

News from ***Congressman Eliot Engel***

Representing the Bronx, Westchester, and Rockland Counties
Offices in the Bronx, Mount Vernon and West Nyack
2161 Rayburn HOB, Washington, DC 20515

Contact: Eric Jacobstein or Jason Steinbaum, 202-226-9980
For Release: Tuesday, June 9, 2009

ENGEL CALLS FOR GREATER U.S. SUPPORT TO HELP GUATEMALA CURB VIOLENCE AND IMPUNITY ***Chairman of the House Western Hemisphere Subcommittee Holds Hearing on Guatemala***

Washington, D.C. – At a hearing today entitled “Guatemala at a Crossroads,” Congressman Eliot Engel – the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere – is calling for greater U.S. support to help Guatemala confront increased violence from illegally armed groups and Mexican drug cartels. Rep. Engel says that “Mexican cartels have moved more aggressively than ever into Guatemala, a country with weaker institutions than its neighbor to the north.”

Guatemala has a long history of violence and one of the highest murder rates in Latin America. In a report to the Guatemalan Congress, the country’s Human Rights Ombudsman noted that 2008 was the “bloodiest year of our history” with 6,292 homicide victims. Illegally armed groups, drug cartels and youth gangs are contributing to spiraling violence. On May 18th, a priest from the United States living in Guatemala – Lorenzo Rosebaugh – was brutally killed during a robbery.

At today’s hearing, Rep. Engel is calling on the Obama Administration to take three concrete steps:

- (1) Continue to focus Merida Initiative efforts on police training and reform, including an increase in the number of U.S. government permanent staff and detailees offering expertise in areas such as crime scene protection and evidence collection.
- (2) Build on current U.S. support to the U.N. International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) by providing detailees to the CICIG from the FBI and other U.S. agencies to offer investigatory expertise and help the CICIG build up its witness and victim protection programs.
- (3) Intensify our focus on the prevention side of youth gang violence.

Witnesses at today’s hearing include Eduardo Stein (former Vice President and Foreign Minister of Guatemala), Anita Isaacs (Benjamin R. Collins Professor of Social Science at Haverford College), Mark Schneider (Senior Vice President at the International Crisis

Group and former Director of the Peace Corps), and Stephen Johnson (former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Western Hemisphere Policy).

Following the session, testimony can be read and the proceedings can be viewed at <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/subcommittees.asp?committee=8>

The following is Chairman Engel's opening statement at today's hearing:

"I am pleased to welcome you to today's hearing on Guatemala. Recent media attention on Latin America has focused overwhelmingly on President Calderon's battle against Mexico's drug cartels. Meanwhile, Mexican cartels have moved more aggressively than ever into Guatemala, a country with weaker institutions than its neighbor to the north. Last Thursday, 3,800 bullets and 563 grenades that were seized from Mexican cartels in Guatemala in April were determined to have originally been the property of the Guatemalan army. In the April seizure, police also found eight anti-personnel mines, 11 M60 machine guns, bulletproof vests and two armored cars.

"Drug-related violence in Guatemala unfortunately complicates an already difficult situation. Guatemala has a long history of violence, and one of the highest murder rates in Latin America. In a report to the Guatemalan Congress, the country's Human Rights Ombudsman noted that 2008 was the "bloodiest year of our history" with 6,292 homicide victims. Illegally armed groups, drug cartels and youth gangs are contributing to spiraling violence. On May 18th, a priest from the United States living in Guatemala – Lorenzo Rosebaugh – was brutally killed during a robbery. It's time to say "enough is enough."

"Last month, I sent a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton urging her to focus greater attention and resources on Guatemala. While I am pleased that the Merida Initiative includes funding for Central America, I believe that much more must be done to support our partners in Central America, and particularly Guatemala.

"In my letter, I outlined three key areas where the United States can intensify our support for Guatemala. **First**, we must continue to focus Merida Initiative efforts on police training and reform. This should include an increase in the number of U.S. government permanent staff and detailees offering police training in areas such as crime scene protection and evidence collection. **Second**, since its creation in 2007, I have been one of Congress's strongest supporters of the U.N. International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), an independent body created with the support of the Guatemalan government to investigate the country's serious problems of organized crime and clandestine security networks. We need to build on current U.S. support to the CICIG. This means providing detailees to the CICIG from the FBI and other U.S. agencies on a case-by-case basis to offer investigatory expertise, as well as helping the CICIG to build up its witness and victim protection programs. **Third**, there needs to be a greater focus on the prevention side of youth gang violence.

"My hope is that today's hearing will serve as a call to action for all of us to help our friends in Guatemala to emerge from the current cycle of violence and impunity.

“The challenges that Guatemala faces should serve as a stark reminder that we must develop a more holistic strategy to combating drugs and violence in the Western Hemisphere than currently exists. As we focus more intensely on Guatemala, let us not lose sight of history. Each time we work with our partners in the Americas to go after drug cartels and drug-related violence, the cartels inevitably move on to the next country. A more holistic approach means not simply fighting yesterday’s battles, but also looking ahead to vulnerable countries like Honduras. Finally, as I have said time and time again, a more holistic approach means doing more within our own borders to curb our country’s demand for drugs and to stop the illegal trafficking of weapons that fuel violence throughout the region.

“I would be remiss not to mention the tragic May 10th murder of Guatemalan lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg. For those of us in the international community, the murder of Rodrigo Rosenberg and the allegations surrounding his death should not become an exercise in finger pointing. Instead, we must support the CICIG as it carries out its investigation. Rosenberg’s murder and the political chaos that it has created only reinforces the need for a stronger justice system and an end to impunity in Guatemala.

“I am now pleased to introduce our distinguished witnesses. Eduardo Stein is the former Vice President and Foreign Minister of Guatemala. Anita Isaacs is the Benjamin R. Collins Professor of Social Science at Haverford College. Mark Schneider is the Senior Vice President of the International Crisis Group and a former Director of the Peace Corps. And, last but certainly not least, Stephen Johnson is a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Western Hemisphere Policy.

“With that, I would like to call on the Ranking Member for his opening statement.”