

Testimony of

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Hearing on

Challenges at the Border:
Examining and Addressing the Root Causes Behind the
Rise in Apprehensions at the Southern Border

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Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn, thank you very much for calling these hearings to look more deeply at the reasons so many vulnerable children and families are migrating to the United States. The humanitarian crisis on the border of the United States is but a symptom of the political, economic and social crises being lived in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala.

My name is Richard Jones, and I am Deputy Regional Director for Global Solidarity and Justice for Latin America and the Caribbean for Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Catholic Relief Services is the international relief and development agency of the Catholic community in the United States. Last year we celebrated our 70th anniversary. Today we are privileged to serve more than 100 million people annually in more than 100 countries. We also work to educate Catholics and people of good will in the United States about the challenges facing our brothers and sisters around the globe.

We are witnessing an exodus due to violence, insecurity and displacement in Central America and Mexico. CRS has been attending to the increased movement of youth from the Northern Triangle of Central America for many years, and we issued a report in 2010 identifying the needs for more programs to facilitate the reintegration of repatriated youth.¹ We have seen the numbers of unaccompanied youth double every year since 2011. We have seen the homicide rates grow, forced displacement increase and Mexican and Colombian drug cartels battle over who controls the routes through Central America. In El Salvador and Honduras, there are more gang members than police. This is the picture I intend to present to you of what is happening and why. I will then share with you the good news that there is hope: CRS has implemented programs to help youth find work, strengthen families, educate, and begin to restore rural economies. I will identify challenges to this work and offer recommendations to the Committee. I ask you to walk with me for a few moments in the shoes of these children and their families.

I. Factors compelling migration: violence, insecurity and displacement

Increasing desperation has led many families, youth and children to the inevitable conclusion that they have no choice but to flee. They are primarily fleeing violence, not poverty. They aren't just coming to the United States; in fact, other Central American countries have experienced a 712% increase in asylum claims between 2008-2013.² We are witnessing the results of the drug war and gangs: child refugees.

Violence

In April, the UN Office of Drugs and Crime reported that Central America has four of the top five homicide rates in the world in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Belize.³ Honduras has a homicide rate of 90/100,000.⁴ Anything over 10/100,000 is considered an epidemic by the World Health Organization. Central America's average homicide rate is over four times higher than the global average, according to the report.⁵

¹ Dahl-Bredine, Erica, and Mary DeLorey, eds. "Child Migration: The Detention and Repatriation of Unaccompanied Central American Children from Mexico." *Catholic Relief Services* (2010).

² "Unaccompanied Minors: Humanitarian Crisis at US Border." UNHCR Washington. <http://www.unhcrwashington.org/children/read-more>.

³ "Global Study on Homicide 2013," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013).

⁴ Ibid, 24

⁵ Ibid, 14.

Just last month, four boys were killed and dismembered in San Pedro Sula, known as the most dangerous city in the world. They were killed because they refused to be drug couriers in their neighborhood. Two of the four were brothers, one age ten the other age six. Community level drug dealing is controlled by gangs in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, while smugglers hired by the Mexican and Colombian cartels for their services move illicit drugs through the countries. In the last 18 months we have seen an increase of the gangs using children to distribute drugs in Honduras or to watch for police or others in the barrios of San Salvador and Guatemala City. Children and youth are becoming the foot soldiers of gangs and cartels.

The dynamics of violence in El Salvador have also changed over the past year. Between March 2012 and March 2013 the homicide rate dropped by half.⁶ This was due to a truce negotiated between the gangs and the Government of El Salvador. However, over the last 10 months the truce has unraveled largely because it lost credibility: the population did not know what was negotiated, nor were local gang members or communities involved.⁷ Since newly elected President Salvador Sanchez Ceren took office on June 1, 2014, violent deaths have risen to 13 per day or over 70 homicides/100,000 people: nearly double what they were at the same time the previous year.⁸ Three factors account for this: increased confrontations between the two major gangs (MS13 and 18th street); internal power struggles within the 18th street gangs; and the appearance of vigilante death squads including one called the Sombra Negra (Black Shadow). This internal fighting is causing the gangs to increase pressure and control over territory and intensify recruitment. Youth are being recruited at ages eight, nine and ten.

