

Center for Strategic and International Studies

Stemming the Flow of Unaccompanied Child Migrants Into the United States: A Conversation with Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández and Guatemalan President Otto Pérez Molina

Introductory Remarks by:

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Remarks by:

**His Excellency Juan Orlando Hernández,
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**His Excellency Otto Pérez Molina,
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Moderated by:

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JOHN J. HAMRE: (In progress) -- so this is not -- this is -- America's not the victim of this migration. So we need to -- and it isn't susceptible to simplistic thinking. This isn't about fences.

This isn't about guards. This is a much more deep and complex problem. And we're not going to be able to understand this problem until we talk to people that share the problem with us.

That's why we're so flattered to have you here. That two presidents are willing to come and have a conversation with us about the complexity of this problem that we share together; and we do share it together. This is not our problem alone, it's not Honduras' problem, it's not Guatemala's problem. This is a shared problem and we need to approach it that way.

And we have two remarkable leaders who are willing to take this time with us and help us understand their perspective on this problem. And we're going to, together, try to find solutions.

And so I want to say a personal, deep thank you. Thank you for helping us to understand something that we need to understand.

Let me turn to Carl Meacham. Carl is the head of our Americas Program and he's going to do the formal introduction of our two presidents.

Thank you all for coming.

(Applause.)

CARL MEACHAM: So thank you, John.

(Off mic.) Thank you, President Molina and President Hernandez, for taking the time to -
- (inaudible) -- and good morning to everybody.

Apologies for the delay. But you know, when you're dealing with presidents, sometimes you just have to wait.

So I'm glad you are able to join us today. I'd like to recognize the other members of the governments of Honduras and of Guatemala that are joining us today. Welcome.

And I'm sure you're all aware of why we're here. I think Dr. Hamre was very clear. The presidents are in town to meet with President Obama tomorrow and have already met with members of Congress on the ongoing child immigration crisis. As you know, thousands of unaccompanied children, primarily from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, are apprehended trying to cross U.S. borders every day. And the numbers have been growing for some time.

The kids are disproportionately impacted by gang-driven violence and security and lack of economic opportunity in their countries of origin. And more than ever before, they're heading for the United States, Mexico, Panama, Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

This has understandably stretched U.S. Border Patrol and Immigration authorities far beyond their normal operating capacity. They're struggling to meet the needs of these children and the children keep on coming.

Two weeks ago, President Obama requested an emergency appropriation to the tune of \$3.7 billion to deal with the crisis, most of which would have been for increasing capacity to receive, care for and process these children. But after languishing in Congress, Senate Democrats and House Republicans each developed their own proposals, reducing the president's by 1 billion (dollars) and 2 billion (dollars), respectively, and conditioning support.

The implications of tens of thousands of Central American children facing such tough situations at home that they believe traveling hundreds of miles along a treacherous path are many. For one, their safety. These children are subject to threats of violence and exploitation at the hands of drug gangs and they show up at our border having lived through hell.

Second, what it means for these countries and cooperative efforts to bolster their security and prosperity. And that's what the presidents are here to talk to us about here today.

Guatemalan President Otto Perez Molina has had a long career in Guatemalan public service, both in government and in the military. He served as head of military intelligence and chief of staff for former President Ramiro de León Carpio. And he's been in office since January of 2012.

President Juan Orlando Hernandez of Honduras has served throughout the Honduran government, first in the legislature and later in the executive branch. He's an expert in Honduran law and has been in office since January of this year.

After the presidents' remarks, I'll lead a discussion among the three of us. I want to make sure that you all know that when I finish my remarks, the rest of the event will be conducted in Spanish. We are providing simultaneous Spanish-English interpretation for those of you who need it. So if you haven't already gotten it, please see a member of my staff to get a translation headset.

Thank you, again, for being here with us today.

And with that, President Molina, I turn the floor over to you.

President Molina.

(Off mic commentary.)

