



MERIDA INITIATIVE “PLAN MEXICO” FACT SHEET

The Merida Initiative, also known as Plan Mexico, was defined by former President George W. Bush as a “new security cooperation initiative” between Mexico and the United States to combat drug trafficking and organized crime.

While the stated goals of the Merida Initiative are to “produce a safer and more secure hemisphere and prevent the entry and spread of illicit drugs and transnational threats,” **the reality and repercussions of the initiative for the Mexican people are not as promising.**

- As originally envisioned by former President Bush, the Merida Initiative/Plan Mexico would allocate **\$1.4 billion** to Mexico over two to three years, a ten fold increase in U.S. military and police aid to Mexico over 2007 levels.
- Of the **\$400 million** signed into law by Bush for fiscal years 2008 and 2009, approximately **\$333 million** had been released by the end of 2008.
- In **March 2009**, President Obama signed **\$300 million** more into law for Merida Initiative funding as part of the 2009 Omnibus Spending bill.
- The release of **15%** of these funds depends on a State Department report regarding **4 Human Rights requirements** conditioned by the U.S. congress for Mexico to fulfill. These include improving the transparency and accountability of federal, state and municipal police; ensuring that civilian authorities are investigating and prosecuting members of police and military forces who have been credibly alleged to have committed human rights violations; engaging in consultation with Mexican human rights organizations; and enforcing the prohibition of testimony obtained through torture.
- The funds released will go to military aircraft and towards drug interdiction equipment and training; these resources are intended for Mexican military and federal police forces. Members of the Mexican Congress have complained about the lack of transparency related to the how these funds have been dispersed up to this point.
- With the change in administration in the U.S., shifts in Congress, the changing circumstances in Mexico, and with more focus on particular issues such as gun trafficking into Mexico from the U.S., it is still unclear how much will be requested for the **Fiscal Year 2010** budget.

The Merida Initiative ignores two major root causes of drug trafficking: U.S. demand and poverty in Mexico.

- Widespread drug use in the U.S. makes drug trafficking highly lucrative for organized crime. In Mexico, where 50 million people live in poverty and minimum wage is approximately 5 dollars per day and many (perhaps most) people don't even make that, it is little wonder that organized crime and drug traffickers find easy prey amongst Mexico's poor.
- U.S.-designed trade policies, such as NAFTA, perpetuate poverty. Deeply impoverished and unemployed people in Mexico have only three options for survival: migration, tenuous and often dangerous work in the informal economy, and crime—which may include drug-running. As long as U.S. policies generate poverty and unemployment, our government will be working at odds with its own counter-narcotics initiatives.





- **Not one penny** of Plan Mexico money is dedicated toward drug prevention or rehabilitation programs in the U.S., essential to efforts to reduce demand for drugs in the U.S.

The Merida Initiative affects all Mexican people by threatening their human rights.

- According to a renowned Mexican human rights center, “Past experience has shown policies like the Merida Initiative to be financially costly and to broaden the mandate of military operations, violating the human rights of civilians, all the while failing to achieve sustainable gains in human security.”
- Counter-narcotics operations in Mexico have a documented history of human rights abuses. Over the past year, Mexican soldiers have committed serious offenses during anti-narcotics operations, most notably in Las Guacamayas and San Jeronimo, small towns in the state of Michoacan, where soldiers beat, tortured, and sexually abused villagers who merely share the same last name as a wanted drug-trafficker. In the Apatzingan municipality in the same state soldiers detained 8 people, including a minor, subjecting them to cruel and degrading treatment for 15 hours. Soldiers also arbitrarily entered private residences without court orders and robbed citizens of their property.
- As recently as fall 2006 and summer 2007, federal and state security forces violently repressed peaceful demonstrations in Oaxaca. Many Mexican groups fear that the U.S. training and equipment would be used to further repress legitimate citizen protest.

Mexican civil society opposes the Merida Initiative:

“[In 2007] the army committed severe human rights violations in their supposed counter-drug operations. We are concerned that the funding from the U.S. government will ultimately make this situation worse.” --*Espacio Civil (coalition of 52 Oaxaca civil society organizations)*

“The Merida Initiative, as we see it, is the U.S. implementation of its broader security agenda. It is the visible manifestation of secret negotiating under the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America...It is part of plans to further criminalize social protest, something that is already a fact of life in Mexico.” --*Miguel Pickard, Center for Economic and Political Investigation for Community Action*

“The Merida Initiative is characterized by a lack of a human rights perspective, a human security approach that mistakes the security of states for the security of human beings...It is time for the international community to stop supporting short-sighted policies such as this one.” --*Miguel Agustin Pro Juarez Human Rights Center*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Sign up at www.witnessforpeace.org for Witness for Peace e-mail action alerts to stay informed on this and other policy issues concerning Latin America.
- Become more involved with Witness for Peace! Go on a delegation, check out activities in your region, stay connected as we constantly keep an eye on U.S. policy initiatives in Latin America.

Special thanks to the Latin American Working Group (LAWG) for helping with information in this fact sheet

