



Integrated Country Strategy

El Salvador

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Table of Contents

1. Chief of Mission Priorities 2

2. Mission Strategic Framework 5

3. Mission Goals and Objectives 7

4. Management Objectives..... 13

1. Chief of Mission Priorities

El Salvador continues to face serious security and economic challenges. High crime, persistent inequality and poverty, and a lack of economic opportunity serve as strong drivers of undocumented migration to the United States. Despite progress against transnational gangs, such as MS-13, violent crimes and extortion remain pervasive. Insecurity limits El Salvador's potential growth and constrains its ability to provide educational and employment opportunities to its citizens.

More than two million Salvadorans live in the United States (25 percent of the Salvadoran population), which deepens the social and cultural ties between our two nations. The Salvadoran diaspora in the United States and the prospect of family reunification also attract illegal migrants, including unaccompanied minors. Salvadorans in the United States often support families left behind, with more than 20 percent of Salvadoran families receiving remittances (accounting for 20 percent of Salvadoran GDP).

Mission San Salvador shapes the efforts of all U.S. government agencies at Post to support the U.S. Strategy for Central America and ensure a whole-of-government approach to advancing U.S. policy objectives, as well as our overarching goal of ensuring U.S. security, including protecting the lives and interests of U.S. citizens. To further reduce illegal immigration and fight transnational crime, Mission San Salvador has three priorities as part of the U.S. Strategy for Central America:

1. Improve security;
2. Strengthen institutions and governance; and
3. Promote prosperity.

U.S. national security and economic interests in the Western Hemisphere require a reliable partnership with a stable, prosperous, and democratic El Salvador. Enhancing citizen security by strengthening Salvadoran law enforcement institutions remains a major Mission focus. The Mission provides assistance to help combat transnational gangs and reclaim territory from criminal elements through police and justice sector professionalization, vetted units, joint police-prosecutor task forces, efforts to combat financial crimes, and the advancement of community policing and corrections sector initiatives. El Salvador has taken the lead on regional investigations against gangs, especially MS-13, and shares information with U.S. law enforcement, which has led to increased border security and criminal prosecutions in the

United States. The Mission also supports initiatives to strengthen border security, promote information sharing, and address the illicit movement of goods and people, including criminals. Over the past two years, homicides have been reduced by 40 percent, and illegal migration has fallen by 50 percent year-on-year.

El Salvador is a stalwart partner on many U.S. priorities and an active participant in bilateral and regional initiatives, particularly those related to security, transnational crime, and illegal migration. As a maritime transit hub, its cooperation is vital to intercept shipments of narcotics and contraband before they reach U.S. borders through customs seizures and offshore operations. El Salvador collaborates with the United States on counter-narcotics activities, military-to-military training, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief, as well as contributing to U.N. peacekeeping efforts.

El Salvador must strengthen its institutions to enhance rule of law and ensure respect for democratic norms. Strengthening the criminal justice system is essential to fighting corruption, holding criminals accountable, and decreasing high levels of impunity. We will continue to encourage respect for democratic institutions and human rights. Fostering transparency and accountability will help strengthen public services. Restoring citizens' trust in Salvadoran institutions will help curb illegal migration to the United States. At the same time, we are working to ensure Salvadoran self-reliance through fiscal policy reforms and the mobilization of domestic resources to ensure the country is paying its fair share of the costs of development. El Salvador has taken significant steps to fight corruption. Currently, two former presidents are under investigation.

El Salvador's economic growth has lagged behind its Central American peers for 11 consecutive years and has averaged just two percent per year for the last decade. A challenging bureaucratic and regulatory environment dampens investment and job creation, contributing to outmigration, poverty, and the informal economy. To stem the tide of illegal migration and encourage Salvadorans to invest in their futures at home, El Salvador must offer economic opportunities in the formal sector for all of its citizens. We encourage El Salvador to adopt economic policies that foster growth, facilitate trade, and improve the investment climate. In addition, the Salvadoran government needs to support and value the contributions of the private sector to attract and retain U.S. investment. A more prosperous private sector would offer greater employment opportunities in a country in dire need of jobs. The Mission is working toward improving the quality of life for Salvadorans by expanding education, training, and advancement opportunities, as well as improving food security, in partnership with the private sector and Salvadoran government.