Guatemala's national homicide rate is 48/100,000 overall but the capital, Guatemala City has a homicide rate over 116/100,000.⁹ According to the Pew Hispanic center, over 600 unaccompanied children picked up in the United States in the first six months of 2014 come from that city.¹⁰

Youth are disproportionately affected by the high murder rate. According to the United Nations, half of all homicide victims in Latin America are young men between the ages of 15 and 29. Girls are hardly immune from the violence either- sexual violence against girls is widespread. Two weeks ago a mother and her two daughters en route to the United States were picked up and deported from Mexico. They had left El Salvador because the 18th street gang that dominates their neighborhood knocked on the door of their home and informed the mother that her two daughters were now going to be the "Queens," that is, girlfriends, of the gang members. Desperate- she packed and left that night. Now that she has been deported back to El Salvador, she has no place to go. She can't go back for fear of retaliation. If she moves to another neighborhood, the gang is likely to find her. She can't afford housing in places the gangs don't have presence. Gangs are so pervasive that in Honduras, they compete with the government for a monopoly on force. Only the wealthiest of families can afford the protection needed to live without fear.

⁶ Ibid, 47-48.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Santos, Jessel. "Sánchez Cerén Recibe El País Con Promedio De 13 Homicidios." *La Prensa Grafica*. N.p., 3 June 2014. Web. 14 July 2014. <<http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2014/06/03/sanchez-ceren-recibe-el-pais-con-promedio-de-13-homicidios>>.

⁹ Ibid, 150.

¹⁰ Hugo-Lopez, Marc, Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, and Jens Manuel Krogstads. "DHS: Violence, Poverty, Is Driving Children to Flee Central America to U.S." Pew Research Center. Pew Hispanic Research Center, 1 July 2014. Accessed 11 July 2014.

Gangs sometimes employ “join or die” practices in which youth are told that they will be killed if they don’t join. In El Salvador, the Vice Minister of Education was quoted as saying that nearly 200 public schools are controlled by gangs. David Ortega, secretary of the teachers union, argued that at least 1,000 schools were at a critical level of gang influence.¹¹ Gang recruiting and threats force many young people to drop out before completing their high school education. In the community of San Ramon in San Salvador, five teenage boys were told by the gangs to either join or be killed. The five boys had to spend their last five months of high school at home. Their teachers sent them assignments so that they could graduate. Last October my own son’s soccer mate was stabbed in the leg on the bus in San Salvador. The gangs in his neighborhood were pressuring him to join. His father had a market stall selling t-shirts in the capital. He and his father fled to the United States last November. He was one month away from completing high school. In urban areas in El Salvador, only 46 percent of young people of high school age are actually in school; in rural areas this drops to 26%.¹² CRS has had to pull out of six schools that were part of an education peacebuilding project due to violence.

In Comayaguela, Honduras, this February, the 17-year old nephew of a CRS staff member was gunned down outside of his small street stand with his 18-year old friend. They had refused to join the gang and were trying to make a living through a micro-business to help their families make ends meet.

Sonia Navario’s July 11 piece in the *New York Times* corroborates what we and our local partners have observed. She reports that in Tegucigalpa “At Nueva Suyapa’s only public high school, narcos ‘recruit inside the school,’ according to Yadira Saucedo, a counselor there. Until he was killed a few weeks ago, a 23-year-old ‘student’ controlled the school. Each day, she continues, he was checked by security at the door, then had someone sneak his gun to him over the school wall. Five students, mostly ages 12 and 13, tearfully told Ms. Saucedo that the man had ordered them to use and distribute drugs or he would kill their parents. By March, one month into the new school year, 67 of 450 students had left the school.”

Direct violence, the threat of violence and forced recruitment to become foot soldiers, lookouts and distributors are three of the major reasons why youth and children are fleeing. The inability of law enforcement to adequately provide protection increases the sense of insecurity.

