Remarks for DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano
Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) Dialogue

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Remarks as Prepared
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Good morning. I want to thank Ambassador Avant for that kind introduction.

I also appreciate the opportunity to join Prime Minister Ingraham, Minister Turnquest, and Permanent Secretary Smith.

The United States and The Bahamas share a strong relationship built on our commitment to bolstering security, strengthening democracy, and promoting trade and cultural exchange.

These shared interests, our common belief in the rule of law and democratic values, and our geographic proximity ensure that we will remain not only strong allies, but also good friends and neighbors.

The United States is equally proud to have strong partnerships with the other Caribbean nations here today.

Thank you for your contributions to the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative and, in particular, this forum. And thank you for your commitment to the security – and economic vitality – of the Caribbean region.

The Caribbean Basin Security Initiative dialogue is – and remains – one of our most effective means to share knowledge, lessons, and experience on threats and challenges we face across the region.

This dialogue is an important way for us to chart our progress over the past year; it is also an opportunity for us to recommit to the continued cooperation that is essential to address transnational threats that impact our nations, from drug trafficking and human smuggling, to natural disasters and terrorist threats.

In my time today, I would like to discuss some of the lessons we have learned at the Department of Homeland Security, and more generally across the U.S. government, on the importance of regional cooperation and sustainment to achieve our shared security goals.

I also will discuss some of the key ways that we are working together across the region, and how we hope to build on this work in the future.

As many of you know, DHS was created in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks to work with our partners in the United States and across the world to combat and respond to terrorist threats. While this is our primary mission, it is not our only mission.

We are also deeply engaged in many countries – and especially here in the Caribbean – on efforts to bolster border and maritime security, combat transnational criminal organizations, and improve disaster preparedness and response.

Our work recognizes that we face a variety of threats that impact our common security. Unlike threats of the past, these threats are more global in scope and origin and increasingly borderless.

In today's world, the very nature of travel, trade, and commerce means that one vulnerability or gap anywhere across the globe has the ability to affect economic activity thousands of miles away.

It is why, for example, over the past two years the United States has worked with the International Civil Aviation Organization to enhance security of the international aviation system following the December 2009 attempted terrorist attack aboard a U.S. commercial flight. We are pleased that some Caribbean countries have joined us in this effort.

Although that incident involved a U.S. plane flying into a U.S. city, it was an international terror plot in just about every way, endangering individuals from at least 17 different countries.

For more than a year now, DHS also has been leading a Global Supply Chain Security Initiative to protect the vast amount of goods and commerce that move across the world every day - and that drive our global economy. Again, Caribbean nations have joined us in this effort.

Together, with the World Customs Organization, we launched Program Global Shield, an initiative to protect the global supply chain by preventing the illegal theft or diversion of precursor chemicals that are often used to make improvised explosive devices.

Currently, more than 60 countries now participate in Program Global Shield, sharing information about the export of 14 precursor chemicals.

We are pleased to have Caribbean participation in these initiatives, which underscore the reality that threats that originate on the other side of the world can impact security in our own hemisphere.

The United States is firmly committed to Caribbean Basin Security and the three pillars contained in the Plan of Action, which are to substantially reduce illicit trafficking, increase public safety and security; and promote social justice.

We believe the CBSI offers the best way forward for CARICOM, the United States, the Dominican Republic, and our other regional partners to meet our common security goals in the Caribbean.

We also recognize that CBSI is a shared partnership. While U.S. foreign assistance commitment to the partnership is significant – totaling $139 million since 2010 – success will require a shared responsibility on the part of all CBSI partners and regional coordination.

And while I recognize the difficultly of raising additional funds for security programs, allow me to share one idea that you may wish to further explore, which is the use of legislative authorities that allow for the seizure of assets used in illicit activity to help sustain law enforcement programs.

DHS makes use of similar laws in the U.S. to obtain funds and equipment for our law enforcement agencies and partners. I encourage further discussion and dialogue on this issue.

A key feature of our partnership is the cooperative dialogue process and the technical working groups that will help us increase regional coordination.

I'm pleased that DHS has participated in several of the groups focusing on law enforcement and maritime security, and we will continue to support these efforts.

I would like to briefly discuss each of these areas, including our work in the region and how we hope to deepen our engagement in the future.

