
Legislative Advocacy Workshop:

Your taxes, your impact

Raising our voices for human rights in
Mexico & Central America

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LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP
ACTION AT HOME FOR JUST POLICIES ABROAD



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Workshop Agenda

Intro: Who we are

Part I: Overview of Policies

- U.S. policies impacting human rights in Mexico & Central America

Part II: How to make your message heard

- Research, Organize & Communicate, Follow-up
- Dos & Don'ts
- Roleplay
- Resources



LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP

The Latin America Working Group (LAWG) advocates for U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean that promotes human rights, peace, and social justice.

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ABOUT

We **mobilize** grassroots. We **lobby** with Congress and the administration. We **educate** the public. We **uplift** civil society partners in the region. We **bring together** organizations with similar values to work towards the same goals.



To ensure that U.S. policies advance
human rights, peace, and social,
environmental, and economic justice in
Latin America and the Caribbean.

MISSION

CAMPAIGNS

In our 35 years, we've helped pave the way from war to peace in Central America and Colombia, successfully pushed the United States to open diplomatic relations with Cuba, defended migrants' and refugees' rights, campaigned for justice and accountability in Mexico, and demanded protections for human rights defenders.

Promote Peace

Uphold Justice & Defend the Defenders

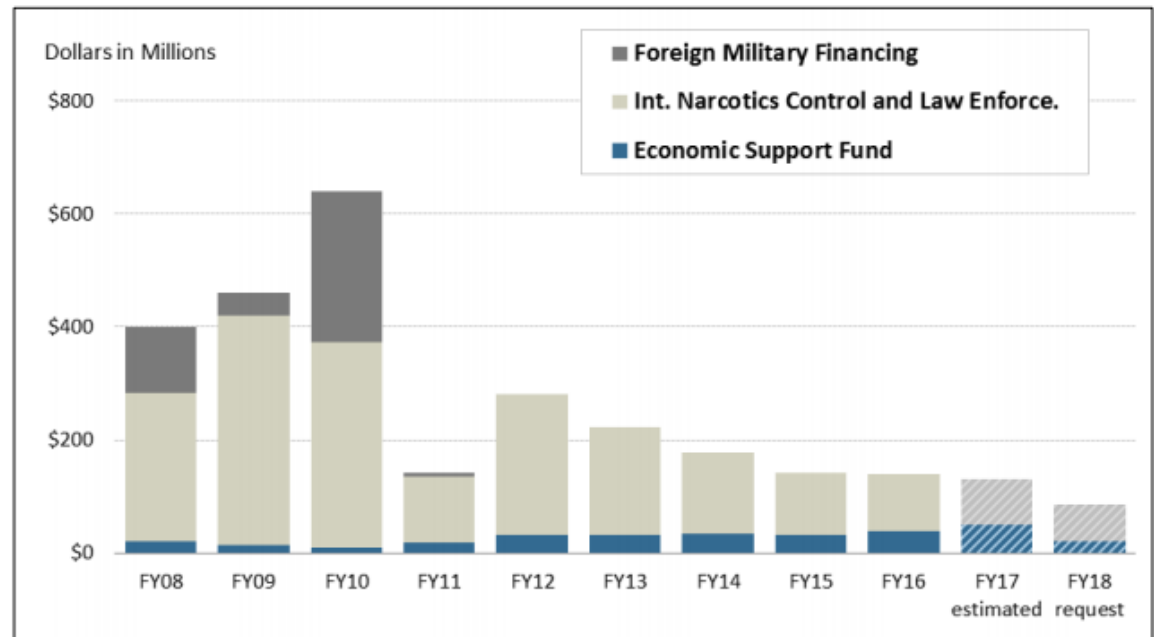
Stand Up for Migrants & Refugees

Advance Land, Economic & Environmental Rights

U.S. – Mexico Security Assistance: Merida Initiative

- Main **U.S. security assistance** package to Mexico
- Nearly **\$2.9 billion** since FY 2008 for the war on drugs
- Military-military assistance mainly through **DOD** now
- **Human rights conditions** on 15% of aid

Figure 4. Funding for the Mérida Initiative by Account



Sources: U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) budget office, November 3, 2016; U.S. Department of State, November 18, 2016; U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, FY2018*.

Source: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41349.pdf>

U.S. – Mexico Security Assistance: Merida Initiative

- **End military assistance** to Mexico, incl. any assistance encouraging a military role in law enforcement.
- **Stop exporting weapons** to Mexican military and police.
- Stop pressuring and supporting **border militarization** at Mexico's southern border.
- **Enforce human rights conditions**, suspending assistance tied to conditions until advances.



U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America

- Largest **U.S. assistance package** to Central America since 1980s
- Security assistance **piece-Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI)**
- **Human rights conditions** on **50% of assistance**
- **Migration conditions** on **25% of assistance**

Table 5. Funding for the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America by Country: FY2016-FY2018

(appropriations in millions of current U.S. dollars)

	FY2016	FY2017 (estimate)	FY2018 (request)	% Change 2017-2018
Belize	1.3	1.3	0.2	-84%
Costa Rica	1.8	5.7	0.4	-93%
El Salvador	67.9	72.7	46.3	-36%
Guatemala	127.5	125.5	80.7	-36%
Honduras	98.3	95.3	67.9	-29%
Nicaragua	10.0	9.5	0.2	-98%
Panama	3.3	3.2	1.2	-63%
Central America Regional Security Initiative	348.5	329.2	263.2	-20%
Other Regional Assistance	91.4	12.5	0.0	-100%
Total	750.0	655.0	460.0	-30%

Sources: U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification for Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Fiscal Year 2018*, May 23, 2017; and the explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 115-31.