Forced Displacement

Gangs, drug cartels and smaller contraband smugglers are also fighting over who controls territory. Since nearly 80% of the cocaine from South America comes through Central America en route to the United States,¹³ the cartels and smuggling networks battle over who controls the routes. But the drugs are not just passing through. Major Mexican and Colombian cartels have begun paying lower level groups whom they subcontract in-kind with cocaine. Since then, the lower-level groups are also fighting over local market shares and control of national markets in Central America. Meanwhile, gangs seek control over neighborhoods for local distribution and their own protection.

¹¹ Hernandez, Carlos. "Educación Acepta Que Al Menos 200 Escuelas Son Asediadas Por Las Maras." *La Página*. N.p., 22 Jan. 2014. Web. <http://www.lapagina.com.sv/ampliar.php?id=91959> visited July 14.

¹² Informe Desarrollo Humano El Salvador PNUD. 2013

¹³ "Cocaine, organized crime groups, and violence". United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2010). https://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/Reports/TOCTASouthAmerica/English/TOCTA_CACaribb_cocaine_SAmerica_US.pdf. Site last visited July 14. See also Ribando Seelke et al (2010), *Congressional Research Service*, 30 April 2010, [Latin America and the Caribbean: Illicit Drug Trafficking and U.S. Counterdrug Programs](#).

In Mexico and Central America, the cartels are fighting over plazas and the fighting is displacing entire communities. They charge a tax to smaller groups for the plaza. The smugglers are largely seeking to control rural areas. The border between Honduras and Guatemala has become one of the most violent regions in the area as smugglers displace farmers and rural land owners to control border crossing points. Typically smugglers will “legally” purchase land by offering ridiculously low sums for land and signing over the title in exchange for not killing the owner. Or they coerce and co-opt the population: in Honduras, for example, CRS staff members hear stories about whole communities being forced into these arrangements. Each community member unloads a kilo from one plane and transfers it to the next transport and are then paid. In this way, these poor community members are tied implicitly into the trade. They are forced into taking a role in the transport, making them legally complicit, and then due to poverty are locked into a perverse cycle of dependency as their family’s day-to-day needs can only be met by these illicit payments.

Gangs, on the other hand, use threats and intimidation to take over individual homes. These homes are then used as safe houses for gang members who are being pursued. There are few specific studies on the relationship of organized crime to forced displacement. However, a public opinion survey conducted in El Salvador in November 2013 by the Instituto Universitario de Opinion Publica at the Jesuit University found that nearly 21 percent of those surveyed had been displaced. Statistically this represents an estimated 130,000 people who have fled their homes- some moving 2 or 3 times. These are higher rates of displacement than that seen during the country’s civil war.¹⁴ The gangs also extort fees in the communities: residents, shop owners or businesses coming into the communities, such as water distributors. On July 3rd in Guatemala City, a lone gang member launched a grenade through a small store owners’ front window for failing to pay extortion.

The violence points to an inability of these governments to protect their people. Police are either involved or complicit or unable to deal with the situation. In Honduras the judicial system is completely overwhelmed. In El Salvador, nine out of every ten homicides ends in impunity.¹⁵ One of the main responses of these governments has been to arrest ever more young men, especially poor young men, filling prisons and local police jails to overflowing. Some are at over 300% capacity in El Salvador. Conditions are inhumane, only inviting greater levels of inhumanity.

Endemic poverty

A glance at the demographics also explains increased migration. As with many developing countries, a significant portion of the populations in Central America are young people. This youth bulge phenomenon creates a whole host of challenges – among them, the need to educate and provide economic opportunities for more and more people. In El Salvador alone, it is estimated that 50,000 jobs would have to be added to the economy annually to address youth unemployment. I am sure I do not have to remind you of the challenges our own country has experienced in doing this in recent years.

The rural economies of Central America and Mexico have been devastated over the past two decades. Due in part to a decline in agricultural support by governments, small farmers find it nearly impossible to compete in today’s globalized agriculture. Those who do manage to eke out a living have little resilience. One natural disaster can deplete all of a household’s limited resources: the recent

¹⁴ Instituto Universitario de Opinion Publica de la Unviersidad Jose Simeon Cañas. Encuesta noviembre 2013.

