

News from **Congressman Eliot Engel**

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ENGEL CHAIRS HEARING ON THE CARIBBEAN BASIN SECURITY INITIATIVE

*Chairman of Western Hemisphere Subcommittee Calls for Strong U.S. Support for
Caribbean*

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Eliot Engel, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, is holding a hearing today on the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative.

At today’s hearing, Chairman Engel states his strong support for increasing “assistance to the small and vulnerable countries of the Caribbean” in order to bolster security in the region.

Rep. Engel points out that the level of violence in the Caribbean “is higher than that of any other region of the world. Aside from the human toll that crime has on society, it also acts as a barrier to development and investment, directing more resources to security and away from social improvement, thus fueling a vicious cycle that only encourages more crime.”

Chairman Engel is one of Congress’s strongest supporters of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, a program announced by President Obama at the Summit of the Americas to strengthen cooperation on security with countries in the Caribbean.

Witnesses at the hearing include Julissa Reynoso (Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, U.S. Department of State), Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith, Ph.D. (Provost & Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, York College, The City University of New York), Anthony P. Maingot, Ph.D. (Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Florida International University), and Stephen Johnson (Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Western Hemisphere Affairs).

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

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

“I am pleased to welcome you to today’s hearing on the Caribbean Basin Security

Initiative and to welcome Julissa Reynoso, the new Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Caribbean, Central American, and Cuban Affairs, to what I hope is her first of many appearances before this Subcommittee. I am also sure your Bronx roots will help lay the ground for a great working relationship with this Subcommittee.

“Today’s hearing provides an excellent opportunity to highlight the security concerns of the Caribbean. So often, the region’s problems get overlooked except as a vacation spot or when there is a crisis.

“As Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, the Caribbean has been a high priority for me, and I have been a strong proponent of making sure the Caribbean is at the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda. Not only do I have many constituents in my congressional district of Caribbean heritage, including many from Jamaica, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, but I firmly believe that a strong bond with our friends in the Caribbean benefits the entire region.

“I was proud to lead the official Congressional delegation to the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago in April, where I met with the leaders of most of the Caribbean nations. I strongly support President Obama’s initiative to strengthen cooperation on security with our neighbors in the Caribbean. Above all, I agreed with his message that we need to listen to our Caribbean friends build on their strengths in areas they see as important.

“That is precisely what we must do to bolster the security of our Caribbean neighbors – enhance what works while creating new avenues for partnership. I know that security is the top concern of many Caribbean leaders, and we must not delay. Prime Minister Manning of Trinidad and Tobago expressed to me a strong willingness to deepen security cooperation with the United States and hoped that resources and attention from Washington, DC would follow our positive rhetoric. Now is the time for us to increase security assistance to the small and vulnerable countries of the Caribbean. What we need is an approach to security in the Caribbean that is cooperative, sustained, and well-resourced while working in coordination with existing efforts in the Western Hemisphere, like the Merida Initiative and the Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI).

“According to statistics released by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime and Interpol in 2007, the overall Caribbean murder rate of 30 per 100,000 is higher than that of any other region of the world. Aside from the human toll that crime has on society, it also acts as a barrier to development and investment, directing more resources to security and away from social improvement, thus fueling a vicious cycle that only encourages more crime.

“I saw this during a recent congressional delegation to Jamaica – a country with an alarmingly high murder rate. In my meeting with Prime Minister Golding, he stressed that 90% of the illegal guns confiscated in Jamaica come from the United States. President Calderon of Mexico reported similarly alarming trends. It is for this reason that the U.S. needs to ratify the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing

of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials. This treaty has been stalled in the Senate and directly targets illegal arms smuggling -- an issue of great consequence for the Caribbean and the rest of the hemisphere.

“Ever since becoming Chairman of this Subcommittee, I have become increasingly concerned about the effectiveness of U.S. counternarcotics efforts in the Americas. We must not only work with our partners in the region to stem the supply of illicit drugs, but we must increase efforts to reduce demand here, at home. Most importantly, we must figure out what works and what does not. I am, therefore, pleased that just yesterday, the House of Representatives passed my bill to create a Western Hemisphere Drug Policy Commission to evaluate the U.S. counter-narcotics strategy in the hemisphere. It is my hope that the work of this Commission will support our efforts to work with CARICOM nations on the scourge of drugs.

“I also believe that we need to take a holistic view of the entire region when we begin implementing CBSI. I am very concerned that if we do not act quickly to bolster our friends in the Caribbean, the positive impact of the Merida Initiative in Mexico and Central America will push the drug trade further into the Caribbean and increase the already alarming rates of violence.

“In implementing CBSI, we need to make sure our approaches with the Merida Initiative and the Andean Counterdrug Initiative work together to combat the drug trade and insecurity throughout the region. It makes little sense for all three efforts to work in the Western Hemisphere without coordination. This is why I have added a section to legislation which has passed that House establishing a Coordinator at the State Department for the Merida Initiative and I am calling for an executive branch coordinator at the State Department to oversee and manage our counternarcotics programs in the Americas.

“Since CBSI was announced at the Summit last April, there have been three meetings held on this initiative. Initial U.S.-Caribbean meetings were held in Suriname, Barbados, and the Dominican Republic in 2009, and a ministerial meeting is expected to take place in Washington in early 2010 at which a political declaration, action plan, and framework for the CBSI will be adopted. We must quickly move forward on this initiative and produce more detailed planning on the shape of CBSI. I also think that at next year’s meeting in Washington for President Obama should meet with the Caribbean leaders. This meeting would not only demonstrate support for CBSI, be it would go a long way toward showing our Caribbean friends that the United States stands shoulder to shoulder on the challenges we face together.

“I would like to commend President Obama for announcing \$45 million of initial funding for CBSI when he was at the Summit of the Americas. However, I am disappointed to learn that only \$37 million will be appropriated. I believe we have to find the remaining \$8 million to meet this important obligation to the Caribbean.

“It’s hard to generalize about a diverse region like the Caribbean, but we all can agree

that insecurity is a common threat to every nation in the region. These threats - drugs, gangs, violent crime, criminal organizations, and even natural disasters – are magnified by poverty, corruption and limited opportunities. What is most important is that, through CBSI, the United States demonstrates to the nations of the Caribbean that we will listen to your concerns about your security, learn from your experiences, and respond tangibly, effectively, and cooperatively to the situation you face everyday.

“While it is hard for any program to be an absolute solution to all the significant security problems found in the region, I think CBSI is a good step in the right direction, and I am looking forward to learning more about the initiative today.

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