By virtue of its location and proximity to the United States, El Salvador enjoys easy access to U.S. markets. As a member of the U.S.-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR), El Salvador has the potential to become a regional logistics hub, increase its imports from the United States, and create additional employment in transformative, export-oriented industries. El Salvador must improve its import environment through greater compliance with existing trade agreements to facilitate imports of U.S. goods and services. Though El Salvador is finalizing negotiations to join a customs union with Guatemala and Honduras, implementing the customs union will require a shared commitment to removing barriers to regional trade. In addition to improving infrastructure and integrating management at border crossings, the Mission's interagency team supports legal and administrative reforms to further regional integration.

El Salvador is facing a more complicated future following the termination of Temporary Protected Status (TPS). Approximately 200,000 Salvadoran TPS beneficiaries must decide by September 2019 whether to return voluntarily to El Salvador. El Salvador stands to benefit from the potential "brain gain" only by keeping returnees safe and expanding employment, educational, and investment opportunities. This places additional demands on El Salvador's underfunded public institutions, which already struggle to provide public services. Progress over the next two years will be critical to El Salvador's future development path. Successful reintegration is essential to ensure that returnees remain safe from the risks posed by gangs. We are assisting the Salvadoran government in addressing the reintegration needs of returnees, otherwise, they may repeat the cycle of illegal migration.

Mission San Salvador will prioritize the safety of the more than 192,000 U.S. citizen children of TPS beneficiaries. Ambiguity surrounding the numbers and timing of the anticipated return of U.S. citizens to El Salvador complicates our efforts to ensure adequate levels of consular services. With an estimated 25,000 U.S. citizens resident in the country at present, additional Mission resources may be necessary to accommodate an influx of U.S. citizen arrivals. In a country vulnerable to earthquakes, flooding, and volcanic eruptions, we are also working to strengthen our emergency response capabilities for U.S. citizens in El Salvador.

El Salvador is a country with great potential, but a long road ahead. With a new Legislative Assembly and mayors elected in March 2018, and a new President taking office in June 2019, El Salvador has a window of opportunity to show results in addressing its challenges. Mission San Salvador is committed to working with willing partners. We will encourage the incoming administration to commit to delivering a brighter future for all Salvadorans. At the same time, we will monitor progress and align our engagement as appropriate, adjusting our action plans as necessary.

2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: Combat crime and violence to improve security in El Salvador and the region. (Incorporates CDCS DO 1)

Mission Objective 1.1: Disrupt and dismantle transnational criminal organizations in El Salvador to improve citizen security.

Mission Objective 1.2: Enhance capabilities of security organizations in El Salvador, including the National Police (PNC) and military, to improve effectiveness and ensure protection of human rights.

Mission Objective 1.3: Reduce gang participation in El Salvador and expand alternatives to gang enrollment/recidivism.

Mission Goal 2: Strengthen institutions and governance. (Incorporates CDCS DO 1)

Mission Objective 2.1: El Salvador strengthens its criminal justice system to fight corruption and increase convictions on violent crimes.

Mission Objective 2.2: El Salvador increases institutional transparency.

Mission Objective 2.3: El Salvador promotes respect for human rights.

Mission Goal 3: Promote prosperity and economic opportunity. (Incorporates CDCS DO 2)

Mission Objective 3.1: El Salvador develops a regulatory and business environment that fosters economic competitiveness, reduces uncertainty, and promotes private sector growth.

Mission Objective 3.2: El Salvador implements regional customs integration measures, streamlined customs procedures, and trade facilitation measures to increase trade, enhance transparency, and create jobs in export-oriented industries.

Mission Objective 3.3: El Salvador promotes workforce development, linked to potentially transformative industries and matched to labor market demand and available job opportunities.

Mission Goal 4: Ensure U.S. security, including protecting the lives and interests of U.S. citizens.

