee knows well, the regime of Nicolás Maduro is a direct threat to Colombia's peace and prosperity and that of the hemisphere and frankly the world. Maduro welcomes Colombian criminal groups with open arms and shelters FARC dissidents and the National Liberation Army, who engage in illegal gold mining and increasingly run their drug trafficking out of Venezuela. According to estimates from the Colombian Government, over 1,000 members of the ELN are currently in Venezuela. Colombian criminal groups have used the safe haven granted by the Maduro regime to regroup and rearm.

At the same time, Colombia is a primary recipient of the largest mass migration in Latin America's recent history, which I have seen in my numerous visits to Colombia. 1.4 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees had arrived as of June, with Colombian migration authorities now projecting that number could even reach 2.5 million by year end in a moderate scenario.

President Iván Duque has adopted a policy of complete solidarity toward Venezuelans, providing medical care, housing, and public education, among other services.

Still, more attention is needed to prevent a regional public health emergency that could eventually reach the United States.

These factors make it critical to develop a regional consensus on how to absorb the influx of Venezuelans. Recently Ecuador joined Peru and Chile in tightening entry requirements, thereby increasing the burden further on Colombia.

Additional international support, as previously discussed, is urgently needed. Colombia has received international funds that equate to about \$68 per migrant, a fraction of the \$500 to \$900 donated per migrant or refugee from Syria, South Sudan, or Myanmar.

Beyond the strains of Venezuela, the partnership will be further solidified as the United States supports Colombia's efforts to sta-

bilize territories, foster rural development, and advance its economic prosperity.

With the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement, the opportunities for mutually beneficial trade with our third largest export market in Latin America are enormous. Still, both countries must implement pending aspects of the TPA to expand market access and investment protections. These advances will also help to provide a counterweight to China's growing influence in Latin America.

The future Colombian economy can be unleashed through innovation and technology, as well as linking human capital to rural development. One area of opportunity is for Colombia and the United States to expand educational exchange programs.

A more modern agenda should also find new ways to promote rural development, build stronger institutions, and tackle the longstanding bilateral stress point, namely coca cultivation.

Weak institutions and lack of economic opportunities in rural areas serve as the breeding ground for coca cultivation and cocaine production, illegal mining, and environmental degradation, as well as the strengthening of criminal organizations.

To fully implement the peace agreement, Colombia will need the continued support of the United States and the international community.

At the same time, although overall levels of violence have decreased, a new wave of violence has been unleashed against human rights defenders, community leaders, and social activists. Working with the Colombian Government to stop such killings should continue to be a priority for the United States.

In conclusion, this is a critical moment to stand by Colombia. A strengthened and modernized partnership will provide the United States with an even stronger partner in the western hemisphere at a moment of great concern.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee today, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Marczak follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JASON MARCZAK

Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Cardin, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to address you this afternoon on the critical importance of the U.S. partnership with Colombia. My testimony will focus on opportunities for deepened collaboration with Colombia at this critical moment for the country and the hemisphere.

Thank you for your longstanding, continued bipartisan support of the Colombian people and of Colombia—one of the United States' strongest, most reliable partners in the Western Hemisphere and the world.

Colombia today is a success story of how long-term U.S. commitment can pay incredible dividends. Twenty years ago, many feared that Colombia, then-embroiled in violence, was on the path to becoming a failed state.

Fast forward and Colombia is now one of the greatest success stories, but one that is facing major headwinds. A peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2016 is in the midst of implementation, but today faces new threats including those emanating from the deteriorating situation in Venezuela. Colombia faces two additional challenges: the flow of millions of Venezuelan migrants and refugees across its border and Venezuela increasingly being used as a safe haven for criminal organizations that threaten Colombia and the hemisphere. The support of the United States at this moment is pivotal: we must double-down to support our ally and capitalize on the broader potential of deepened U.S.-Colombia ties.

The new challenges—and opportunities—faced by Colombia makes it imperative that we advance a new, modernized blueprint for the U.S.-Colombia partnership. The issues of historical focus must continue to be addressed: security, counter-narcotics, human rights, among them. But Colombia is and can increasingly be a partner for the United States on issues ranging from trade and investment, to partnering in solving other regional challenges. Still, Colombia is at a crossroads.

The leadership of this subcommittee and the U.S. Senate will thus be imperative. It is for this reason that the Atlantic Council's Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center convened the second phase of our U.S.-Colombia Task Force, with the findings to be released next week. I thank Senator Cardin and Senator Blunt for co-chairing this important effort. I will thus focus the rest of my testimony on three items that draw from our findings: Colombia's role as a strategic U.S. partner; Venezuela's multi-pronged impact; and opportunities to deepen and modernize the relationship.

