

**Counselor of the Department of State, Ambassador Thomas A. Shannon  
Testimony to Senate Appropriations Committee, July 10, 2014**

Madam Chair, Mr. Vice Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you on the President's supplemental budget request to address the increase in child and adult migration from Central America in the Rio Grande Valley areas of the southwest border.

It is an honor to appear before you with the Secretaries of Homeland Security (DHS) and Health and Human Services (HHS), as well as Director Osuna from the Justice Department, to describe the supplemental budget request, and to explain how we would use the proposed funding to address the migration crisis unfolding on our southwest border.

My esteemed colleagues have laid out the dimensions of this crisis, and its impact on existing resources at DHS, HHS, local law enforcement agencies, state humanitarian and disaster response teams, municipal and state governments, and on local communities as they face an unprecedented surge in attempted migration to the United States by unaccompanied children.

We are facing an acute crisis on our southwest border, as tens of thousands of children leave Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador to travel through Mexico to the United States. Driven by a mix of motives and circumstances, these children are fleeing their homelands in search of their parents, better life opportunities, and, in some cases, safety from violence and criminal gang activity.

The human drama of this migration is heightened by the nefarious role of smuggling operations. Smugglers exploit these children and their families, preying on their desperation and hope, while exposing the children to grave dangers, abuse, and sometimes death as they move the children along a journey of more than one thousand miles.

You have heard of the efforts made by DHS and HHS to apprehend, screen, process, place, and in some cases return these children. You have also heard of the resource and infrastructure challenges we face along our southwest border. The need for additional funding to meet these challenges is great, but such funding is necessary to ensure that these children, an especially vulnerable class of migrant, are treated in a humane and dignified fashion as we enforce our laws and meet our international obligations.

I would like to describe to you our diplomatic efforts to address this phenomenon, and to highlight how supplemental funding would be used along with existing resources to address the factors that are driving children from their homes in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

## The Problem

Migration by unaccompanied children is not a new phenomenon. It has ebbed and flowed for some time. However, what has changed is the size of the migration and the source countries. In the past, most children migrating illegally to the United States were Mexican nationals. Under existing law, these children could be returned to Mexico through expedited removal. In 2008, we returned 34,083 unaccompanied (Mexican) children to Mexican authorities. Vigorous enforcement of our laws, new forms of law enforcement partnerships with Mexico through the Merida Initiative, and efforts by the Government of Mexico to address the factors driving such migration helped reduce the number of unaccompanied children from Mexico who were apprehended attempting to enter the United States.

As you are well aware, this decline has been offset by a surge in unaccompanied children migrating from Central America. While we have witnessed an increase in such migrants from Central America over the past several years, more than 50,000 unaccompanied children from Central America have been apprehended along our southwest border this fiscal year. Of these migrants, nearly three-quarters are males between the ages of 15 and 17 years of age.

Efforts to understand the drivers of this migration by the United Nations High Commission of Refugees, NGOs, and information collected in interviews conducted by Customs and Border Protection officials highlight the mixed motives behind this surge in Central American migration. For the most part, these children have abandoned their homes for a complex set of motives that combine a desire to be with their parents and pursue a life of greater opportunity and wider possibility. Underlying some of this migration is a fear of violence in their home communities, and a fear that criminal gangs will either forcibly recruit or harm them.

In short, this migration trend is the product of economic and social conditions in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. A combination of poverty, ineffective public institutions, and violence have combined to push these children from their homes and to begin an arduous and dangerous journey.

While the United States has been the primary destination of these migrants, largely because family members are already here, the impact of the migration has been felt throughout the region. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees has identified a more than 400 percent increase in asylum requests made by unaccompanied children from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador in neighboring countries.

To address the challenge posed by the migration of unaccompanied children, we have fashioned a five-part strategy designed to stem the flow of migrants, screen them properly for international protection concerns, and then begin timely repatriation. This strategy consists of:

- One: Establishing a common understanding of what is happening and why between the United States, the three source countries -- Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador -- and the major transit country, Mexico.
- Two: Fashioning a common public messaging campaign to deter migration, especially by children. This campaign highlights the dangers of migration, but also counters misinformation or smugglers seeking clients.
- Three: Improving the ability of Mexico and Guatemala to interdict migrants before they cross into Mexico and enter the established smuggling routes that move the migrants to our border.
- Four: Enhancing the capacity of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to receive and reintegrate repatriated migrants to break the cycle of migration and discourage further efforts at migration.
- Five: Addressing the underlying causes of migration of unaccompanied children by focusing additional resources on economic and social development, and enhancing our citizen security programs to reduce violence, attack criminal gang structures, and reach out to at-risk youth.