Mission Objective 4.1: Protect U.S. citizens by strengthening our emergency response capabilities and preventing mala fide travel, including by members of Central America's violent criminal street gangs.

Management Objective 1: The Mission maintains a robust operating platform for a growing mission while increasing efficiency, protecting its people and resources, and controlling operating costs.

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1: Combat crime and violence to improve security in El Salvador and the region.

Description and Linkages: We work to support Salvadoran law enforcement and foster a culture of lawfulness to reduce crime and corruption, thereby providing a greater level of security to discourage illegal migration. Links to the National Security Strategy Pillar I (security), specifically Strengthening Border Control and Immigration Policy and Dismantling Transnational Criminal Organizations. Links to Joint Strategic Plan Goal 1 (protecting America's security at home and abroad), specifically objective 1.3 (counter instability, transnational crime, and violence that threaten U.S. interests by strengthening citizen-responsive governance, security, democracy, human rights, and rule of law) and objective 1.4 (increase capacity and strengthen resilience of our partners and allies to deter aggression, coercion, and malign influence by state and non-state actors). Links to WHA/LAC Joint Regional Strategy Strategic Goal 1 (a secure hemisphere).

Mission Objective 1.1: Disrupt and dismantle transnational criminal organizations in El Salvador to improve citizen security.

Justification: A Mission-wide approach has increasingly concentrated resources and programming in the 50 municipalities prioritized under El Salvador's national security plan (PESS - Plan El Salvador Seguro). With this plan under implementation, homicide rates are dropping in some of the most high-risk communities. The USG will prioritize work to build the capacity of Salvadoran entities to disrupt and dismantle transnational criminal organizations, including drug-trafficking organizations, human and contraband smugglers, and gangs, including MS-13. Efforts will focus on building institutional capacity, supporting the efforts of the Attorney General and vetted units, and strengthening cross-border intelligence sharing and international ports of entry in order to deter regional criminal activities.

Mission Objective 1.2: Enhance capabilities of security organizations in El Salvador, including the National Police (PNC) and military, to improve effectiveness and ensure protection of human rights.

Justification: The PNC lacks the hardware and skills to effectively combat transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), including MS-13. In addition, serious concerns about human rights violations perpetrated by security forces, including extra-judicial killings, must be addressed in order to ensure that security advances are not tainted by accusations of the excessive use of force. Finally, El Salvador must also curtail the role of the military in civilian policing operations by building the capacity and effectiveness of national police forces. The USG is providing

support to Salvadoran security forces in order to address and advance these issues and will continue to focus on them over the next three years.

Mission Objective 1.3: Reduce gang participation in El Salvador and expand alternatives to gang enrollment/recidivism.

Justification: El Salvador's gang problem, particularly the brutality of MS-13, impacts the United States, El Salvador, and neighboring countries. With an estimated 50,000 gang members and 500,000 affiliates, arresting and incarcerating everyone associated with gangs is an impossible task. Thus, the USG will continue to focus on cutting off gang recruitment in order to provide youth with alternatives to a life of crime and on providing a way out for those wishing to leave gangs or who have been released from prison following the completion of their sentences.

Mission Goal 2: Strengthen institutions and governance.

Description and Linkages: We work to develop accountable and effective institutions in El Salvador to increase public trust and citizen engagement, thereby strengthening ties between Salvadorans and their government and providing a positive alternative to illegal migration. Links to the National Security Strategy Pillar III (Preserve Peace through Strength) and Pillar IV (Advance American Influence), specifically Encourage Aspiring Partners and Champion American Values. Links to Joint Strategic Plan Goal 3 (Promoting American Leadership through Balanced Engagement), specifically objective 3.1 (transition nations from assistance recipients to enduring diplomatic, economic, and security partners). Links to WHA/LAC Joint Regional Strategy Strategic Goal 3 (a democratic hemisphere).

Mission Objective 2.1: El Salvador strengthens its criminal justice system to fight corruption and increase convictions on violent crimes.

