



WHITE HOUSE AND U.S. NAVY PHOTOS

2007: HISTORIC COMMITMENT, POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT

The U.S. Department of State Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs

“Our two continents are becoming more than neighbors united by the accident of geography. We’re becoming a community linked by common values and shared interests in the close bonds of family and friendship. These growing ties have helped advance peace and prosperity on both continents.”
– President George W. Bush, March 5, 2007

The year 2007 was one of positive and comprehensive U.S. engagement in the Western Hemisphere. Our engagement was built on the four pillars of our Americas policy: consolidating democracy, promoting prosperity, investing in people, and protecting the security of the democratic state. It included President and Mrs. Bush’s visit to Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico; the President’s participation in the North American Leaders’ Summit in Montebello, Canada; a cascade of visits by Cabinet officials; high-level conferences including the White House Conference on the Americas, Conference on the Caribbean, and the Americas Competitiveness Forum; the deployment of the Navy hospital ship, *USNS Comfort*; and several forward-looking initiatives such as U.S.-Brazil Biofuels Partnership, the Merida Initiative, and the establishment of a regional healthcare training center in Panama.

CONSOLIDATING DEMOCRACY

The United States is committed to fostering democratic governance and protecting fundamental rights and liberties in the Americas. Working bilaterally—through our foreign assistance programs and diplomatic outreach—and multilaterally—through the Organization of American States (OAS) and the other institutions of the Inter-American System, we are helping our partners in the Americas attack poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. We are standing up to tyranny, especially in Cuba. And we are working to ensure that all the peoples of the Americas have the rights and the capabilities to enjoy and express their citizenship in all its dimensions: political, economic and social.

Effective Multilateral Engagement: The U.S. advanced President Bush’s call for “relevant multilateralism,” working

with our regional partners at the OAS to bolster democracy, good governance and human rights. In July 2007, Secretary Rice inaugurated the “OAS-African Union Democracy Bridge,” establishing a strategic alliance between the two organizations to strengthen democracy in both regions through the promotion of democratic values and the defense of democratic institutions.

Democracy Practitioners: The OAS, supported and funded by the U.S., launched a network of 100 practitioners with expertise in the areas of legal, judicial, electoral, and citizen participation reform. This network is available to help the region’s elected governments respond to the challenges of democratic governance.

Electoral Observation Missions: During 2007, the United States continued its support for OAS election observation. It provided \$950,000 to support the OAS Electoral Observation Mission in Guatemala, which monitored the first and second rounds of national elections in that country. The United States also supported OAS observation missions to monitor elections and referenda in Colombia, Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Jamaica, as well as OAS implementation of the Santa Rosa Resettlement Fund for Peace to resolve a land dispute along the Guatemala-Belize border.

PROMOTING PROSPERITY

Delivering the benefits of free markets, trade, and economic integration to all citizens is one of the biggest challenges facing democratic governments in the Americas. Access to economic opportunity and the social mobility that it creates are fundamental components of social justice. The United States

is helping to create economic opportunity in the Americas through our free trade agenda, now encompassing two-thirds of the gross domestic product of the hemisphere. We are also working through our foreign assistance programs, especially the Millennium Challenge Corporation, to fight corruption, promote the rule of law, and create the kind of democratic and just governance necessary to ensure that economic opportunity is not limited to elites but instead courses through society.

Free Trade Agreements: Our free trade agreements open markets for U.S. products, accelerate economic growth, create jobs, and bolster our relationship with the rapidly developing democracies of the region. Building upon the free trade successes of NAFTA, Chile, and the CAFTA-DR, and with strong bipartisan support of Congress, President Bush signed the U.S.-Peru Trade Promotion Agreement on December 14, 2007. In 2008, we will continue our efforts to secure congressional approval of pending free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama. Once implemented, these three agreements will complete an unbroken chain of trading partners stretching from Canada to Chile.

Millennium Challenge Corporation: Through the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the U.S. began disbursement of nearly \$1 billion in support to El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Guyana, and Peru. These programs support efforts to eliminate corruption, promote transparency, improve healthcare and education, and build roads to connect people and markets.

Debt Relief: Following on the President's debt relief initiative announced at the G8 Summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, the Inter-American Development Bank provided \$3.4 billion in debt relief in March 2007 to five of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere – Bolivia, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua. This commitment opens budget space for these countries to focus resources on other pressing needs such as better education and healthcare for their citizens.

U.S. - Brazil Biofuels Partnership: During President Bush's March visit to Brazil, Secretary Rice and Brazilian Foreign Minister Amorim signed a memorandum of understanding committing both countries to addressing the challenges of energy cost, diversity, and availability in our hemisphere. Together, we are working to develop global and regional markets for ethanol and biodiesel, with the goal of giving countries in Central America and the Caribbean Basin a promising new source of locally-grown fuels that will promote energy security and sustainable development.

Promoting Small Business: In June 2007, Secretary Paulson announced a \$200 million dollar plan to encourage market-

based bank lending to small businesses. Small and medium-sized enterprises are the largest, most dynamic source of job creation and economic growth in the Americas. The Inter-American Development Bank, the Overseas Private Investment Cooperation and the Treasury Department combined to support lending to small and medium-sized enterprises (SME), reduce market constraints and promote best practices relating to small business lending; and to provide training to bank supervisors and regulators in the Americas.