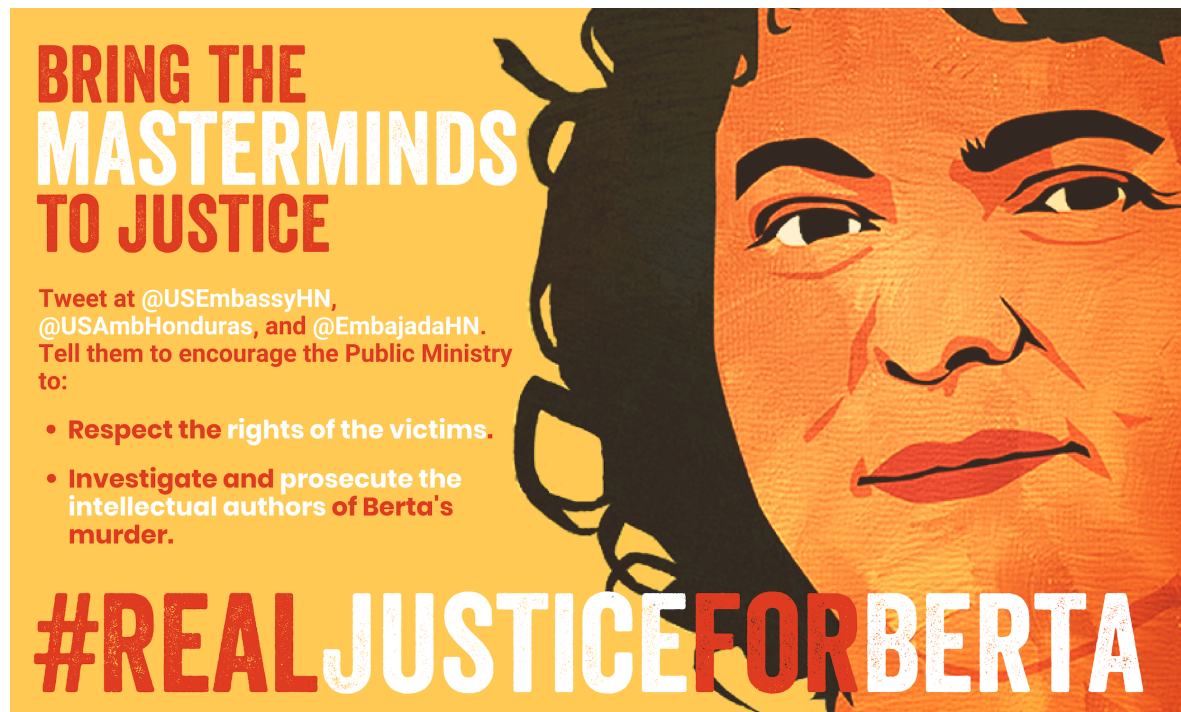
Notes: "Other Regional Assistance" includes assistance appropriated or requested for Central America as a whole through funding accounts such as the State Department's Western Hemisphere Regional program, USAID's Central America Regional program, and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation. Health assistance provided through USAID's Central America Regional program is not considered part of the strategy.

Source:

[U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress, 2017](#)

U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America

- **End military assistance** to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, incl. any assistance encouraging a military role in law enforcement.
- **Enforce human rights conditions** on U.S. assistance to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, **suspending assistance tied to conditions until advances.**
- Oppose U.S. assistance to **harsh and ineffective counter-narcotics assistance** in Central America.



How to get your message heard

- **Research your Representatives & Senators**
 - Research policy positions, personal connections/ special interests, press coverage, social media
 - Contact info-D.C. & In-district office
 - Sign up for email updates, events, news alerts, etc.
 - Find out committee assignments (Appropriations, Foreign Affairs, Homeland Security, Judiciary, Armed services, etc.)



How to get your message heard

- **Organize & Communicate**

- Identify issue & talking points
- Strength in numbers
- Organize in district meetings
- Attend town halls & local events
- Make calls & write letters, op-eds
- Follow-up



How to get your message heard

- **DO** use personal stories to make a point.
- **DO** bring short materials-fact sheets, reports, petitions.
- **DO** relate situations in their home state or district to legislation.
- **DON'T** overload a meeting with too many issues.
- **DON'T** expect staffers or members to be specialists.
- **DON'T** forget to follow-up.

How to get your message heard

Sample Dear Colleague Letters

- **Rep. Lowenthal, Ayotzinapa Anniversary**, Sept. 2018, <http://bit.ly/2DBcgUO> , “Congressman Lowenthal, House Colleagues, Call for Truth and Justice on the 4th Anniversary of Mexican Students’ Disappearance”
- **Rep. Ellison**, May 2018, <https://bit.ly/2tKHOQS>, Mx security “We write to urge you to conduct a full and public assessment of U.S. security assistance to Mexico. We are concerned that U.S. funds may be furthering cycles of violence and enabling human rights violations by the Mexican military.
- **Rep. Lowenthal**, June 2017, <https://bit.ly/2m0dywZ>, Tillerson, Plan Frontera Sur
- **Rep. Ellison**, Dec. 2017, **Honduras Elections**, <https://ellison.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/letter-on-honduras-elections>,

Resources

- **LAWG**-www.lawg.org
- **Security Assistance Monitor** <https://securityassistance.org>
- **Indivisible Guide**-<https://indivisible.org/guide>
- **Congressional Research Service**-<https://crsreports.congress.gov/>

Thank you!



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