GUATEMALAN PRESIDENT OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA: (Through interpreter.) Thank you very much everyone for being here this morning.

I believe this is an excellent opportunity for us to be able to share with you our point of view of what is occurring right now, not only to talk about the two issues.

One is the crisis that has emerged with unaccompanied children, which is an issue that we have to resolve together with cooperation, with each one of us addressing our own responsibilities. We know that these are different responsibilities, but we have to share efforts to find a solution. And I'm sure we are going to find a solution.

I am asked to talk about security in the context of the crisis with unaccompanied children.

I would like to perhaps start off by saying or sharing a thought which is that for the countries of Central America, the closeness with the U.S. is a closeness that we would like to view as a strength. Being neighbors of the United States, being neighbors of the largest power in the world and the largest economy of the world, we have experienced years where rather than viewing this strength, we have seen maybe more weaknesses than strengths.

And I say this because in the case of Guatemala, but also in the case of Nicaragua, El Salvador and also the case somehow of Honduras, we experienced a civil war of 36 years, which was framed within a cold war, a cold war between the two powers of that time, but where the hot spots of that cold war took place in countries of Central America.

You may remember back in the '80s Central America was immersed in civil wars and this is not something that we can separate from the context of the cold war. We came out of it weakened with internal problems in a number of things. And then we saw the context of what we are now experiencing, which is transnational organized crime where once again countries of Central America became transit corridors or warehouses for the drugs reaching the United States. And we also became the recipients of arms. And we also became the recipients of the dollars that come not legally to our countries.

So the thought that the countries of Central America, the closest neighbors of the United States after Mexico, have been involved in circumstances that have become more a weakness than a strength.

But as we were coming back from Congress today, we were discussing this. This is a time when the weaknesses and challenges need to be turned into an opportunity and a strength, to work together to develop a plan, a plan for a Central America where we are able to work together.

And I say these things because the crisis of children that we are facing today will be resolved. I am certain that it is already on the right path to being resolved with the actions that we have adopted. We have information that tells us that the flow of these children to the border of the United States has dropped by 50 percent. This is a problem that I'm sure will be resolved.

We have worked very hard and we will continue to work hard to punish the networks of traffickers. We have arrested one of the largest groups of smugglers of persons, criminals that have made it possible for us to tackle the tourists working illegally in this regard.

We have engaged in a campaign. We are strengthening our consulates. We are working, all three countries are working together, and this is what will make it possible for us not only to work together, but also with Mexico. And in the United States we will be able to resolve this crisis which is humanitarian in nature because it deals with unaccompanied children.

We respect the laws and the processes that need to be followed in the United States. And we are also ready to receive the persons who are deported because they are not eligible to stay in the United States within the context of the United States. And we are getting ready for the last two years already to receive them back and to find possibilities for them in our country, which is our obligation.

Now, beyond that, we see -- and that is why I say that we are going to find a solution to this crisis and we are working on that.

Now, beyond that, how can we work together to solve the underlying causes for this problem, the problems that lead to this migration by children? And we have to address the underlying causes. We have to work on dissolving, eliminating the violence that is a result of drug traffickers, the money that is laundered through our countries, and work together in a more aggressive program, in a cooperation program between Central American and the United States to work on security.

In Guatemala alone, between 2003 to 2013 we have seized 50,000 arms -- 50,000 arms -- which are arms which for the most part come from the United States.

I'd like to say that this is an important area that we have to work on together, but there is also another equally important area which is the area of opportunity for the economy of our countries to grow, for investment to come.

Years back, the United States was the major investor in our country. Now it is the seventh investor in Guatemala. Before the United States, we see Canada investing in Guatemala, we see Russia, we see Colombia investing in Guatemala. And the United States moved from being the top investor in Guatemala to the seventh investor in Guatemala.

