



Integrated Country Strategy

Honduras

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1. Chief of Mission Priorities

Continued U.S. engagement with, and assistance to, Honduras is crucial to advancing the interests of the United States. We support Honduran efforts to combat corruption and other criminal activity, end impunity, improve security, strengthen historically weak institutions, and provide economic opportunities so that Hondurans see their future in Honduras and not in the United States. We are working to staunch the flow of drugs and undocumented migrants from and through Honduras to the United States, bolster democracy in the region, and develop a market favorable to U.S. investors that creates jobs in the United States.

We remain convinced that the United States can only support lasting change where Hondurans demonstrate tangible commitment to the same outcomes, and there are many vested interests opposed to change. Many of President Hernandez's goals align with ours, and his determination to achieve progress – or at a minimum leave a political legacy – creates opportunities for collaboration. While the controversial 2017 elections have made governing more difficult for Hernandez, the Hernandez administration has made a number of important advances since the beginning of his first term in January 2014, and we have played a role in many of them. Despite a decline from the record levels of 2011, Honduras continues to have one of the highest per capita murder rates in the world. Impunity for all categories of crime, including serious offenses like murder and kidnapping, is high. Yet the Hernandez administration, with U.S. assistance, has taken noteworthy steps to address these problems. Honduras has extradited 19 criminals to the United States since May 2014, including eleven high-level drug traffickers and a corrupt police officer working for the cartels. Many others surrendered in lieu of probable arrest and extradition. Nearly 30 such indicted criminals – including former President Rafael Callejas – now face justice in the United States for corruption, drug trafficking, or money laundering. The Honduran government is implementing a well-defined effort partially led by independent civilian organizations to overhaul and professionalize the Honduran National Police (HNP). Indictments of members of the political and business elite for a variety of crimes are a striking departure from the past, as is the relatively professional investigative work of the investigators and prosecutors in these cases.

Since April 2016, the Organization of American States Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH) has supported, strengthened, and collaborated with the judiciary, Public Ministry prosecutors, HNP, and other Honduran institutions to prevent, investigate, and punish acts of corruption. However, these efforts are increasingly under attack by political and business interests who feel threatened by the investigations. Likewise, human rights remain a significant concern in Honduras. Civil society organizations and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) report that Honduran security forces used excessive force and otherwise committed serious human rights violations in the post-electoral period. At the invitation of President Hernandez, the OHCHR officially

opened a national office in 2016. A minister of human rights was sworn in in January 2018 to lead a newly created ministry dedicated to promoting human rights.

President Hernandez's economic reforms and the country's continued fiscal stability have led to a stabilized macroeconomic environment and positive outlooks and debt upgrades from major international ratings agencies. The budget deficit has shrunk to 2.6 percent of GDP from a record high of 7.9 percent in 2013. Tax collection increased 10 percent from 2016 to 2017. The Central Bank of Honduras predicts GDP growth of 4.4 percent in 2018 despite post-election violence due to the steady expansion of private consumption and strong growth of agriculture exports. President Hernandez seeks to attract international investment and combat the country's 40 percent underemployment rate through Honduras 20/20, an ambitious initiative aimed at creating 600,000 new jobs by 2020 in the tourism, textiles, intermediate manufacturing, outsourcing, and housing sectors.

Public diplomacy will continue to play an integral part in promoting our goals. We will highlight the investments and successes of the United States in improving conditions for Hondurans and Americans. We will cultivate professionalism within the Honduran media so the "fourth branch" can serve as a check on corruption and impunity and an advocate for transparency. Through expanded use of social media, policy-grounded programming, and academic and cultural exchanges, we will broaden and deepen our connections to critical audiences including students and academics, opinion leaders, entrepreneurs, creative arts and civil society leaders, the local U.S. citizen community, and vulnerable populations, including potential irregular migrants.