COLOMBIA AS A STRATEGIC U.S. PARTNER

The U.S.-Colombia relationship is one of the greatest U.S. foreign policy successes over the last two decades. The two nations have jointly worked together to create a mutually beneficial partnership that has successfully safeguarded U.S. and Colombian national security interests. Today, given rapid changes in the Western Hemisphere, our security, economic, and geopolitical interests are more intertwined than ever before.

The partnership is far-reaching. We work together to fight international drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, while promoting democracy, the rule of law, and economic prosperity in the region. Colombia also contributes security expertise in Central America, Afghanistan, and a number of countries in Africa and is NATO's only global partner in Latin America. Through its leadership in the Lima Group, Colombia is spearheading regional efforts to address the crisis in Venezuela, and will certainly play a pivotal role in eventual post-transition efforts.

Although the relationship is longstanding, the announcement of Plan Colombia in 1999 marked a sea change in the bilateral ties. Over the next two decades, the United States provided more than \$11 billion to aid the Colombian government to strengthen state capacity and institutions, decrease coca crops, and fight the FARC and other illegal groups that profited from drug trafficking. This model is one that should be looked at for replication in other hotspots. U.S. financial support and technical assistance were fundamental, but, in the end, Colombia contributed more than 95 percent of the total investment in Plan Colombia.

While the ratification of the peace deal in 2016 represented the opening of a new chapter for Colombia, it has also led to new challenges. Among them, securing and directing the necessary financial resources to implement the accords, expected to easily surpass \$30 billion. As well, although the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies notes that implementation is underway in 70 percent of the accords' commitments, uneven implementation is widely seen among the six pillars of the accord. An issue of great concern is the almost 300 percent increase in 2018 in victims of antipersonnel mines and explosive devices over the previous year. Also, the recent call to arms by Jesús Santrich and Iván Márquez, both former FARC commanders, marks a worrying new development in the accords' implementation.

The Colombia of 2019 is far removed from that of two decades earlier, making Plan Colombia one of the United States' most successful foreign policy initiatives in recent memory. We must protect this investment to ensure that Colombia has the needed support as it faces new challenges. Colombia's pivotal role as a regional leader in advancing security and prosperity means that Colombia's success is directly tied to U.S. success.

VENEZUELA'S MULTI-PRONGED IMPACT

The political, economic, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela is an external threat to Colombia—and to the Western Hemisphere—of the size and scope not previously seen. The regime of Nicolás Maduro is a direct threat to Colombia's peace and prosperity and that of the hemisphere. Maduro welcomes Colombian criminal groups with open arms and shelters FARC dissidents and the National Liberation Army (ELN) who engage in illegal gold mining and increasingly run their drug trafficking out of Venezuela. According to estimates from the Colombian government, over 1,000 members of the ELN are currently in Venezuela. Colombian criminal groups have used the safe haven granted by the Maduro regime to regroup and rearm.

The freedom to operate in Venezuela has provided Colombian criminal groups with new opportunities to launch attacks into Colombia. In February 2019, 22 young

cadets were killed by a car bomb at the Colombian Police Academy, an attack ordered by ELN commanders from Venezuelan territory. Last month Iván Márquez announced a “new phase of the armed struggle” in a video that Colombian authorities believe was filmed in Venezuela.

The cooperation between the Venezuelan regime and Colombian illegal groups seems to have increased recently. According to leaked Venezuelan intelligence documents, Colombia’s rebels are actively trained and armed in Venezuela, including in the use of weapons such as high-tech Russian shoulder-mounted antiaircraft missiles. Further, according to the Colombian newsweekly *Semana*, ELN and FARC dissidents are helping Venezuela to identify high-value military targets inside Colombia.

At the same time, Colombia is the primary recipient of the largest mass migration in Latin America’s recent history. With 1.4 million Venezuelan migrants in its territory as of June 2019, Colombia is the primary destination for Venezuelans. Estimates from Colombian migration authorities project that in a moderate scenario, up to 2.5 million Venezuelans could be living in Colombia by year end. That number could reach as high as 3.5 million Venezuelans—an unprecedented wave of migrants and refugees by global standards.

President Iván Duque has adopted a policy of complete solidarity toward Venezuelan migrants, providing medical care, housing and public education, among other services.

In the last 2 years, more than 340,000 Venezuelans were treated in the Colombian health system, over 29,000 pregnant women gave birth at no cost, 156,000 Venezuelan children and youth were enrolled in publicly funded schools, and 62,000 Venezuelans had access to public protection programs and child and family welfare services. Recently, the government granted nationality to 24,000 children born to Venezuelan parents in Colombian territory.

Still, more attention is needed to prevent a regional public health emergency that could eventually reach the United States. Malaria, chagas disease, dengue, zika and other dangerous infectious diseases are prevalent in Venezuela and could rapidly spread throughout the hemisphere.

The Colombian response has not only been humanitarian. A long-term solution to the current migration crisis includes giving legal status to Venezuelans and integrating them into the labor force. Almost 700,000 migrants have received temporary protected status, which provides them with legal status and facilitates their access to legal employment opportunities, healthcare, and education. These measures are critical so that migrants can achieve economic self-reliance and contribute to the Colombian economy.