¹⁵ Informe Desarrollo Humano para America Central: Abrir espacios a la seguridad ciudadana y desarrollo humano, 2009-2010.

devastation of the coffee industry in much of the region due to the coffee leaf rust disease has indeed contributed to higher than usual levels of migration. Many families who have lost their livelihoods thus move to the cities, often a first step to another journey north.

Family Disintegration and Social Exclusion

The migration of so many working aged men and women has left many communities as virtual nurseries and nursing homes- only the very young and the elderly remain. One positive outcome of this reality is that women are increasingly empowered as leaders in their communities. But it also means that family structures have broken down. Fathers may leave and send remittances home, but they are not home to protect children and serve as role models. Grandparents are relied upon to provide for children, but as teenagers are more at risk of attacks by gangs, they often cannot protect them.

Conclusion

Most of the youth and children arriving on our doorstep are fleeing violence, insecurity and forced recruitment. Although there may still be a percentage of youth among those fleeing whose motive is primarily poverty or family reunification, the skyrocketing numbers are largely due to violence. These youth have no options. They and their families are well aware of the risks of the journey. Five out of seven girls expect to be sexually assaulted on the trek north. Many tell us that they take birth control pills before they leave to avoid getting pregnant if they are raped. It is also well known that smugglers and the drug traffickers kidnap migrants. Research conducted by our Catholic Church partners in 2009 documented over 9,000 kidnappings in the first six months of that year.

Mauricio Gaborit, SJ, Dean of the Psychology program at the Jesuit University of El Salvador, uses the following analogy: "Families and young people know that migration is a long, dark dangerous tunnel. But it is a tunnel. Here they live in a cul-de-sac." That cul-de-sac is not only devoid of educational and economic opportunities but is ever more dangerous because narco-trafficking and gang activities have taken over more and more areas. As one mother from Honduras told us, I would rather my child die trying to find life in the north than die sitting here.

Critical problems underlying the violence are the exclusion and social fragmentation inherent in these societies. There are no quick solutions to these long brewing problems. But to address their current symptoms, it is critical to interrupt the violence through interventions with youth in conflict with the law, youth in prison, and youth being released from prison, as well as gang intervention. The United States has had some successes with this in Los Angeles, Chicago, New Orleans.

Successful secondary prevention programs target youth at high risk of dropping out of school, engaging in risky behavior and joining gangs. Such programs engage adolescents (ages 8-15) and their families for direct case management intervention. Others target youth ages 16-24 for programs that also address risky behavior and create alternative livelihood opportunities. I share details about one such successful program below: Youthbuilders.

To address the exclusion and social fragmentation in the long term requires primary prevention that will strengthen families. Examples of such community-based programs are community centers and day care with daily, multiple generation activities. Activities for multiple generations help to reduce social

exclusion and family and community risk factors for violence. They also increase protective factors like family cohesion, self-esteem, and community support. Another critical characteristic of such programs is their connection to government programs like alternative education and opportunities for employment. Economic advancement promotes social inclusion. Each of these interventions should be simultaneous, continuous and in the same place. Current programs are piecemeal. Promising pilots should be implemented and tested for success.

Catholic teaching asserts that people do have a right to migrate in order to fulfill their responsibilities, that is, to provide for their families. Catholic teaching also asserts, however, that people have a right not to migrate; that is, people have a right to thrive where they are and become the people God has called them to be. In CRS' experience, no child or family makes the decision lightly to undertake the arduous journey north. It is usually the last decision, when no other alternative remains. Families in Central America do not have to be told to diversify their income sources, as we are instructed with our investment portfolios. The insecurity in which they live necessitates this strategy. One glimmer of hope can help a family to avoid the most desperate tactic of heading north.

II. Successes investing in children and youth

In response to high unemployment among young people in Central America, CRS has implemented innovative programs for young people at risk. They range from reducing child labor and assisting street children to attend school to providing essential life and job skills to young people in some of the toughest neighborhoods.