Our consular work is also an essential component of our efforts. U.S. citizens in Honduras remain vulnerable to the same violent crime and other challenges that afflict Honduran nationals. We will assist Americans who experience difficulty, coordinate with Honduran authorities as they prosecute crimes committed against U.S. citizens, and help citizens to return to the United States when appropriate. We will continue to encourage registration with the U.S. Embassy and will expand new and innovative means of communication with U.S. citizens living in or traveling through Honduras. We will continue to protect U.S. borders and promote legitimate travel to the United States through our visa processes. We will work with Honduran partners to ensure U.S. citizen children of Honduran nationals repatriated to Honduras or no longer eligible for Temporary Protected Status are afforded all appropriate consular services and protection. We will also work with Honduran officials to pave the way for a more ethical, transparent, and streamlined adoption process.

Our management platform is critical to achieving our Mission Goals. To implement our vision, we need skilled staff, secure facilities, and adequate resources. We will continue to develop a management team that is customer-driven, motivated, well-trained, and capable of providing a wide breadth of high quality, cost-efficient services to support U.S. government operations in Honduras. We will devote attention to strengthening emergency planning and the protection of U.S. personnel, facilities, and residences.

2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: Sustainable economic growth reduces poverty, creates employment for Hondurans and Americans, and encourages Hondurans to build their futures in Honduras.

Mission Objective 1.1: Support an improved economic climate, increased bilateral trade and investment, and greater regional economic integration.

Mission Objective 1.2: Extreme poverty sustainably reduced for vulnerable populations in Western Honduras. (CDCS DO 2)

Mission Objective 1.3: Help Honduras adopt and enforce measures to manage its natural resources, especially its energy resources, in a sustainable and responsible way.

Mission Goal 2: Support effectiveness, transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness of government institutions to reduce corruption.

Mission Objective 2.1: GOH national-level public administration is more transparent and accountable. (CDCS DO 3)

Mission Objective 2.2: Help Honduras improve democratic processes to make them more transparent, fair, and credible.

Mission Objective 2.3: Help the justice system processes cases more quickly and fairly.

Mission Goal 3: Improvements in security diminish the impetus for migration and promote rule of law.

Mission Objective 3.1: Security forces increasingly take actions to prevent and address misconduct, particularly the commission of human rights violations, by their members.

Mission Objective 3.2: Citizen security increased for vulnerable populations in urban, high crime areas. (CDCS DO 1)

Mission Objective 3.3: Honduran institutions become more effective in disrupting and dismantling transnational organized crime, combating homicide, and reducing other threats to the population.

Management Objective 1: Ensure mission resources and staffing levels are commensurate with evolving challenges.

Management Objective 2: Improve security services' capacity to respond and ensure facility/residence security in order to protect mission members at this critical crime post.

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1: Sustainable economic growth reduces poverty, creates employment for Hondurans and Americans, and encourages Hondurans to build their futures in Honduras.

Description and Linkages: At the June 2017 Central America Conference in Miami Vice President Pence reiterated the direct correlation between prosperity in Central America and the security of the United States. Mission Goal One directly supports the U.S. Strategy for Central America's Prosperity Pillar by focusing on the economic drivers of illegal immigration while increasing opportunities for U.S. and other businesses. We do this through our focus on promoting sound economic policies, supporting energy sector improvements, facilitating increased trade, encouraging environmental resilience, and advancing U.S. investment.

Mission Objective 1.1: Support an improved economic climate, increased bilateral trade and investment, and greater regional economic integration.

Justification: A prosperous Honduras with transparent and predictable regulatory and judicial environments will lead to greater foreign investment and trade. This will in turn lead to job creation in the United States and Honduras and will provide Honduran citizens with hope for a better future in Honduras.

