

H. Res. 564

In the House of Representatives, U. S.,

October 2, 2007.

Whereas murder rates have been increasing throughout Central America in recent years;

Whereas in 2005, the estimated murder rate per 100,000 people was roughly 56 in El Salvador, 41 in Honduras, and 38 in Guatemala;

Whereas the February 2007 murder of 3 Salvadoran legislators from the Central American parliament and the subsequent murder in prison of the Guatemalan policemen linked to the crime clearly illustrated to the international community the threat posed by violence in Central America;

Whereas a May 2007 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) makes the case that Central American countries are particularly vulnerable to violent crimes fueled by drug trafficking and corruption because they are geographically located between the world's largest drug producing and drug consuming countries;

Whereas 90 percent of the cocaine shipped from the Andes to the United States flows through Central America and thus contributes to increased violence on the Central American isthmus;

Whereas Central American governments and United States officials have attributed a large proportion of the rise in violent crime in Central America to youth gangs, many of which have ties to the United States;

Whereas UNODC estimates that there are 69,145 gang members in Central America;

Whereas on June 7, 2005, the Organization of American States (OAS) passed a resolution to urge member states to support the creation of holistic solutions to the gang problem;

Whereas Guatemala has experienced a surge in female murders during the past 3 years, with many of those murders allegedly committed by drug traffickers and other organized criminal groups;

Whereas violence between partners, particularly violence by men against their wives or girlfriends, is widespread in Central America and an International Violence Against Women Survey comparing selected countries in Africa, Latin America, Europe, and Asia found that 60 percent of women in Costa Rica—often considered the least violent country in Central America—reported having experienced domestic violence during their lives;

Whereas the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a briefing and hearing on June 26, 2007, on violence in Central America;

Whereas the Guatemalan government and the United Nations signed a groundbreaking agreement in December 2006 to establish the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) which was approved by the country's legislature on August 1, 2007;

Whereas the Central American Integration System (SICA) is an inter-governmental organization formed in 1991 comprised of the following member states: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama;

Whereas the Dominican Republic participates in SICA as an Associate Member State;

Whereas SICA and the United States held their first ever Dialogue on Democratic Security in Guatemala City from July 16 through 18, 2007, which focused on gangs, drug trafficking, and arms trafficking;

Whereas SICA and the United States signed an agreement at this meeting to improve intelligence sharing and policing and to institutionalize dialogue on regional security;

Whereas this meeting was the first time in almost a quarter century that high level officials from the United States and all 7 Central American countries and the Dominican Republic have met formally to discuss security issues;

Whereas United States Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Thomas Shannon announced at this meeting the United States Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico designed to prevent youth from entering gangs and strengthen the fight against gang-related violence and other crimes;

Whereas Assistant Secretary Shannon recognized at this meeting that youth gang delinquency “has profound social roots and our way of fighting it cannot only be through policing”;

Whereas the United States pledged \$1,000,000 at this meeting to help Central American governments draft a re-

gional strategy to fight youth gangs and drug trafficking and \$3,000,000 to fund rehabilitation programs for youths in gangs; and

Whereas an enhanced political commitment and cooperation between the United States and Central America on security issues can help curb violence in Central America: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That it is the sense of the House of Representatives that—

(1) crime and violence pose an increasingly serious threat to peace and stability in Central America;

(2) officials from Central America and the United States should be commended for holding a historic meeting to discuss regional security strategies;

(3) the announcement on July 18, 2007, of the United States Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico should be commended;

(4) the President of the United States should follow through on commitments made in the United States Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico with concrete actions;

(5) the commitment of funds by the United States to fight youth gangs in Central America is an important step forward and greater resources should be considered in the future to fight this problem due to its severity and its transnational nature; and

(6) Central American and United States officials should be encouraged to meet on a regular basis to further cooperation in combating crime and violence in Central America.

Attest:

Clerk.