However, a regional consensus on how to absorb the Venezuelan influx is necessary and urgent. Recently, Ecuador joined Peru and Chile in tightening entry requirements, therefore increasing the burden on Colombia. This crisis is a regional problem and cannot be borne by Colombia alone. Colombia’s generous response to the massive influx of Venezuelan migrants and refugees should be viewed as a model for countries around the world.

Naturally, the Venezuelan migration crisis is placing significant strains on Colombia’s economy. According to the World Bank, the estimated economic cost for Colombia in 2018, not including infrastructure and facilities, reached 0.4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), or the equivalent of \$1.5 billion. But the number of refugees has increased since then, and today the Colombian government estimates that the cost of providing health care, schooling and other services to Venezuelans will be 0.5 percent of GDP.

Additional international support is urgently needed. In the last 2 years, Colombia has received approximately \$150 million per year in assistance from the global community—10 percent of what is needed. Colombia has received international funds that equate to approximately \$68 per migrant—a drop in the bucket compared to the \$500 to \$900 donated per migrant or refugee from Syria, South Sudan, and Myanmar. A U.N. call for \$738 million from the international community has turned up less than a third of the money sought, with the United States contributing the lion’s share.

The continued flow of Venezuelans to other countries in Latin America, and precisely to Colombia, is not sustainable. Fiscal costs will peak in 2020 as a result of Colombia’s efforts to provide migrants and refugees with access to quality healthcare, education, housing, and other basic needs. These costs represent a major economic strain for a country working to implement a peace agreement and seeking to secure institutional control over all its territory.

A DEEPENED AND MODERNIZED U.S.-COLOMBIA PARTNERSHIP

The interests of Colombia and the United States are closely linked. The new U.S.-Colombia partnership should recognize this reality, and capitalize on the opportunities that this represents. The partnership will be further solidified as the United States supports Colombia's efforts to stabilize territories, foster rural development, and bring about a sustainable democratic transition in Venezuela. Economic and diplomatic ties will also be strengthened as both countries work together to support the eventual reconstruction of Venezuela and to advance stability in other parts of the region, particularly in Central America.

With the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA), the opportunities for mutually beneficial trade are enormous. The United States is Colombia's largest trading partner and Colombia is the United States' third-largest export market in Latin America behind Mexico and Brazil. Still, both countries must implement pending aspects of the TPA to expand market access and investment protections.

Additionally, strengthened trade and investment between Colombia and the United States will help to provide some counterweight to China's growing influence in Latin America. Over the last 20 years, trade between China and Latin America has multiplied 18 times, from \$12 billion in 2000 to \$224 billion in 2016. Today, China is the largest trading partner for Chile, Peru, and Brazil, and, in the case of Colombia, China has become its second-largest export partner.

The future Colombian economy should also prioritize innovation and technology as well as linking human capital to rural development. One area of opportunity is for Colombia and the United States to expand educational exchange programs via scholarships, grants, exchange programs, and joint research. About 8,000 Colombians study in the United States every year—with an economic impact of \$302 million—and approximately 236 of them receive full scholarships through the Fulbright Program. Expanding opportunities for postgraduate training of Colombian students in the United States would make a direct contribution to the development of human capital and economic development in Colombia, which would benefit shared U.S.-Colombia interests.

A more modern agenda should also find new ways to promote rural development, build stronger institutions, and tackle the longstanding bilateral stress point, namely coca cultivation. Office of National Drug Control Policy figures released in June 2019 show a slight drop in coca production from 209,000 hectares in 2017 to 208,000 in 2018. Those numbers must continue to drop. President Duque has prioritized coca eradication and counter-narcotics efforts overall, with the expectation of a continued downward trend in coca cultivation.

Weak institutions and lack of economic opportunities in rural areas affect both Colombia and the United States. These conditions serve as the breeding ground for coca cultivation and cocaine production, illegal mining, and environmental degradation, as well as the strengthening of criminal organizations, all of which affect the well-being of Colombian citizens as well as U.S. national security interests.

Devoting the necessary effort and resources to implement the peace agreement is critical as is bringing to justice those who are in stated violation of the agreement and intend to return to conflict. To fully implement the agreement and devote the necessary resources to capacity building, local governance, and alternative economic development in rural areas, Colombia will need the continued support of the United States and international community. This is especially true in the midst of ever-growing fiscal strains resulting from Colombia's commitment to continue to support the growing Venezuelan migrant and refugee population. The U.S. Senate has historically risen to the occasion to provide resources at critical moments for Colombia.