Youth also need employment. One particularly successful program is Youthbuilders, or Jovenes Constructores in Spanish. The six month program helps at-risk and gang-involved youth to find economic opportunities. From one-on-one counseling and life skills training to vocational training and remedial education, Jovenes Constructores gives youth hope and moral support. One participant, Nelly, aged 23, owns a bread-baking company thanks to the support of the program. Through Jovenes Constructores, Nelly discovered an interest in baking, learned how to manage her books, provide customer service, and make a profit. Jovenes Constructores provided seed money so she could invest in a gas oven. She is the only person in her family bringing in income. It is not hard to imagine her coming north if it weren't for this business.

An incredible 80% of participants who complete Jovenes Constructores either find work or return to their education. CRS alone prepared more than 6,000 youth in the El Salvador between 2010-2014. The program in El Salvador works with more than 250 employers in El Salvador to help place youth in work. CRS' intervention helps employers to trust the youth, giving them a second chance at life. It is being replicated throughout the region and with additional support could be further scaled up.

As mentioned earlier, it can be very difficult for some families to keep their children in school. It is often children from such poor families who head out to the streets trying to earn money or, at least, be one less mouth for mom and dad to have to feed. Through a project funded by the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program, CRS has helped to keep 54,000 children in more than 1,000 schools in Intibucá, Honduras. This department in rural southwestern Honduras has the third lowest human development index in the country, fourth lowest adult literacy rate, and is geographically inaccessible in many areas. It is an also area of high emigration.

The program employs several approaches. First, we seek to enhance the quality of education. Schools are modified, substitute teaching is employed, and more than 2,000 teachers have been trained. Secondly, we provide healthy food: daily breakfast provided from a school garden, community contributions, and commodities from the US. Third, safety patrols and transportation to school helps some families to overcome the security barrier.

The current program costs about \$6 million per year to serve 54,000 children, or about \$111 annually per child. Half of this is invested in food commodity delivery and the other half is invested to remove barriers to access and improve education quality. Child attendance rates for boys and girls are above 90% and Ministry Officials assert that academic achievement statistics in Spanish have dramatically increased across the department. With additional resources, this program could be expanded to other departments in Honduras.

III. Success in community-based, pro-poor economic development

In an effort to raise rural incomes in areas with high rates of emigration, CRS and local partners have implemented agriculture and agro-enterprise programs which have assisted a total of 67,000 farm families throughout Central America since 2007. Smallholder farmers often grow only rain-fed crops and use low quality seed. They also produce supply-driven raw materials that they sell to intermediaries at the farm gate. As a result, they don't benefit from the profits made in the resale of their goods in larger markets and remain trapped in a cycle of poverty.

CRS has been assisting such farmers to produce demand-driven goods and sell them directly to profitable markets. We have also helped them organize themselves in enterprises that maintain multiple off-farm relationships with financial service providers, buyers, local governments, and added-value certification bodies. CRS' programs have demonstrated that small farmers can be profitable and move out of poverty given the right combination of training, technical assistance, access to credit, and marketing support.

Launched in November 2007 in Nicaragua, the CRS-led Alliance to Create Rural Development Opportunities through Agro-enterprise Relationships (ACORDAR) is an example of this work at scale. The \$53 million, public-private sector, five-year initiative directly benefits 7,000 producers organized in 107 cooperatives. USAID views ACORDAR as its flagship agro-enterprise project in the country and frequently hails it as an example of success of the Global Development Alliance. The program increased annual coffee revenue on average by 268 percent to (\$3,980) by the end of the program.

Investments in smarter inputs, improved technology, and training are the core of the program's success. ACORDAR supported farmers to repopulate coffee and cocoa plants. New production technologies such as micro-tunnels and plastic row covers ward off pests, reduce weeds, and enhance soil moisture. ACORDAR also promotes high quality and certified seed to increase yields and introduce new crop varieties based on market demand. As a result, bean farmers using certified seed have more than tripled production. Because seed is expensive for farmers and germination is critical for the investment, ACORDAR has supported the installation of over 43 greenhouses that are owned by cooperatives and used by thousands of their members.