This strategy is a cooperative effort defined by collaboration between the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. It is a new approach to address migration issues that reflects the growing ties and common interests created among our countries by demographics, trade relations, and increased security cooperation.

So far, our diplomatic outreach has created a common understanding of the problem of migration by unaccompanied minors and the responsibility of all the countries to address it. President Obama's outreach to Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto, Vice-President Biden's trip to Guatemala to meet with the leaders of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, Secretary Kerry's meeting with these leaders in Panama during the inauguration of the incoming Panamanian president, DHS Secretary Johnson's trip to Guatemala to meet with President Perez Molina, Under Secretary of State Sarah Sewall's trip to Honduras, and my own engagement with the Foreign Ministers of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras were all part of intense engagement over the last several weeks.

Our engagement has also allowed us to fashion a common public message that has received support from the highest levels of government in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. For example, the visits of the First Ladies of these countries to the southwest border to meet with unaccompanied children, and their subsequent public statements urging their compatriots not to send their children north or expose them to smugglers have echoed powerfully in their countries. Combined with public messaging campaigns by our Embassies, the governments of these countries and Mexico, we have helped create a new and dynamic debate about illegal migration that undermines efforts by smugglers to entice young people into migration through misinformation about the risks of the journey and the benefits they will supposedly receive in the United States.

The announcement of Mexican President Pena Nieto of a new Mexican southern border strategy was a welcome step towards improving Mexico's ability to exercise greater control along its border with Guatemala. Announced in the presence of the Guatemalan president, this initiative is a manifestation of a new willingness to work together along their border. To match this level of cooperation, we are working to provide support to Mexico's southern border initiative and intend to provide \$86 million of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) funds, and we are working with Guatemala to improve its border controls, with special focus on building joint task forces that link all agencies with responsibility for border control.

In regard to repatriation and reintegration, Vice President Biden announced during his trip to Guatemala \$ 9.6 million to improve the ability of the source countries to increase the number of repatriated migrants they can receive and assist in their reintegration.

Our work in Mexico through the Merida Initiative, and in Central America through the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), has allowed us to build the relationships, understanding, and capacity to help the Central American source countries to address the underlying causes or drivers of migration by unaccompanied children. Our development assistance work conducted by USAID has also allowed us to build new assistance partnerships that can be turned to helping our partner countries address the economic and social development issues that also contribute to migration.

### The Supplemental Request

The success we have enjoyed so far, while important, is not enough to stem completely the migrants moving towards our southwest border. The supplemental request, although focused largely on addressing resource and infrastructure issues along our border, also has an important component focused on the work I have described. The \$300 million request allocates \$5 million on public diplomacy and messaging, and \$295 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF) on an initiative broadly grouped under the headings of prosperity, governance, and security.

The \$125 million directed toward prosperity would focus on improving economic opportunity and creating jobs, improving customs and border controls to enhance revenue collection and economic integration, and investing in energy to reduce the cost and improve access to energy as a driver of economic growth.

The \$70 million requested for governance would focus on improving public sector management, fiscal reform, and strengthening the independence, transparency, and accountability of the judiciaries in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. The purpose of these funds would be to promote rule of law, attack corruption, and enhance the efficiency and efficacy of government.

The \$100 million requested for security would focus on expanding community based program to reduce youth crime and violence, expand national police capacity, attack gangs and organized crime, promote prison reform, and enhance migrant repatriation capacity. These funds would allow us to work with our partners to improve citizen security and address the violence that is one of the principal drivers of migration.

We believe this request is reasonable and necessary. It builds on work we are already doing in Central America, takes advantage of existing expertise and experience, and expands our ability to encourage Guatemala, Honduras, and El

Salvador to work with us closely on an issue of compelling human drama and national interest.

This request will also allow us to build a new, comprehensive, and collaborative approach with Central America and Mexico to problems that have an immediate manifestation in migration, but underlie the larger development and security challenges facing our closest neighbors. By working to meet the challenge of illegal migration of unaccompanied children to the United States, we will be advancing broader interests in the region and giving substance to our vision of an Americas where democracy and markets deliver economic and social development. This is an investment worth making. I thank you for the opportunity to discuss this request with you and look forward to your questions.