The need to double-down on rural development is exemplified by the fact that many of the communities that believed the end of the FARC meant the arrival of the state are experiencing fierce battles between different criminal groups competing over illicit rents. More than 25 illegal armed groups, with a total of about 7,000 members, operate in the country today. The August 2019 call to arms by Iván Márquez reinforces the critical importance of meaningful reintegration of ex-combatants and attention to unmet needs in rural areas, which are the parts of the accord most behind in terms of implementation.

At the same time, although overall levels of violence have decreased in Colombia, a new wave of violence has been unleashed against human rights defenders, community leaders, and social activists. Estimates of the total number of murders vary across sources, but Colombia's Ombudsman's Office reports 317 victims from January 2016 to April 2019, most of whom were peasants, Afro-Colombians, or indigenous persons. Working with the Colombian government to stop such killings should continue to be a priority for the United States.

In sum, this is a critical moment to stand by Colombia. It is vital for the long-term interests of Colombia, the United States and the whole region. A strengthened and modernized U.S.-Colombia partnership involves deepening bilateral trade and investment, promoting rural development in Colombia, cooperating to find a solution to the world drug problem, and finding a peaceful solution to the Venezuela regional crisis. This multi-pillar focus will help catapult Colombia to the next stage of prosperity and provide the United States with an even stronger partner in the Western Hemisphere at a moment of great concern.

Thank you, once again, for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today. I look forward to answering your questions.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

The ranking member.

Senator CARDIN. Well, thank both of you.

You heard our discussion during the first panel. Mr. Marczak, your point about the international community's support for the migrants from Venezuela in Colombia is eye-opening. It is shocking. \$68 per migrant versus \$500 to \$900 for the Syrian crisis.

We cannot do this by government alone. We are going to have to have help from the private sector. That has been underscored. In the Council's work, that has been one of our key points.

What should we be mobilizing to help Colombia on the migrant issue so that they can make the progress they need to in regards to their economy, in regards to dealing with drug issues, in regards to dealing with implementing the peace process?

Mr. MARCZAK. Well, thank you, Senator Cardin, for that question.

As mentioned in the earlier panel, the question of an international donor conference for Colombia is fundamental. This is one of the recommendations in our report is that more analysis is needed on specifically—

Senator CARDIN. We have got to get countries to attend.

Mr. MARCZAK. You got to get the countries to attend. And the numbers that are out there right now—the World Bank estimate of how much it costs Colombia, .4 percent of their GDP—that only takes into account the short-term needs that Colombia is doing, the short-term housing, the education. It is not the long-term needs that Colombia will have to bear to absorb the millions more that could potentially be coming from Venezuela. It is pivotal that the United States and the international community work with member countries to provide that support and convene donors to really focus on the importance of this crisis in Colombia.

At the same time, what is critical is to help Colombia in a number of other areas. One of those is data gathering and collection and of other collection techniques. The Colombians are trying to find for two different types of data collection efforts: one on data gathering to facilitate integration; another data gathering for security, knowing who is crossing the border, getting sensors, getting drones at the border.

On the first point—

Senator CARDIN. Well, on that point, I invite both of you to respond. The Chairman raises a very valid point. How do you maintain a stable government when you have a border country that is harboring your terrorists, the FARC rebuilding? You said monitor the border. I wanted to stop you on that because maybe that is part of the answer to deal with the FARC presence in Venezuela coming back into Colombia. Is that viable?

Mr. MARCZAK. Thank you, sir. Yes. The Colombians can tremendously benefit from increased U.S. support through technology to strengthen its border, drones, sensors. The FARC, the ELN in particular, are frequently crossing back and forth across the Colombian-Venezuelan border. They have impunity. Dictator Nicolás Maduro and Venezuela grants them that impunity, and they use that impunity to target Colombian sources, to launch attacks in Colombia, and then go back across that border. So the more that the United States can do to facilitate strengthening that border—we are not going to be able to put soldiers across that entire border, but we have the technology to be able to help the Colombians.

Senator CARDIN. Let me ask both of you. We applaud Colombia having an open border so Venezuelans can escape the horrific humanitarian crisis and find safe haven in Colombia. We noticed more countries in the region are requiring visas. They are starting to close their border. Is Colombia right to keep the open borders? We wanted them to, but from an internal security point of view, are they right to do that?

Ms. BALLING. Well, first I would say one of the wonderful things about the Colombian people is that they are actually quite grateful to the Venezuelan people for when, during the time of, for example, Pablo Escobar, there were thousands of Colombians that had to resettle in Venezuela. So there is an unusual amount of good will between the two peoples.

As Mr. Marczak said, unfortunately, the Colombian military is not capable of shoring up the border, in part because the topography makes it impossible. Drones are certainly a good suggestion.

I think until the Colombian people no longer have the will to welcome their Venezuelan neighbors, the Colombians are doing the right thing. And as both Senators have suggested earlier, it is quite remarkable because they are essentially standing alone because, as you say, the other neighboring countries are requiring visas.

So as I mentioned in my testimony, at least for a short-term solution, I think helping the Colombians manage the security situation in those specific four departments that border Venezuela could definitely make an impact.