Mission Objective 1.2: Extreme poverty sustainably reduced for vulnerable populations in Western Honduras. (CDCS DO 2)

Justification: While the U.S. government recognizes extreme poverty can be found throughout the country, we will focus on the six western departments, given the severe poverty, under-nutrition, and low education indicators in this geographic area. These activities will be designed so that the poor will acquire the tools to increase their incomes sustainably through improved resource management and human capacity. National-level institutions such as the Ministry of Education, will improve services at the departmental and municipal level. Assistance will also be provided for other services such as water and nutrition by strengthening their service providers' institutional and management capacity.

Mission Objective 1.3: Help Honduras adopt and enforce measures to manage its natural resources, especially its energy resources, in a sustainable and responsible way.

Justification: Responsible development of Honduras' natural resources is a key source of job creation, providing Hondurans with higher income. A transparent and fair resource concession process will improve governance of natural resources and allow investors to develop their operations in Honduras confidently and quickly. An interconnected, efficient energy grid will allow Honduras to provide cheaper, more reliable energy to its people and industries. Reducing losses in the state electric company ENEE will enable Honduras to meet its fiscal responsibility and deficit reduction targets.

Mission Goal 2: Support effectiveness, transparency, accountability and inclusiveness of government institutions to reduce corruption.

Description and Linkages: This Mission Goal supports Goal 1.3 of the State/USAID Joint Strategic Plan: Counter instability, transnational crime, and violence that threaten U.S. interests by strengthening citizen-responsive governance, security, democracy, human rights, and rule of law; Goal 2.3: Advance U.S. economic security by ensuring energy security, combating corruption, and promoting market-oriented economic and governance reforms; Goal 3.3: Increase partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations to mobilize support and resources and shape foreign public opinion; and Goal 4.1: Strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of our diplomacy and development investments.

In addition, this Goal is aligned with governance, transparency, and accountability goals included in the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America (CEN Strategy), Alliance for Prosperity (A4P) Plan, and GOH Open Government Partnership (OGP) commitments. Specifically, this Mission Goal strengthens international and Honduran anti-corruption measures, improves fiscal capacity (public financial management, fiscal transparency, and clear metrics for revenue collection and service delivery), increases the role of civil society in advocating for responsive and responsible budgeting for more effective public services, in line with OGP and pro-transparency initiatives, and reinforces democratic institutions, including respect for human rights.

Mission Objective 2.1: GOH national-level public administration is more transparent and accountable. (CDCS DO 3)

Justification: The lack of effective governmental and non-governmental oversight mechanisms leads to poor allocation and management of public funds and increased opportunities for corruption. If civil society is better able to oversee and influence government decision making, it can press for full implementation of existing laws and needed reforms. Stronger financial management systems, including controls, audits and sanctions, enable state institutions to manage public funds more effectively and responsibly. With less corruption, the Honduran government will be more successful in advancing its sustainable country development priorities.

Mission Objective 2.2: Help Honduras improve democratic processes to make them more transparent, fair, and credible.

Justification: Honduras' democratic system remains fragile. Doubts about the integrity of electoral processes and key government appointments further erodes public confidence in an already struggling system. More transparent and inclusive processes that take into account civil society and political party views will enhance democratic stability.

Mission Objective 2.3: Help the justice system process cases more quickly and fairly.

Justification: Impunity is one of the most significant challenges to strengthening institutions in Honduras. Investigators, prosecutors, and judges require training, and their institutions must have internal controls that prevent them from misusing their positions. The government needs to address the full continuum of the criminal justice system, from reporting, through investigation, arrest, trial, conviction, sentencing, and rehabilitation in prison. With a current average processing time of two years from arrest to conviction, it will take time to influence the system. Criminal cases that involve corruption are particularly prone to delay.

Mission Goal 3: Improvements in security diminish the impetus for migration and promote rule of law.

Description and Linkages: In keeping with the U.S. Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime (July 2011- Priority Element 6) and the Executive Order on Transnational Organized Crime and the Comprehensive Opioid Response Initiative, U.S. programs in Honduras are designed to disrupt and dismantle combat transnational criminal organizations, stem drug trafficking, enhance citizen security, reduce gang violence, strengthen borders, and deter human smuggling and trafficking by focusing on professionalizing police and military institutions, and improving their ability to address these issues on their own. This includes combatting gangs, such as Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and 18th Street, which are typically involved in local drug distribution, extortion, kidnapping, and human trafficking.