Latin America and Caribbean Infrastructure Development Program: The United States partnered with the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC) to promote private investment in infrastructure in Latin America. This initial \$17.5 million program will finance feasibility studies to identify infrastructure projects that can be financed by private capital. The IFC estimates that the program could leverage as much as \$800 million to \$1 billion in new infrastructure investments and \$300 to \$400 million in fiscal savings to local governments.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE

All citizens should benefit from the opportunities of democracy. The United States is helping to unlock the vast potential of the peoples of the Americas by working with our partners to invest in people through improved education and training, health care, access to capital, economic infrastructure, and security for their families and their property.

USNS Comfort Partnership for Americas: The Comfort visited 12 countries during its four-month deployment. Its doctors, nurses, and healthcare professionals treated nearly 100,000 patients and performed over 1,170 surgeries.

New Healthcare Training Center: In June, Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael Leavitt opened the first regional healthcare training center in Panama. This innovative U.S. health diplomacy program trains nurses, technicians, and community health care workers from six Central American countries.

Partnership for Latin American Youth: The United States committed to provide \$75 million to help thousands more young people improve their English and to study in the United States. This three-year initiative will include English language training; home-country and U.S.-based study; counseling for students to apply for and win scholarships; and skills development to improve students' ability to gain employment.

Commitment to the Cuban people: The United States significantly expanded democracy assistance, broadcasting, and outreach to the Cuban people. In an October 24 speech on Cuba, President Bush offered hope for the hemisphere's most oppressed people, announcing new initiatives to help the

Cuban people directly: The International Freedom Fund for Cuba and an extension of the Partnership for Latin American Youth Scholarship Program to include Cuban students.

Partnership for Breast Cancer Awareness and Research of the Americas: Announced by Mrs. Laura Bush in July 2007, the Partnership unites experts from the United States, Brazil, Costa Rica, and Mexico in the fight against breast cancer. The initiative brings together The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, the grassroots network and educational resources of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, the regional management experience of the Institute of International Education, and the strong commitment of the U.S. government. These partners will work to increase research, training and community outreach in the region to give women the knowledge and confidence to take charge of their own health.

U.S. - Chile Equal Opportunities Scholarship Program: In August 2007, the United States and Chile established a new initiative to support doctoral degree study by Chilean graduate students at U.S. universities. Through this program, up to 100 Chilean students annually will be awarded Fulbright scholarships supported by the Government of Chile for study in the United States. Emphasis will be on disciplines that meet Chile's needs for the future, including science and technology, urban planning and public policy. As part of the program, the United States will help fund English language training for students who many need to import their English proficiency prior to beginning their academic programs.

PROTECTING THE DEMOCRATIC STATE

In recent years, the United States and our regional partners have fundamentally transformed the security agenda for the Americas and forged a consensus on the vital link between security and prosperity. Today's challenge is confronting nontraditional threats such as organized crime, terrorism, gangs, natural disasters and pandemics. By protecting the people of the Americas from those who operate outside the law, we strengthen democracy, promote social justice, and create a secure space for citizens and states to pursue economic prosperity.

The Merida Initiative: In October 2007, President Bush announced a \$1.4 billion, multi-year security cooperation initiative with Mexico and Central America to combat the threats of drug trafficking, transnational crime, and terrorism that undermine security not only in these countries, but also the United States. If approved by the U.S. Congress, the Merida Initiative will build a new strategic partnership with Mexico and the Central America countries; bolster homeland security by impeding the flow of transnational criminal

activity and strengthening state institutions in Mexico and Central America; and increase the prospects of breaking down criminal organizations by building on successes of the Mexican government in the past year, including increased extraditions, police restructuring and legal reforms, and recent very large cocaine seizures.

U.S. Strategy to Combat Gangs: In July, the U.S. announced its Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico. Under this comprehensive strategy, the United States will work with partner countries to combat transnational and other gangs by improving law enforcement cooperation, targeting at-risk youth through social programs, and helping ex-gang members reintegrate into their communities.

U.S. - SICA Security Dialogue: Held in July, the first U.S.-SICA (Central American Integration System) Security Dialogue identified organized crime and drug cartels, weapons, traffickers, and gangs as the top regional security threats. It committed the U.S. and its Central American partners, "to find regional solutions to regional security problems," prompted the seven Central American SICA nations to draft a joint security strategy, and provided an important foundation for even greater cooperation through The Merida Initiative.

Continuing Progress in Colombia: Since 2000, Colombia, with U.S. support, has made significant improvements in narcotics eradication and interdiction, as well as human rights, economic and social development and humanitarian assistance. Reductions in violence and kidnappings have been unprecedented, while reform programs are transforming the judicial system. However, much still needs to be done to protect and expand on these gains. Colombia's "Strategy to Strengthen Democracy and Promote Social Development 2007-2013," announced in January 2007, continues successful programs, but recognizes the need to expand programs in remote rural areas and increase the emphasis placed on security, social services, and assistance for especially vulnerable groups, such as the Afro-Colombian population on Colombia's Pacific coast, indigenous communities, and displaced persons. U.S. programs are designed to support Colombia in these efforts.

Security and Prosperity Partnership: President Bush, and his Canadian and Mexican counterparts, announced a North American Plan for Avian and Pandemic Influenza at the North American Leaders Summit. This lays out a comprehensive approach to combating avian influenza and preparing for any possible pandemic in North America, including provisions to coordinate border policy and screen travelers, inform our publics in a coordinated way, and identify and protect critical infrastructure in the three countries. ■