Justification: Low satisfaction with El Salvador's democracy and high rates of public sector corruption contribute to a lack of confidence in the government institutions. Corruption undermines credibility in the effectiveness of institutions and their ability to protect citizens and ensure that justice is served to perpetrators. Slow pace and ineffectiveness of the judiciary process perpetuates violence caused by criminal networks and gangs. El Salvador's institutions of law enforcement and justice face many challenges in their ability to confront the country's enormous problem of crime and violence.

The judicial system has improved with the current Attorney General's efforts but is still heavily under-sourced and overwhelmed by the volume of cases. Relatively few crimes are successfully prosecuted and the resulting impunity threatens the legitimacy of state institutions and breeds

distrust between the government and civil society. The inability to process detainees effectively through the judicial system clogs the courts and prisons. The weakness of Salvadoran institutions has facilitated conversion of El Salvador into a major center for laundering of proceeds of illicit criminal activity.

Mission Objective 2.2: El Salvador increases institutional transparency.

Justification: An accountable and transparent government that allows citizens' oversight of public resources is essential to diminishing opportunities for corruption and increasing confidence in the democratic system. Although important advances have been achieved in combating corruption, the political will to implement reforms still lacks consistency. While there may be more openness on the surface, political leaders are still controlling and restricting transparency related institutions that should be fully empowered to independently monitor the use of public resources and punish those who violate laws.

Mission Objective 2.3: El Salvador promotes respect for human rights.

Justification: The GOES and civil society must ensure its institutions effectively prevent and promote accountability for human rights abuses. Through USAID and INL programming, we are assisting GOES to improve prison conditions and increase its institutions' efforts to protect vulnerable populations from violence. Our programs focus on improving the professionalism of law enforcement and security forces to ensure compliance with international human rights norms.

With more than 39,000 individuals in Salvadoran prisons, 30 percent in pre-trial detention, we are urging El Salvador to reduce overcrowding and strengthen its judiciary to speed up trials. INL is helping GOES establish new norms for medical screening of inmates to ensure timely treatment for tuberculosis and other illnesses. The Embassy is engaging with the Legislative Assembly to approve a permanent reform to the penitentiary code that will outline parameters for communications between prisoners and the outside world.

The Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman reports at least 20 complaints of alleged unlawful killings (EJKs) committed by 40 security and military officials. The basis of most EJK accusations is inadequate or insufficient investigations, or that courts considered evidence selectively, leading to a dismissal in favor of the security or law enforcement official. Most cases are dropped due to a lack of forensic evidence, a dynamic affecting many criminal complaints in general.

Mission Goal 3: Promote prosperity and economic opportunity.

Description and Linkages: We will support the adoption and implementation of growth-friendly economic policies in El Salvador to remove the obstacles that impede entrepreneurship, foreign investment, regional integration, and job creation. Links to the National Security Strategy Pillar II (Promote American Prosperity), specifically Promote Free, Fair, and Reciprocal Economic Relationships, and Pillar IV (Advance American Influence), specifically Encourage Aspiring Partners and Champion American Values. Links to Joint Strategic Plan Goal 2 (Renew America's Competitive Advantage for Sustained Economic Growth and Job Creation) and all three objectives (Promote American prosperity by advancing bilateral relationships and leveraging international institutions and agreements to open markets, secure commercial opportunities, and foster investment and innovation to contribute to U.S. job creation; Promote healthy, educated and productive populations in partner countries to drive inclusive and sustainable development, open new markets and support U.S. prosperity and security objectives; and Advance U.S. economic security by ensuring energy security, combating corruption, and promoting market-oriented economic and governance reforms.) Also links to Joint Strategic Plan Goal 3 (Promoting American Leadership through Balanced Engagement), specifically objective 3.1 (Transition nations from assistance recipients to enduring diplomatic, economic, and security partners). Links to WHA/LAC Joint Regional Strategy Strategic Goal 2 (a prosperous hemisphere).

Mission Objective 3.1: El Salvador develops a regulatory and business environment that fosters economic competitiveness, reduces uncertainty, and promotes private sector growth.