In addition, this Goal is aligned with the U.S. Strategy for Central America, the interagency framework for the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), the Alliance for Prosperity (A4P) Plan, and stated Honduran government strategic priorities.

Mission Objective 3.1: Assist security forces to take actions to prevent and address misconduct, particularly the commission of human rights violations, by their members.

Justification: Security forces cannot fulfill their obligations to protect their citizens and enforce the law while they have criminal elements within their ranks. Moreover, impunity and corruption by and within the security forces are root causes of the lack of public confidence in these institutions. The Police Purge begun in 2016 has significantly reshaped the HNP and the institution is being rebuilt with more comprehensive initial training and expanded continuing education, as well as a drive towards specialization. The passage of two new police laws now requires the drafting of specific implementing regulations in order to consolidate the reform and continuing oversight of the institution. While arguably less vulnerable than the national police to internal corruption and criminality, the Honduran Armed Forces allegedly continue to commit human rights violations and – along with the police – should be held accountable.

As we continue to bolster the professionalism and effectiveness of police investigators, the need for comprehensive reform within the Public Ministry and among prosecutors becomes critical in order to combat perceptions of impunity and encourage rule of law.

Mission Objective 3.2: Citizen security increased for vulnerable populations in urban, high crime areas. (CDCS DO 1)

Justification: These programs will concentrate in high-density urban areas with notably high crime rates including Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, Choloma, Tela, and La Ceiba. Activities will empower those populations most vulnerable to crime and violence in Honduras with resources and opportunities to reduce their risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of crime or violence in their communities. The U.S. Government will scale-up evidence-based, proven programs which provide educational and off-street social opportunities for at risk youth; community infrastructure that mitigates crime; school and classroom infrastructure to increase access for youth beyond the sixth grade; social services to address household and gender based violence; community policing; increased active citizen engagement and oversight of local and national level institutions; and improved the effectiveness and transparency of the GOH's security and justice agencies. Together the interagency will address prevention, deterrence, and enforcement challenges in Honduras to improve community safety.

Mission Objective 3.3: Honduran institutions become more effective in disrupting and dismantling transnational organized crime and other threats to the population.

Justification: Transnational criminal organizations that operate in Honduras present threats to U.S. security. Local crime plagues Hondurans and U.S. citizens residing in or visiting Honduras. Improvements in security protect the citizens of both nations and diminish the impetus for migration. Our activities concentrate on countering narco-trafficking and its associated financial crimes, fighting gang crime, and on countering local organized crime networks. The responsibility for improving security is shared by the national police and the Honduran armed forces. Both institutions are hampered in their efforts by inadequate, old, or poorly maintained equipment.

4. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1: Ensure mission resources and staffing levels are commensurate with evolving challenges.

Justification: Providing effective services to a growing customer base requires planned, justified and well-managed growth in the management platform in order to provide services that other sections and agencies need to perform their missions.

Management Objective 2: Improve security services' capacity to respond and ensure facility/residence security in order to protect mission members at this critical crime post.

Justification: As a critical threat post for crime, the Regional Security Office maintains a staff that includes USDH, LE staff, and contracted guard force, much of which is focused on the security of employees and families. Nonetheless, the workforce is exposed to high levels of risk. Neither public taxis nor public transportation are considered to be safe, even for local staff, forcing nearly all employees who own private vehicles to drive to work or (in the case of USDH with predictable schedules) use the Embassy-provided shuttle. LE staff employees have been victims of crime on the streets used for commuter parking near the current building. As part of the residential security program, the local guard force includes a mobile patrol, which operates in housing areas. Although the capacity of local law enforcement partners has improved, they still rely on training provided by the U.S. Government.