And we need the investment. We need the opportunity to create employment, and that will prevent the need for the U.S. to have to invest in border patrolling, border security, border controls and the money that is invested in border processes. With one-tenth of the \$7 billion or the one-tenth of that, if it came as investment in our country, I am sure the United States would no longer need to invest on the borders.

So these are issues that we are working on. We're working on security. We are working on investment and in growing our economies. And that, on the other hand, will make it possible for us. And because we are not (eluding ?) our responsibilities, our countries, we are engaged in

efforts to improve our education, our health systems and in educating and training our youth so that they might have the skills needed to be able to gain access to dignified jobs.

So this is what I'd like to say. First of all, we're facing a crisis. I am sure that with due respect of the laws of the United States, with the responsibilities that we share, but which are different responsibilities, we are going to solve that crisis and it's already being resolved.

In the underlying causes, we have to think of the next five to 10 years. In five to years, five should be the minimum amount of time, and it should not take more than 10 years. We'll work together, we'll make efforts to continue to eliminate the gap between the rich and the poor, which does exist, or where we are able to collect more taxes in our countries to invest in the major needs.

And if in addition to this we have the support of a plan for Central America, as has been the case from the United States in Colombia and other countries, I am certain that we would be solving the problems that we now see at the border with the United States.

And so I leave you with these thoughts and I hope to be able to interact with you. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

HONDURAN PRESIDENT JUAN ORLANDO HERNÁNDEZ: (Through interpreter.) A very good day to each of you. I wish to extend my appreciation to the Center for Strategic and International Studies for extending an invitation to us. I think this is a wonderful opportunity, even though the reason for our being here is a great tragedy, one which humanity at large would do well to ponder and study.

I'm quite sure that there is no one who is a mother or father or brother or sister or simply a neighbor of anyone can remain enured to the problem that we have before us.

This is a problem that we have never seen of a magnitude that is historic. In Honduras, in Guatemala, this has simply overwhelmed us.

A few years ago, as we know, the United States, in partnership with Colombia, were very successful in fighting the levels of violence in Colombia. Something similar was structured in Mexico sometime later. And again, some level of significant success was achieved in that country.

But precisely because of those successes we are today faced with a vengeance a number of drug lords that have now settled in Central America and that have linked up with gangs in an unholy alliance, as it were, that has generated levels of violence that are unprecedented.

So what has helped Colombia, what has helped Mexico, alas, has created a problem of gigantic proportions for us.

Now, number one, let me address what might be the root causes here. Drug trafficking generates violence. That, of course, leads to immigration, but it is also because of lack of opportunity that this has arisen.

We must also point to the ambiguity that has been the hallmark of the debate on the reform of the immigration process in this country. Here we have to say that the coyotes, the smugglers who are very much a part of organized crime networks perversely have sought to exploit those ambiguities and peddle a mistaken, a totally wrong interpretation to the parents of these children and saying you can get your kids into the U.S., we can do it for you.

Well, those coyotes, those smugglers, are nothing other than the human face of an enormous criminal monster that has one foot firmly in the camp of the drug lords and in Central America, indeed in Mexico as well. But the second foot is here in the United States under American jurisdiction.

That is why the presidents of Central America, of Mesoamerica writ large, have decided to put our heads together and recognize that we have here joint, but several responsibility. This is something that affects us all.

Another problem that arises from the drug problem is that Central America is on the very root between those who produce drugs and those who consume drugs massively. And while we know that efforts are certainly under way to reduce the violence that drug trafficking generally generates, this has been done in New York City, it has been managed in Los Angeles and a number of other urban areas, but alas, in Central America, the problem remains enormous.

What have we done in this regard? Well, this is where we so much appreciate the opportunity that is given us to address you today in this strategic center to tell you what we are doing about it, even with our scarce resources.

When this problem arose recently, we took a look at a homeland security map and looked indeed also at a map of the United States coming from United States official offices that have traced drug routes. And if you superimpose one map on the other, you see clearly that in the case of Honduras most of the children have come from the most dangerous areas of our country where drug lords and gangs are at the root of the greatest levels of violence. We're talking about some 30 municipalities.