Mr. MARCZAK. Can I just emphatically say that the Colombian model is a model to the rest of the world. The way that the Colombians are treating migrants and refugees should be broadcast around the world as an example of what you do in a situation like this, the welcoming of millions, and not just welcoming them, not just providing health care and housing and education services, but actually giving them the status so that they could actually formally work inside Colombia, the recent granting of Colombian nationality to children of Venezuelan parents born inside Colombia, and looking at the Venezuelan migrant/refugee situation as not about people who are going to go back the next day, but looking at how do they incorporate these people into their society.

Senator CARDIN. I agree completely with you. They should not be penalized. They should be rewarded, and that is why we are all frustrated there has not been more international support for the burden that they are bearing with open borders. But I agree with you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RUBIO. So a couple points here to tie this up.

It is a complex situation with the migration, number one. There is actually a substantial number of Venezuelans that also hold Colombian citizenship, predating the migration. So that is a factor.

The other is clearly—you know, it is interesting. If you went back 25 years, it was the reverse. It was the Colombians going into Venezuela. And so I think that gratitude has played a role in this reception.

But there are indications—and I am not being critical. It is a natural reaction of any country that—we saw it very quickly happen in Peru. We saw it very quickly happen in Ecuador. There is a natural tendency at some point in time for it to begin to create fractures and pressures inside of a society. So I am not prepared to say that there is an emerging xenophobia, but there are the beginning signs that the support for this migration has begun to sort of flag a little bit among the general population in Colombia as more and more of this burden is being fully felt. And that is something to be concerned about. Is that your assessment as well?

Mr. MARCZAK. I agree with that assessment, Chairman. I think that this is a phenomenon, as you correctly state, throughout the world, just recently on a trip to Colombia, seeing a news broadcast and seeing the people being labeled as Venezuelans when a particular crime was committed. And I think that that further reinforces the need, as talked about in today's subcommittee hearing, for additional international and U.S. support for Colombia at this critical moment. Colombia just does not have the fiscal resources to be able to implement the peace accord, deal with FARC and ELN attacks coming from Venezuela, and at the same time provide services and integration for millions of Venezuelans that are crossing its border.

Senator RUBIO. Is that your assessment as well?

Ms. BALLING. Yes, that is my assessment absolutely. As I said, I think that these types of specific civil affairs efforts that U.S. SOUTHCOM and U.S. SOC SOUTH could execute could really help with that because, yes, I have heard that the tensions are beginning to worsen and unfortunately, of course, among the poorest of Colombia's citizens.

Senator RUBIO. And I do not raise to be critical—

Ms. BALLING. No, no. It is just natural.

Senator RUBIO. And to add to it though, I also do not want people to take for granted that what we have now is forever, that this is some sort of a permanent thing that we can accept. I do think that there is the potential at some point for this situation to take a different direction if it continues for much longer.

I do want to say, because it has been mentioned a couple times—and I do not know if this has been noted by others and I failed to do so. But there was a donor conference convened I believe by our mission at the OAS with Ambassador Trujillo and others a few months ago. And I think there was \$100 million pledged, which is 10 percent or less of what the annual cost is. I am not sure how much of that \$100 million ultimately came in, but the lion's share—and I think it was noted in your testimony, Mr. Marczak. The lion's share of the international contribution has been U.S. dol-

lars. I forgot the number. It is about \$300 some odd million at this point, about \$375 million or so—U.S. assistance.

Mr. MARCZAK. That is correct, Chairman. And of that \$100 million pledged at the OAS conference, only a fraction of that money has actually come to fruition.

Senator RUBIO. And then the U.N. put out a call as well, and I think a very small reaction to that as well. So there have been efforts. It is not fair to say there have not been efforts. There have been efforts to step up. But frankly, we as policymakers do not like it. We complain about it, but we are going to have to do a lot of this ourselves if we want it done. And that is why this hearing is so important. We can sit here and hope that others will step up, but ultimately we have to make a decision about whether it is in our national interest to do so or not. And I hope after this hearing today that we can convince more of our colleagues of that.

A side note because I do not want to forget to ask. You mentioned, Mr. Marczak, the Free Trade Agreement. I do not know what the numbers have been the last couple years, but for some substantial period of time, there was actually a trade deal we ran a surplus on of trade. I do not know if those numbers remain that way, but it is a pretty good deal for the U.S., in essence. It is certainly very good for Miami where I live and in south Florida and in Florida at large. But it is actually a real success. We talk a lot about Plan Colombia, but one of the real successes of our relationship has been the trade opportunities that it has created. So I do not know what the numbers are. Maybe one of you do, but I know for a while it was a surplus. It may still be the case.