CRS has also taken advantage of years of experience in sustainable agriculture by promoting organic fertilizer production both on the farm and within farmer cooperatives. As a result, hundreds of farmers

in ACORDAR are either organically certified or using organic methods as a cost-saving measure for fertilization.

Improving proper water access, storage and irrigation systems enables farmers to grow irrigated crops, thereby decreasing their vulnerability to erratic weather patterns. Co-investments in water management systems have resulted in 50% reduction in water usage and increased production.

These successes have created well over 5,000 new jobs and doubled producers' incomes. And of course these economic benefits have secondary and tertiary effects for the entire community. Farmers are doing so well that in at least one case, one brother returned home from the US to help out on the family farm.

Families who lack farmland must find other entrepreneurial opportunities. As in Nelly's story, small loans can make a big difference in a family's finances. CRS promotes savings-based microfinance programs to help increase the financial security of the rural and urban poor throughout Central America. These programs provide training and organizational support to groups of 25 to 30 people at the community level to form their own savings groups. The groups learn how to pool their members' savings to make small loans to support their members' income-generating enterprises. Loans are sometimes as small as \$5. The groups provide access to small amounts of capital necessary to grow small businesses, pay for school fees, and deal with emergency situations that members would not otherwise have. By learning to save and mobilize their own resources to provide loans for one another, families and communities can become more resilient and better able to support their families. CRS in Latin America, in conjunction with local partners, has organized over 44,000 people in savings groups who have amassed over \$1 million in savings.

IV. Challenges

In all of our programs, CRS works closely with the local and state-level governments. Clearly, the governments of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala must invest more in their people, particularly the poor and marginalized. Government representatives in El Salvador admit that they are still trying to understand the complex issues driving the increase in child migration. The public child protection system is also working overtime to try to ensure that child migrants being returned from the United States and Mexico are safely reunited with their families.

In Honduras, repatriation flights are landing two times a day in San Pedro Sula. The government and the international community are setting up temporary shelter at emergency camps for three days and then sending these people home. The interventions offered are temporary: documentation, reunification with family members, food, and a small transportation stipend. The programs do not address any of the issues at the heart of their original flight. Of those being returned, more than 13,000 are estimated to be children. Children returning to their original communities will be forced to deal with the same cycle of violence and poverty that forced them to leave in the first place.

Newly sworn in Salvadoran President Sanchez Ceren has called on the deeply polarized society to come together in dialogue to find solutions to the violence. The country's elites must support these efforts, as they have not always been willing to do. The governments in the region need greater support from the international community to address the security and economic crises which are driving the spike in

migration of children and youth to the United States. Child welfare systems require significant support and investment throughout the region, including development of foster care programs.

Ongoing corruption of government officials at all levels means that security is tenuous. Citizen security approaches must be adapted to protect families, including increasing pay for law enforcement authorities. Even if owning a small business meets the economic needs that enable a family not to send someone north, if a gang threatens someone in the family they have little choice. And the costs of flight can deplete family resources.

V. Recommendations

Catholic Relief Services strongly urges the United States government to invest in programs to respond to the many factors compelling flight. Responding to the symptoms of these problems is much more costly, not only in terms of dollars but, more importantly, lives. Small investments in communities are a bargain to taxpayers. Community-based programs focused on citizen security are critical. From a development perspective, international assistance to the Central American countries should be more specifically targeted toward: a) community-based programs to successfully reintegrate deported young adults into society, such that they find gainful employment or other livelihood options; b) assisting governments to provide follow-on support to the families of children and adolescent migrants who have been returned by the United States and Mexico, c) providing targeted assistance for job creation and livelihood programs in rural and peri-urban areas with high rates of out-migration, and d) supporting the expansion of proven models for violence prevention among at-risk youth. Specific recommendations follow.