In the rest of the country, I can tell you, in the five months and five days since I took office as president, I can tell you we have faced the problem frontally and tackled it head on in terms of prevention, terms of fighting violence. But this, of course, doesn't blind us to the fact that where the greatest problem lies, where the greatest drug violence is generated is precisely where most of the children are being exported.

Well, my wife and others took a look at the housing that is being provided for children, went to the U.S. border and found absolutely shocking news. Some of the smugglers said to the children take this, this is a vitamin, it will be good for you, but what it is is a birth control pill

because most of those little girls are the victims of sexual abuse. Others disappear along the way.

And therefore, I think it's a fair statement to say this is a humanitarian crisis. And that's why we plead that when a child arrives here, surely we must first and foremost concentrate on the interests of that child.

I studied for six months in this country. At the time, my wife and child remained in Honduras. I missed them tremendously. And until my own wife obtained a scholarship and was able to join me with our child, we pined for each other all the time. So my heart goes out to those who have been split, families that are torn asunder.

Mothers that don't remember their children or the children who don't remember their mothers, but after seeing their mothers briefly really want to go back to Honduras because it's their grandmother that raised them and there that they feel most at home.

So this is a matter and a situation that creates a host of psychological turmoil and difficulties of all stripes.

What we are offering is, hand and heart, the offer of reinsertion into our country, into society, whether it's in the urban areas or in the more rural areas.

But we've done more than that. We closed the Department of Immigration that we used to have and have started from scratch and set up a new immigration office. Why? Because the old immigration officers were in cahoots with the drug lords and the human traffickers. And many of them are now in jail. We have 12 smugglers already clapped in irons, in jail. And we are working on others. We're working hard on the border conditions with El Salvador, on the one hand, with Guatemala, on the other.

But there is no question, as we have discussed with President Otto Perez, President Sanchez Ceren of Guatemala and El Salvador, respectively, we understand that what we need to do is act on the basis of co-responsibility, of shared responsibility, amongst ourselves and indeed involving the U.S. as well. We assume that responsibility.

And I would simply close with this thought. And I share this with the people of the United States. Please remember, first and foremost, we're talking about children. These are human beings. But as children, as minors, they are the most vulnerable, the weakest among us. And this should catch the attention and pull at the heartstrings of humanity at large.

My second message is that Washington must understand that if there exists drug violence in Central America, if there is no peace, if there's a lack of opportunities, this will redound to an enormous cost to the United States, not to any benefit.

By contrast, if Washington understands fully, grasps what Central America can offer that would be a zone of peace, a zone of opportunity, then this will be a win-win for us all. Then the situation will become a benefit to the U.S. and to us. After all, our countries aren't going to go

anywhere. Our territories are rooted where they are. We are, in fact, your third border. Let's work as the neighbors we are, because we're firmly rooted where we are, where we've been. Geography is immutable.

A congressperson rose the question not long ago, well what are you going to do about inequality? What are you going to do about wealth distribution? Well, I can assure you, this is at the foremost place in my concerns. We are now looking at people who are corrupt wherever they may be, in the police and anywhere else, and we are putting them in the hands of judiciary. We are also looking at the banking systems, which very often have been somehow subverted and are, in fact, generating more inequities, more inequalities, instead of bridging these.

The state must invest in housing, must invest in education. And we must therefore have the strength to fight teaching unions that are not interested so much in proper education for the children as much as in their own interest. So we need to fight vested interests wherever they may be and identify the good of the people, because I am convinced that Central America, which will be at peace, which will be a place of opportunity, will be a place from which we can all benefit.