Justification: El Salvador has experienced the lowest rates of economic growth in the region for 11 straight years. El Salvador has also struggled to attract foreign direct investment. The country's economic underperformance is driven by a combination of institutional, regulatory, and political factors but is also weighed down by security challenges and a contentious relationship between the government and the private sector. In order to increase economic opportunities for its citizens, the Government of El Salvador (GOES) must work collaboratively with the private sector to facilitate commerce and implement fiscal and regulatory incentives that will attract potential job-creating investments. USG efforts concentrate on encouraging measures to improve the business climate, increasing public-private dialogue, and enhancing the competitiveness of small- and medium-sized businesses which are the principal employers of the Salvadoran workforce.

Mission Objective 3.2: El Salvador implements regional customs integration measures, streamlined customs procedures and trade facilitation measures to increase trade, enhance transparency, and create jobs in export-oriented industries.

Justification: As a small country with no direct access to Caribbean ports, El Salvador must reduce the obstacles and costs of regional trade to fully realize the benefits of its strategic location and membership in the CAFTA-DR free trade agreement (FTA), thereby creating decent

jobs as an alternative to illegal migration. Promoting trade facilitation, harmonization of regional import requirements and improving the capacity of government and private sector institutions would improve the productivity of regional value chains and provide greater access to export markets.

Mission Objective 3.3: El Salvador promotes workforce development, linked to potentially transformative industries and matched to labor market demand and available job opportunities.

Justification: An educated, skilled workforce is crucial for development of a services-based economy. However, in many high-crime Salvadoran municipalities, young people have limited access to quality education or vocational training and few economic alternatives to gang membership. Underemployment – or the number of workers unable to find full-time jobs – is estimated to include over a third of El Salvador’s workforce. Low productivity in export sectors acts as a constraint to growth. El Salvador’s education system must better develop human capital and secondary and higher education institutions must graduate students with more marketable skills to meet labor market demands. Aligning educational curriculum development with private-sector needs would increase employment and labor productivity. The Mission supports the GOES to provide greater educational and vocational opportunities for at-risk youth by mobilizing local organizations and leveraging the private sector through public-private partnerships.

Mission Goal 4: Ensure U.S. security, including protecting the lives and interests of U.S. citizens.

Description and Linkages: Our highest priority is to protect the lives and interests of U.S. citizens. In addition to providing assistance to U.S. citizens in El Salvador, we enforce U.S. border security and immigration policies to deter, detect and disrupt bad actors before they enter the United States. Links to the National Security Strategy Pillar I (security), specifically Strengthening Border Control and Immigration Policy and Dismantling Transnational Criminal Organizations. Links to Joint Strategic Plan goal of Protecting America’s Security at Home and Abroad, specifically objective 1.5 (strengthen U.S. border security and protect U.S. citizens abroad).

Mission Objective 4.1: Protect U.S. citizens by strengthening our emergency response capabilities and preventing mala fide travel, including by members of Central America’s violent criminal street gangs.

Justification: Protecting the safety and welfare of U.S. citizens abroad is the highest priority of the Mission. El Salvador, with a large number of U.S. citizen residents and visitors, is an

extremely violent country with a high homicide rate and rampant criminal activity including robbery, extortion, and kidnapping, as reflected in the most recent Travel Advisory. El Salvador is also vulnerable to natural disasters including earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, and floods. Police, first responders, and social service providers lack adequate resources. Hazardous driving conditions, treacherous ocean currents, and other risk factors pose dangers for U.S. citizens in El Salvador. These conditions require the Mission to proactively monitor and assess El Salvador's safety and security situation in order to provide up-to-date, relevant information to the public and demand a strong commitment to assisting American citizens in the event of an emergency or natural disaster.

4. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1: The Mission maintains a robust operating platform for a growing mission while increasing efficiency, protecting its people and resources, and controlling operating costs.

Justification: To better serve the Mission's needs and provide optimal customer service, Embassy San Salvador must contain costs, use funding judiciously, and ensure all personnel and assets are properly protected.