1. **The US Agency for International Development**, in coordination with the Department of State, the US Department of Agriculture, and other relevant agencies, including Government Ministries of designated migrant-sending countries and non-governmental organizations with experience in the region, **should develop a strategy to prioritize inclusive economic growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable alternatives to emigration.** USAID should promote public policies towards this end, and prioritize programming in communities 1) with high rates of international movement to the United States; 2) experiencing or at high risk of trafficking in persons; 3) receiving high rates of returned or deported migrants and refugees; 4) affected by destabilizing level of criminal, gang, and other violence; 5) which have developed partnerships with migrant associations and federations in the United States.

The strategy should include

Programs to strengthen families and reduce violence, particularly for adolescents between the ages of 10-15 years, who increasingly are at greatest risk of gang recruitment. Psychosocial programs to teach families alternatives to violence, parenting skills, positive discipline, stress management, problem solving skills and communication have been credited with strengthening intra-family relationships in pilots. This will require hiring and training social workers and psychologists in a proportion of 2 workers/psychologists for every 25 gang members.

Increased investments in citizen security, judicial systems, and policing. The policing needs to be about intelligence and more surgical as opposed to making massive arrests

that lead nowhere. Until governments can control the violence, children will continue to flee.

Scaled-up efforts to alleviate rural poverty and revitalize agricultural production. Rural revitalization can help thousands of farmers to move beyond day-to-day living and take their products to market.

Increased promotion of public-private partnerships for income generation, employment and violence reduction, and prioritizing urban youth. Programs to build vocational skills and help youth to find work can help to address the youth bulge in Central America. High youth unemployment rates make it difficult for youth to find meaningful work and make them more vulnerable to gangs.

Scaled-up micro-enterprise initiatives, rural credit and micro-insurance mechanisms, targeting assistance to traditionally marginalized groups. Micro-enterprise can help to harness the creative ideas that youth and other traditionally marginalized populations, such as the indigenous and women, experience.

Rely on long-term, quality, community-based programs with sustainable outcomes using assistance rather than contract mechanisms. In CRS' experience, the longer-term community involvement inherent in assistance instruments significantly increases the sustainability of such programs. Moreover, their routinely smaller awards mean that such instruments are more likely to be effectively absorbed by the local community and less at-risk for corruption. In order to effectively manage an increase in grants and cooperative agreements, USAID should hire more agreement officers.

2. **With the governments of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, the United States should invest in safe and robust programs for youth and young parents who have been repatriated.** As the story of the "Queens" demonstrates, families and children who flee may not be able to return to their home communities. They may end up on the streets. Many will attempt again to make it to the United States. Robust programming to find safe homes and livelihoods for them will provide alternatives to another arduous journey.
3. **The State Department should consider the implementation of an orderly departure program for children and families who are in danger and meet the requirements for refugee protection.** This would ensure that these vulnerable populations are protected, spare them the risky journey north, and ensure that the US is meeting its international refugee treaty obligations. They could be resettled in the region or the United States, depending on the best interest of the child standard.
4. **The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance should further invest in Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery Strategies targeted at regions of high emigration.** Ongoing investment in building resilience and reducing communities' vulnerability to disasters can reduce the need to migrate as a last resort. The high incidence of climatic shocks in the region, including earthquakes, hurricanes, flooding and drought – have spurred urbanization and often migration in the region.

5. **The Government Accountability Office should undertake a study to identify the communities with the highest rates of emigration.** It should identify the primary factors driving migration, including gang, criminal, and domestic violence; family reunification; and lack of economic opportunities, country by country. The study should identify any previous programs funded by the US government which have successfully addressed these causes, and any which have failed. It should also consider the extent to which assistance to date has been targeted to areas of highest emigration and violence.

6. **Approve Millennium Challenge Corporation Compacts in Honduras and El Salvador.** These compacts could inject much-needed investments into the countries. In addition, CRS strongly urges that United States Trade Representative accept the government of El Salvador's use of procurement policies to support its small farmers. This program has been very effective for small farmers for whom market access in the past has been extremely limited. It is particularly important to support the Salvadoran government's efforts to improve living conditions at home.