Let me beg this Center for Strategic & International Studies to take a hard look at Honduras, because I've looked into this, and I have the impression, with all due respect, that you may not have been as aware of the realities on the ground in Honduras as you may now be becoming aware. It is a sad thing that this great tragedy should be such a great opportunity, but so it is.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. MEACHAM: (Through interpreter.) There is much to be said, and we don't have a lot of time. So I am going to go straight to the topic. Many people see what's happening. They see people coming. They see violence. They see the statistics. So what are they doing down at the border? I'm sure that the Congress representatives and perhaps members of the media might be asking those questions.

What are the specific things that you are doing to deal with this problem? Can you do this alone? Do you have the capacity to do this alone? Or do you need more assistance? We have CASI, the Central American Security Initiative, here in the United States. It is a framework to deal with many of these problems, but maybe it isn't working. How can that be fixed, and what type of commitment from the United States does that require?

PRESIDENT PEREZ: (Through interpreter.) I believe that these are going to draw questions that an American citizen might ask himself or herself. What is Central America doing? And we have already said a little bit about this, and now we can explain it a little bit further.

I have been in power for two and a half years. Three years into my tenure, I introduced tax reform in order to raise our tax collection rate. We understand that we have to meet our obligations. We were able to introduce education reform, one that had been lagging for 15 years. The tax reform had not passed in 20 years. We were able to get passage on it. We are being able

to make the country more competitive to be able to attract investment. So that will create employment opportunities so that these employment opportunities will stop the migration flow.

We have accomplished important steps forward in the area of security. In my country, there were 40 murders by every 100,000 inhabitants when I took office. Now it's down to 34 per 100,000. This year we have dropped it to 30 per 100,000. And in the next three years, if we are able to reduce it by 10 points, that is going to be extremely important for our country. And this had not been able to be accomplished in the past, and we are accomplishing it. And that's going to be very important.

In terms of economic development, we introduced the largest number of reforms as scored by the World Bank through the Doing Business. We improved 19 positions last year. And this year we introduced the largest numbers of reforms in Latin America, and one of the most reforming countries in the world. We hope to be in the top countries introducing the largest number of reforms.

In other words, we are doing important things to improve on the security infrastructure, competitiveness and investment to be able to improve our conditions. But to accomplish this, I hope that we can get closer and more aggressive cooperation programs from the United States.

You have mentioned CASI. Let me say that CASI created huge expectations in Central America. President Hernandez – (inaudible) – but the outcomes were not there. Commitments were made. And last night I talked to the secretary of SICA, and he said to me we didn't see any resources coming from the United States, (what ?) the United States continue to do, not for the region, which is what we hoped for through the Central American security effort.

The United States continued to engage in binational cooperation with each one of the countries rather than with the region. As I said before, I think this is a crisis, yes, but it allows us to talk not only about the crisis, but to talk about the underlying causes of the crisis. If we don't talk about the underlying causes, crises will continue to occur.

The countries are doing, each one of us, our part. But we know that much remains to be done. We still have a long road ahead of us. We haven't done everything we need to do. As President Hernandez has said, who has been in office only six months, and I have been in office two and a half years, and we are working very hard. But it would be far easier if we had aggressive cooperation from the United States. I'm sure that we could accomplish a lot more, and that would be a win-win for the entire region. It really would be a win-win opportunity.

PRESIDENT HERNANDEZ: (Through interpreter.) I had the opportunity to be the speaker of the house in Honduras before I was the president of the republic. We decided to reform the criminal system. And I have been working to clean up the justice operators – police, even military people, confidence positions. This was hard in Honduras. I'm not going to come and tell you anything other than what I have lived and what I recognize to be what it is.

The fact of the matter is, organized crime had a real grip on institutions in Honduras. And it was essential to cut this Gordian knot, to really get to the bottom of it. And some years

ago, we worked with the United States to try to extradite some Honduran citizens that were involved in drug lords. We had to change, to amend our constitution in order to do this. The congressmen knew that this was necessary. It was not easy to amend our constitution. It's not an overnight process. One year went by. We had to wait a second year. Then, of course, we needed to wait for the supreme court to act on this. And we did it.

