

Witness for Peace



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THE MÉRIDA INITIATIVE

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The Mérida Initiative, also referred to as Plan Mexico, is described by the U.S. Department of State as an “unprecedented partnership between the United States and Mexico to fight organized crime and associated violence while furthering respect for human rights and the rule of law.” The reality of the Mérida Initiative, however, is something entirely different.

Introduction

The Mérida Initiative was introduced in October 2007 and began in Fiscal Year 2008; Congress appropriated almost \$2.5 billion to Mérida Initiative programs over the next seven years. In FY2016, it is estimated that \$139 million went to funding the Initiative.¹

The Merida Initiative identifies a four-pillar strategy that was reaffirmed by U.S. President Barack Obama and Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto in 2013.² The four pillars include 1) disrupting organized criminal groups, 2) institutionalizing the rule of law, 3) creating a 21st century border, and 4) building strong and resilient communities.³ The realities of the Merida Initiative are a failure.

Unfulfilled Commitments

The Initiative emphasizes the shared responsibility of both Mexico and the U.S. in organized crime and violence, and most (not all) of those activities have their origin in the drug trade. Thus, the U.S. government “pledged to address domestic drug demand and the illicit trafficking of firearms...to Mexico.”⁴ Yet those commitments have not been fulfilled.

The U.S. has been unsuccessful in the war against drugs; according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, illicit drug use (including illegal drugs, marijuana, and prescription drug abuses) increased from 8.3% in 2002 to 9.4% of the population in 2013.⁵

The presence of U.S. firearms in Mexico is a two-part dilemma:

1) 70% of firearms seized by Mexican authorities between 2009 and 2014 came from the U.S, and most were purchased from licensed dealers and pawnbrokers in states along the southwest border with Mexico.⁶

Most firearms seized in Mexico are transferred illegally from the U.S. to Mexico,⁷ and a new method of

transfer has more recently emerged: weapons *parts* are transported across the border, which eliminates federal reporting requirements and makes tracing them more complicated.⁸ The Department of Justice’s Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) and the Department of Homeland Security’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) pledged in a 2009 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to collaborate in order to combat firearms trafficking, but they have not established the mechanisms needed for monitoring that MOU, thus gaps in responsibilities and information sharing undermine its integrity.⁹

2) The United States Department of Defense (DOD) provides a significant number of arms to Mexico for carrying out missions of the Mérida Initiative, but those arms are routinely used against innocent civilians. In 2015, the DOD provided \$4.8 million in “excess defense articles” (unused U.S. military equipment), to Mexico, as well as \$4.67 million in Foreign Military Funding, which provides military equipment and training.¹⁰

Human Rights in Mexico

Human rights abuses are prevalent in Mexico, in large part due to the ongoing militarization of Mexican security forces by the U.S. Between 2011 and May 2016, 3139 human rights violations were committed against human rights defenders alone.¹¹

The U.S. Department of State's 2015 Mexico Human Rights Report issued a significant amount of data that supports its conclusion that "the most significant human rights-related problems include law enforcement and military involvement in serious abuses, such as unlawful killings, torture, and disappearances. Impunity and corruption in the law enforcement and justice system remained serious problems."¹²

Despite claims that strict conditions on the release of Mérida Initiative funding are tied to human rights reports, the aid is often released without human rights standards being established or met.¹³ The high-profile U.S. State Department decision to withhold \$5 million from Mexico in 2014 due to human rights violations¹⁴ had minor implications when considered as part of a \$110 million budget (the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement budget for Mexico, 2015).¹⁵



Solutions

WFP has a clear conclusion that a militarized approach to addressing the drug trade is a complete failure. Current U.S. drug policy stems from a failure to recognize the roots of the drug trade: U.S. demand and the devastating poverty that drives people to grow and sell drugs. We call on the United States government to redirect Mérida Initiative funds to prioritize drug abuse prevention, addiction treatment and poverty reduction.

Take Action

- 1) Sign up at WitnessForPeace.org for action alerts and to stay informed on policy issues concerning Latin America.
- 2) Join a Witness for Peace delegation to Mexico and participate in Witness for Peace activities in your region.
- 3) Contact your elected representatives, and share your thoughts about Latin America policy.

WORKS CITED

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