

**Opening Statement  
Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings**

**Hearing on “Violence on the Border: Keeping U.S. Personnel Safe”  
September 9, 2015**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling today’s important hearing. I also want to thank Congressman Vela, the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, for being a leader on this issue and for promoting aggressive action to protect the United States and our diplomatic corps overseas.

**Drug cartel violence in Mexico threatens American and Mexican citizens and their families on both sides of the border. It also negatively impacts our important bilateral trade relationship with Mexico. Combatting the violence and stabilizing this region needs to be a top priority for both countries.**

Congressman Vela’s position is that the consulates should remain open to support American citizens and economic interests on both sides of the border. And I think this is persuasive. **Closing U.S. consulates in Mexico will destabilize the region, making our borders less safe.**

Our consulates in Mexico play a critical role in implementing the Mérida Initiative, which is our nation’s \$2.5 billion dollar investment in disrupting organized criminal groups, institutionalizing the rule of law, and building stronger communities.

Many of our U.S. consulates also house our federal law enforcement efforts to combat the drug trade and strengthen border security.

In addition, many U.S. companies, including DuPont, Tyco, and General Electric, have significant business investments in Mexico. These and other businesses provide 65,000 jobs in the Matamoros consular district alone, and they depend on the support provided by the U.S. consulates.

**U.S. consulates also provide crucial services to U.S. citizens residing in and visiting Mexico.**

**Our diplomatic relationship with Mexico is a critical tool for stabilizing the region. We need to strengthen this diplomatic relationship—especially in regions that need it most—not damage it by closing these consulates, as some have suggested.**

**I believe Mexico should do more to enhance security in the region, but the U.S. also has a role to play, such as stemming the flow of guns.**

Congressman Vela has suggested establishing secure economic zones in northern Mexico, similar to those that have already been implemented in southern Mexico. These zones

would include a joint economic plan that would provide more opportunities for communities on both sides of the border.

These ideas deserve serious consideration. We must ensure that Mexico is doing everything it can to root out the corruption that plagues law enforcement and civil institutions in order to effectively combat drug cartels. Greater stability will encourage more economic investment.

On our side of the border, the United States must do more to stem the flow of guns into Mexico. In March, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms reported that more than 100,000 guns were recovered in Mexico and submitted for tracing from 2009 to 2014. Of those, 70% originated in the United States.

**Guns that are entering Mexico are being trafficked in from the United States. This is one reason I am a proud cosponsor of the Gun Trafficking Prevention Act, which is being reintroduced today on a bipartisan basis by our colleague, Congresswoman Maloney. If we can stem illegal gun trafficking in the United States, there is no doubt the positive effects will be seen by our neighbor to the south.**

Finally—and most importantly—the United States must take all appropriate steps to ensure that our diplomats are safe and fully and fairly compensated.

This includes building modern, secure diplomatic facilities. Construction plans are underway in Mexico City, Matamoros, and Nuevo Laredo to build new diplomatic facilities that will house Marine barracks to ensure even greater protection of our personnel.

I also understand that the State Department is changing how it pays employees serving in dangerous and difficult environments. I appreciate the Department's efforts to use resources effectively and consistent with the law, but I believe no employees who serve on the front lines abroad should face reductions in pay.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how to further improve the safety of U.S. personnel while promoting our longstanding and mutually beneficial relationship with Mexico. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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