The first Honduran to be extradited is now in the United States and is indicted. There are four arrest warrants against other Honduran citizens; had a number of foreigners who have been apprehended in like manner.

We also levied a special tax, a security tax, in order to generate the resources which could be allocated in the areas that are essential to buttress justice, yes, but also to prevent crime are undertaking enormous efforts with NGOs, with civil society in general, with churches, with a vast array of people who want to work for the good and who wish to restore to society the ability to live in normalcy, to have fun, to live at peace. And as President Otto Perez of Guatemala has said, we've seen a very dramatic drop in the level of children coming to the borders in the last couple of weeks. And the capture of a number of traffickers that were involved in immigration channels have also been record.

We are doing what we can to set up now different means of recruiting people – psychometric tests, clearances - a great deal more professional effort being made to screen the right people. We also have an airfield that we have set up with the United States and with the assistance of the State Department.

Now, we know that while there is that airfield, one cannot share information on flights even under international protocols, anything that might lead to shooting down a plane. Trouble is, many of those planes are laden with drugs. But the simple matter is that since we took over that airfield, we have managed to reduce the problem with the tracking and working with the south command.

And our minister for defense is with me here. He can tell you, as I will tell you, that we have excellent efforts under way to achieve marine interdiction, to stop, therefore, or reduce the flow of drugs by sea, as we are working to do it by land. But for the longest time, Honduras was a territory that was fully in the hand of drug lords. That is not the case today to the same extent. We're working hard. So we have the shield by sea. We have it by air. We're working now to set it up on land.

PRESIDENT PEREZ: (Through interpreter.) In the case of Guatemala, this is to a lesser extent the case. But we have nine different sea frontiers that we need to look at. This is no small thing. I think that our efforts are paying off. But you must be aware that the magnitude of the problem is such that I couldn't tell you that we will be able to resolve this as quickly and as effectively as we would like, certainly not alone.

We have already joined forces with Guatemala and El Salvador. But I'll tell you, we are here today because we want to put our case to the Congress, to President Obama, to the people of the United States, to say that Central America, as a zone of peace, as a zone free of drugs, as a

land that will be one of opportunity, will be healthy and beneficial to us all. And I hope very much that Washington will understand it.

MR. MEACHAM: (Through interpreter.) Then (says the moderator) I think it's fair to say a new awareness has been generated by this crisis. You have seen how governors of different states of the United States have dealt with this problem. Governor Perry of Texas has sent the National Guard to the border. Deval Patrick of Massachusetts has offered refuge to children who may go to his state.

The causes that you have mentioned, the root causes of the problem, are huge, as you've rightly pointed out. But do you think that they require a new type of cooperation, a new way of thinking, a different take that maybe has not been come up with before?

You were talking about initiatives that have been taken in the past, Plan Colombia and the Merida Initiative, where indeed measures were taken by the Department of State and colleagues in Colombia and in Mexico, respectively, and their respective armed forces. Are you able to answer any of that?

PRESIDENT HERNANDEZ: (Through interpreter.) Let me just quickly say the CASI initiative – because I don't want to leave the president of Guatemala alone in his comment, even though this was discussed at the SICA meeting, it is true – and Vice President Biden discussed this too – for many of us in Central America, this ended up being almost a farce. There was a great deal of promises made, but at the end of the day, not much to show for it. So this isn't a simple thing. I wanted to be sure to let you know that the viewpoint expressed by the president of Guatemala a minute ago is not his viewpoint alone. We share it. And it's the sense of many in Central America.

PRESIDENT PEREZ: (Through interpreter.) Yes, not only are we ready to work together. We believe that there should be a far more aggressive plan, one that can produce results. I would like to repeat what the president of Honduras has already said, that one dollar invested on Central American security is one dollar invested on U.S. security. And I believe that is the vision that we need to adopt, not see how we invest there.

