



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development
Committee on International Justice and Peace

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January 6, 2014

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

In 2007, the Governments of the United States and Mexico announced the Mérida Initiative to formalize a partnership in the struggle against narcotics trafficking and its related criminal activities along our mutual border. These efforts were driven, in significant part, by concerns in the United States over the need to reduce drug consumption, as well as to combat illicit arms trafficking and money laundering. Since then, over \$1.5 billion in U.S. foreign assistance has been spent on military and humanitarian programs in this effort.

As Chairmen of the Committees on Domestic Justice and Human Development and on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), we encourage you and the Administration to examine carefully the usage of funds related to this Initiative, and similar efforts to combat lawlessness and drug cartels in Central and South America. It is the conviction of the Church in the region and our Committees that expenditures should be concentrated on efforts that aim to protect human rights, strengthen civil society and expand the levels of humanitarian and development assistance. An overemphasis on military assistance can be counterproductive.

Since 2008 USCCB has held this position on the Mérida Initiative, as expressed in testimony by our Conference before pertinent legislative committees of the U.S. Congress. The implications of Catholic Social Teaching and the experience of the local Churches of the region, as well as the research of many experts, lead to the conclusion that success in this critical effort will be enhanced through:

- greater support for the development of incorruptible and accountable security forces operating in Mexico (and the United States);
- strengthening the Mexican judicial system;
- enhancing economic opportunity in Mexico by means of improved education and training programs to create viable alternatives to criminal careers;
- promoting agricultural development by providing assistance aimed to support Mexican small and family farmers;
- expanding programs that target youth unemployment in Mexico; and
- providing treatment facilities for those already addicted.

We are convinced that these programs will result in a more humane and effective investment of our limited national resources. Such activities may be linked to efforts to increase the manufacturing and tourist industries that already exist in these areas, supported by a truly “Twenty-First Century” border. A focus on human rights and fair economic development will lead to more successful outcomes than would continued deployment of increasingly expensive and complex weapons systems, military hardware and expert personnel.

We know that the State Department is aware of the centrality of these concerns by virtue of the work it undertakes in monitoring and reporting on human rights issues. We urge that other Executive Departments,

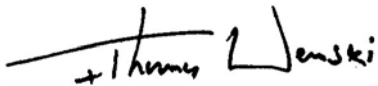
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most notably the Department of Defense, adhere to comparable standards. Compliance with the guidance noted above should condition any further aid being provided pursuant to the Mérida Initiative.

While there is a role for security assistance, we also urge that an increased proportion of budgetary expenditures attributable to U.S. international aid be allocated to support the fostering of human rights, a just and humane civil society, and broad-based economic development.

We look forward to meeting with you on these crucial issues, and to strengthening and expanding the humanitarian aspects of the Mérida Initiative.

Sincerely yours,

Handwritten signature of Thomas G. Wenski in black ink, featuring a stylized 'T' and 'W'.

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Archbishop of Miami
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development

Handwritten signature of Richard E. Pates in black ink, featuring a stylized 'R' and 'P'.

Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chairman, Committee on International Justice
and Peace