On the military and the border, one of the interesting things is for all of their reputation of being militant and I see descriptions of Duque as more with a firmer, harder hand than Santos. And I think the people who say that often use it to criticize him. They have actually deliberately avoided sending military units to the border. For example, when the effort was made to bring in humanitarian assistance across the border into Venezuela, it was police units that they deployed. And one of the reasons why is the fear that if they deployed military units to the border, it could inflame tensions and lead to a military escalation. And they have also shown tremendous restraint. I think there is clear evidence that not only was tear gas and other things fired into Colombian territory, but there were even intrusions by some of the national guard elements. So I think they have shown tremendous restraint.

And I say that only because there is a challenge there between—and it is something that may need to happen, but if you stand up and bulk up a military presence on the border, there are some that will accuse that of being militarization, in essence, a provocative act in response. And I do not know if any of you have sort of thought through that or what the international reaction to that would be. Colombians are sensitive to it.

Ms. BALLING. Yes, absolutely, Chairman. And forgive me for repeating myself. That is why these very specific forms of, quote/unquote, “military presence” are crucial. So that is one of the functions civil affairs teams serve. And that is one of the missions of acción integral is to essentially actually present the military as an extension of the state as a protector of democracy, but not in an

offensive, aggressive way. And these specific programs actually are the programs designed to show the citizens that they do not look at the national police and the army as aggressive invaders and so forth. It is nuanced. But that is why I feel very strongly about backing these specific programs.

Senator RUBIO. And I do not disagree. I think one of the challenges people are unaware of is when the peace deal came into being and FARC elements would pull out, immediately other criminal elements would step in and now begin to fight. And some of the violence that we keep hearing about are these different criminal elements saying, hey, there is a vacuum there now. It is like if a gang abandons a neighborhood. So these four other gangs start fighting over who now inherits that territory. And that has also been a challenge to the state in dealing with that reality as well.

And then clearly in many of these areas that have not had a government presence for a significant period of time, people grew up in a culture and society where government forces coming in were viewed as hostile. And so changing that perception is important.

I think one of the things I had hoped would come from this hearing is one of the things that you talked about—I think both of you really have alluded to—and that is we really do need to upgrade and update. You know when you get that alert that your app has a new update? We really do need to update this relationship because it now faces a set of challenges that extend beyond Colombia's border. And frankly, I am not sure that our current programs, as they are currently constructed, fully address the full spectrum of those challenges.

Obviously, we will await the work that you have done along with Senator Cardin and Blunt, which I guess you will announce a review on next week?

Mr. MARCZAK. Next Thursday.

Senator RUBIO. And is that one of the things you have looked at, what that update to the app looks like?

Mr. MARCZAK. Yes. This is a refresher. This is the app 2.0. And it is how to provide for a modern blueprint for a U.S.-Colombian partnership.

Senator RUBIO. Because one of the things that I have spoken to the National Security Council about, I have spoken to the Department of State about to some extent about is we really do need a more holistic approach to this that involves the use, for example, of the OAS, which I think has been reinvigorated in a role that it reinvigorated. And that has been positive. It looked at how our existing programs coincide.

But at the core of it is the argument I consistently make, and that is it is impossible to simply focus on Colombia as a challenge that exists within the confines of their own border. It is impossible to deal with these issues that we are discussing as long as there is a mafia acting as a government in a neighboring country cooperating and, in some cases, potentially training and harboring criminal elements who have among their stated intent the overthrow of your government. And I think about what nation on earth could sit there and permanently tolerate that groups hostile to the government and prepared to carry out armed attacks and killings is operating with impunity and you are basically sitting there unable to

do anything about it. I think that is an intolerable situation that eventually has to come to a head one way or the other.

And so ideally it would be a regional response to it. Perhaps the beginning of the Rio discussion will convince more countries in the region that this is a regional response that needs to happen to this.

But I just do not know ultimately how we solve any of these challenges that we are discussing as long as—no matter how much they eradicate coca, no matter how much we fund the migrant situation, all these things will help. But as long as there are these armed criminal groups operating with impunity, I do not know this gets substantially improved. I do not know how you solve this problem without dealing with that specific part of the problem.

Mr. MARCZAK. Chairman, if I may. I fully agree.

First, the task force report, which I look forward to sharing with you that will be coming out next week, looks at not only the challenges of Colombia being beyond Colombia's borders, but also frankly the opportunities that Colombia brings. Colombia is a regional and a global leader on security assistance. Colombia is a regional leader on economic prosperity, on democracy promotion. And Colombia frankly is the regional leader through the Lima Group and working to solve the Venezuela crisis.

I think as you pointed out beforehand with regard to the influx of Venezuelans to Colombia, the illegality of what is occurring in Venezuela will only continue to grow the longer that Nicolás Maduro stays in power. The more that he is squeezed, the more he is going to continue to resort to illegal groups and illegal sources of funding. And that illegal source of funding, arms trafficking, illegal gold trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering—this is what is helping to keep the regime afloat, among other issues. And that needs to be curtailed or else he will continue to resort to illegality and to the FARC and ELN and other groups as his supporters.