If (down there ?) they (aren't ?) able to resolve their problem, it's a problem for the region, because we have already said it. The arms come from the United States. The dollars come from the United States. And that forces us to invest the financial resources which we could well be investing in infrastructure, education and health. It forces us to invest those resources in security, in a number of things. And if we were able to do that together with the United States, that would lead to a safer and more prosperous region for the benefit of all. So we stand ready to do it. And it needs to be an aggressive plan, I believe.

This morning we were at Capitol Hill, and tomorrow we will spend time with President Obama. And, by the way, I would like to state that President Obama has been courageous and has taken the leadership to address migration reform in the United States. And that is important, because leadership needs to be used in difficult issues.

And President Obama is speaking (in favor of ?) more than 11 million migrants who are here, working and paying taxes in the United States. And President Obama is fighting to get passage of migration reform. And we hope that the current crisis in Central America will not lead to this reform not moving forward.

MR. MEACHAM: (Through interpreter.) We don't have a lot more time.

PRESIDENT HERNANDEZ: (Through interpreter.) I merely wanted to say that we have structured a tax reform in order to ensure that the tax collection efforts of Honduras is fairer and sounder for the state of Honduras. But we have also launched a set of initiatives, for instance, to jumpstart agricultural production in the rural areas, which for 20 years had been forgotten. We're working with all kinds of different quarters to try to get the countryside going again.

We're also working with the most marginalized. We're talking about 45 percent of the Honduran public that live with less than one dollar a day for their means of subsistence. We are working to help these people, promoting micro-enterprise, doing all we can to generate massive employment, job creation through the building of low-income housing, social construction, that will give people a roof over their head.

So let me say it's very sad, what's going on and what we're living. But you said it. It's also an opportunity. And we need to concentrate on that. We must not forget either - let's call a spade a spade - that the United States is in the run-up to an electoral moment. We are in an electoral process.

And I would appeal to the leaders and to the people of this great country to understand that this is a humanitarian crisis. We are neighbors. We are neighbors, and we'll remain neighbors. And it is best to be friends with your neighbors, to ensure the welfare of one's neighbor, so that everyone can benefit.

Peace and prosperity in Central America will be good for the United States, for the children and the grandchildren of the American public, as it will be for the children and grandchildren of the Central American public.

We have talked about this amongst ourselves. We've talked about it with the House of Representatives. We're waiting to do as much with the Senate, with Vice President Biden, indeed, with President Obama himself. And we hope that this will be somehow a renewed initiative along the lines of the alliance for progress that was launched so many years ago.

The Merida plan, the Colombia plan, are examples of recent programs that have been successful. The Colombia plan - Plan Colombia, as it's called - the Merida plan, worked very well for Colombia and for Mexico. But we're picking up the pieces, because they all came home to roost in Central America. And that's what we're dealing with now. And so we're appealing to this public to understand that we will all benefit from working for peace and prosperity in Central America.

MR. MEACHAM: (Through interpreter.) Thank you so much (says the moderator). We're very grateful to both the presidents of Guatemala and of Honduras for sharing their viewpoint, for sharing their thoughts on this intractable issue. It's a huge issue, a great problem, and we appreciate your input.

Thank you also to all of you who have come. And thank you to the advisors of the embassies involved and Mr. Correa (sp) for his help in helping us organize this important event.

Many thanks to you all. We wish you every success on this visit. We are certain that you will be very busy indeed, but hope that you will find, if not the full solution, at least the beginning of a solution now.

PRESIDENT HERNANDEZ: (Through interpreter.) One last petition, if I may, says the president of Honduras. I think the CSIS would do something excellent for all of us – for humanity, for the U.S., for Central America – if you set your sights on research as to the root of this problem and what we can do best from the standpoint of research to resolve it.

MR. MEACHAM: (Through interpreter.) Thank you very much. We take good note.

Thank you very much. The meeting stands adjourned.

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