Ms. BALLING. Yes. I would say one good thing is now that the peace accord has been signed, there is no longer what was, I think, an incredibly high level of political pressure to have that deal signed at whatever cost. Now, as a result in my opinion, there were certain things that perhaps were somewhat more permissive than they could have been with the FARC. Be that as it may, it has been signed. I think it is crucial for the U.S. and Colombia now to be very pragmatic without the burden of the political pressure of signing a deal with a terrorist organization with regards to the security situation. So I actually look at this as a positive.

Senator RUBIO. Look, I know there is a lot of talk about—people love to talk about the deal because I think, for whatever reason in our culture, we view deals as the answer to every problem. The problem is deals are only as good as compliance. And in a deal with a criminal organization, even if 80 percent of them comply, that is still a lot of armed people. You had FARC dissidents almost from the beginning. And then you had these other criminal groups that stepped into the vacuum. You still had to deal with the ELN, which was not part of the deal. And then you saw what happened when one of them decided we want to sell drugs again, and you went after them. They claimed you are violating the deal as if somehow it gave them impunity to act.

So I think it is important to understand that—and by the way, we also need to point out that that deal failed in a national referendum in Colombia. It never had the buy-in of the population. It required Santos to go through the legislative process and twist arms to get the votes for it.

But, look, that is a sovereign issue for them to determine. We are here to help them either way.

I do want to say this one more point, and that is, you talk about the economic opportunities. But when someone says to you we are going to harm the state, we are now at war with the state and they are going to try to harm you, that is not just about shooting at them. It is about going after their economy. And these criminal elements know that one of the best ways to go after the Colombian economy and harm them as an attractive place for investment is to carry out attacks in urban centers, which we have not seen in quite a while where they used to be commonplace back in the day. It is what the cartels did. When Escobar wanted to pressure the government to provide him whatever it is he wanted at that point, which I think was just impunity and amnesty, he blew up airplanes. He blew up newspapers. He attacked in the urban centers.

And so I do not think it is far-fetched that at some point in the near future, Colombian authorities are going to be aware of efforts to carry out attacks in urban centers being organized, orchestrated, and perhaps financed from the territory of Venezuela.

And I want people to put yourselves in their shoes for a moment. Imagine the United States was aware that there was a terrorist organization somewhere in the world plotting to attack and carry out attacks in our cities. We would go after them in that territory, and no one could say anything to us about it. We have a right to defend ourselves.

And I do not know if policymakers and those who cover this have been sufficiently socialized the fact that no matter what we are talking about here today, that is something that I think is going to happen at some point here. There will come a point where if these people are serious about waging war against the state, they will try to conduct and may even carry out successful attacks similar to what we saw in the police academy but at a much higher rate. And I do not know what people are prepared to say or do about when Colombia turns to the world and says this is unsustainable for us. We have to do something to stop this. And we have a regime next door that is unwilling to do anything about it. We are going to have to take it upon ourselves, and what response that would elicit and what that could mean and what would unfold.

I do not know if either of you have given thought to that contingency, which I think is not a far-fetched one. In fact, I think it is a likely one.

Mr. MARCZAK. Chairman, I think a couple of things.

One is I think it highlights as well the importance of implementing the peace accords in Colombia, the attention to rural development in Colombia, because as you state, the FARC and the ELN are using Venezuelan territory as an opportunity to regroup, rearm, identify targets within Colombia.

But at the same time, there are vast swaths of Colombian territory, as part of the peace accords, that need to be developed. And that goes from creating alternative economic models, not just crop substitution, but actually creating new economic models in rural territories. It involves state capacity in rural territories. It involves interconnectivity. It involves building secondary, tertiary roads. It involves bring electricity: all of these different factors that can convert rural territories from being areas where illegal groups or criminal organizations thrive to ones where there is actually a state presence and a thriving economy. So I would like to add that into part of the equation here: the need for a multidimensional strategy and the need for U.S. support for Colombia in implementing that.

Senator RUBIO. And I agree 100 percent. There is nothing bad, and a lot of good comes from winning the hearts and minds of people who have not had interaction with the government in many cases their whole lives.

But that does not stop a criminal organization who is plotting to detonate bombs in Bogotá operating from Venezuela and then using a porous border to insert those terrorists into the country to carry out these attacks. And you are the Colombian authority sitting there. You see this is about to happen, and you want to stop it before it does. And maybe you can intercept them at the border. Maybe your informants on the ground will tell you these guys are coming over because you have a better relationship with them. But maybe you have to go after them.

And I am not saying that is going to happen tomorrow morning. I am just that is where I think this leads, knowing how these things work and knowing how these particular groups work. Is that something you have looked at or talked about?

Ms. BALLING. Yes. So again, actually roads are a huge issue. I mean, that is definitely something that keeps the poor rural Colombians isolated. And by the way, when it comes to building the roads, it is their army corps of engineers. And unfortunately, they have in the past had problems because the perception of them by the population is that they are aggressive and so on. So that is again an example of when, unfortunately, sometimes it is the army that is really the only representative of the state.

Whether the FARC is operating geographically beyond its border or in, unfortunately, any of the myriad areas of Colombia where it is very difficult to access them, it underscores the importance again of intelligence. As you might remember when the DAS imploded, that was a significant blow to the Colombian intelligence system in general. So I think that, again, if we could take a close look at how to improve that because from what I experienced, having interviewed scores of FARC, some commanders and some civilians—they were not, since the 1990s, motivated by ideology. It was whether they were forcibly recruited or—well, it is really the fact that they can make more money, as you pointed out, trafficking drugs, et cetera.

So in terms of intelligence effectiveness of weakening a given group, that is the good news. In other words, I think actually the ELN, despite their smaller numbers, is far more ideologically motivated and therefore perhaps a little bit more difficult to penetrate

when it comes to HUMINT. But I do think that with a renewed focus on intelligence gathering, that this is a way that we could help the Colombians combat what could be advantage now if Maduro is in fact letting these commanders sit in his back yard.

Senator RUBIO. And I just have two wrap-up comments, not even questions, although if you have a comment, I would welcome it.

The first is we talked about the border. You look at a map, and there is a line, but that is not really how this works. It is largely an ungoverned swath of people coming across all the time in areas. And part of it is the topography makes it difficult. Part of it is the lack of a state presence in some of those places because the cost of maintaining a human presence there is quite high. You have people shooting back at you. So I think that is important. A lot of people do not realize it. It is a border, but it is a geographic border with coordinates and the like. But it does not function in that way. It really is more of an ungoverned corridor space and parts of it because it is really difficult both because of the topography and also because of the violence and other things and even resources.

And the last point I would make is—I do not want to misstate this either—that if tomorrow morning Maduro gets on an airplane and flies to Havana and retires, that this all goes away. The transition in Venezuela is not going to be this linear, one-day-to-the-next issue even in the best case scenario. Even if tomorrow morning, Juan Guaidó was able to rightfully assume control of the apparatus of the state, there is reason to believe that for a substantial period of time, the Venezuelan state under new leadership would not have the capacity to deal with some of these matters. In fact, one of the biggest concerns I would have in the short term is the sheer volume of people currently wearing police and army uniforms that would quickly abandon their posts because of the fact that they are only there now either because they receive some small benefit that the general population does not or because of what happens to defectors and their families when they do leave.

So my point is that this Venezuela problem, even if tomorrow there was a political transition that began and it was ideal, you still have a host of other capacity and societal challenges. You have armed elements, the colectivo groups in Venezuela that certainly work for the state and operate at the direction of the regime, but who are criminals that are not just going to all of a sudden decide to go in to open a chain of car washes or laundromats.

So this is really complicated. I do not want to simplify the long-term challenges that Venezuela poses when you have upwards of 4.5 million to 5 million people in your population, when your entire infrastructure is destroyed. This is a long-term commitment we have on our hands here even beyond what we are facing here today.

Well, thank you both for being a part of it. We look forward to seeing that report. I know Senator Cardin is going to get all the credit for it, so that is good.

[Laughter.]

Senator RUBIO. Blunt too.

Senator CARDIN. Let me read it first. Then I will see.

Senator RUBIO. Yes.

Do you have anything else?

Senator CARDIN. No. Again, I thank the witnesses, and I really do thank the Task Force that has been set up. I do look forward to their report. I think it can be very helpful to us.

Senator RUBIO. And unfortunately, we are talking more about the hemisphere because of these challenges. But I think we have talked more about the hemisphere in the last couple years than we ever have. So even today with the attendance of the chairman and you saw the ranking member, who has had a long commitment, stay, you saw the attendance on the minority side, so I think it is good that there is more conversation happening about the region. And unfortunately, it is because of these challenges. But I do hope we can build some real momentum and that your report and other products that are put out could serve as sort of a blueprint that policymakers could take and begin to implement.

All right. Well, I want to thank you both for your patience and time. It has been a longer hearing than we anticipated but I am glad it has been because it is an important topic and one I care a lot about. Just as a side note, we have tried to have this hearing now for a few months. We struggled to get people to sit there on the first panel for a while, but it all worked out. The second panel was ready to go for a long time. But we got there and we are happy about that. Again, we thank you for being here.

The record will remain open for 48 hours after the close of this hearing.

With that, the hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 5:15 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

THE COMMITTEE RECEIVED NO RESPONSE FROM MR. JASON MARCZAK FOR THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Question. How can we further deepen the U.S.-Colombia trade and investment relationship?

[No Response Received]

Question. Coca crops are cultivated in areas with vastly different topographies. What would a more differentiated approach look like for U.S. assistance that takes into account this reality?

[No Response Received]