We know the majority of country and territory borders in the Caribbean Basin are maritime borders, not land borders. This presents unique challenges for border security efforts.

Together, we must work to prevent illegal flows of drugs, migrants, contraband, weapons, and stolen goods, while continuing to facilitate the lawful trade and travel essential to our economies.

We operate the Container Security Initiative in a number of Caribbean countries, including here in the Bahamas, to prescreen U.S. bound shipping containers and detect dangerous cargo, including chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons and explosives.

We have been successful in providing customs assistance and training in some Caribbean basin countries to improve security while helping increase customs revenue.

In addition, we have worked with CARICOM to establish an Advance Passenger Information System (APIS) center in Barbados to identify individuals connected to criminal or terrorist organizations.

This has become a model for regional cooperation on aviation security, and we hope to build on this work by expanding the CARICOM APIS program to additional Caribbean nations.

We have also worked with our CARICOM partners to significantly increase our maritime security efforts to combat the flow of illegal drugs transiting the region.

With more than one million miles of open ocean across the Caribbean, policing these waters will continue to be a challenge. We must do more, together, to meet current and future security needs.

The U.S. Coast Guard has been engaged in the Caribbean region for decades. The Coast Guard provides personnel and assets to increase surveillance and information sharing, conducts interdiction operations in international waters, and provides Caribbean maritime services with training in a wide range of maritime security, law enforcement, and safety missions.

The Coast Guard also works with many countries across the region to assess anti-terrorism measures. Through CBSI funding, the Coast Guard and U.S. government partners have committed to provide boats and related training to a number of Caribbean countries totaling $10.9 million to date.

In the future, we want to build on these efforts by working through the CBSI to improve our domain awareness in the Caribbean.

This increased collaboration may include sharing technology with partner-countries, creating a system to share near real-time information about threats, and developing a maritime and air control strategy. We also hope to work with you to create a new forum to share best practices and develop new tactics to counter drug trafficking and transnational criminal organizations.

In addition, we must increase our joint law enforcement investigative and operational capacity in the Caribbean to disrupt transnational criminal organizations, both in the short and long term.

With the Department of State and the FBI, DHS has been working with our Caribbean partners through the CBSI to develop a fingerprint collection system that will help us check criminals against terrorism and criminal databases.

Once this system is operational, we believe it will allow for sharing of information between the U.S. and participating Caribbean countries.

In the future, we also hope to expand our U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement partner units in the Caribbean to help detect, deter, and dismantle transnational criminal organizations. These units are currently active in two Caribbean countries.

I noted earlier that the U.S. has been working with ICAO to advance a global initiative to strengthen the international aviation system against evolving terrorist threats.

This effort culminated last year with the adoption by 190 countries of a historic Declaration on Aviation Security at the ICAO Triennial Assembly, which laid a new foundation for a truly global aviation security system. It is important that Caribbean nations signed this document and continue to be a part of this international effort.

The Transportation Security Administration is actively engaged in the Caribbean region to help build capacity to prevent terrorists and criminals from exploiting the aviation system.

This work has included conducting airport assessments and air carrier inspections at all last point of departure airports in the Caribbean. Through the Organization of American States, TSA also provides aviation security training to Caribbean countries.

In the future, we hope to offer additional aviation security training to all Caribbean countries on inspection techniques, cargo security management, screening, and quality control.

And we hope to explore sharing of equipment and technology where those needs exist, as well as sharing our expertise on air cargo security best practices.

Finally, we know that every nation in the region must contend with the threat of potentially catastrophic natural disasters, from hurricanes and floods to devastating earthquakes like the tragedy that struck Haiti in 2010.

The United States is committed to helping our Caribbean partners prepare for and respond to disasters when they occur.

It is why, for example, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has provided many Caribbean countries training on disaster preparedness and resiliency. FEMA also assisted with search and rescue operations in the aftermath of Haiti's earthquake, as did the U.S. Coast Guard and other U.S. agencies.

Many of these programs and initiatives are examples of strong, cooperative models that work, and that can be expanded and used to strengthen regional cooperation in other areas.

Ultimately, our success will hinge on how well we continue to work together within the framework of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative to advance our common goals.

We have made important progress since the creation of this dialogue, and I look forward, within CBSI, to continue our cooperation and engagement in the region.

The United States appreciates your partnership and continued collaboration. Thank you for inviting me to speak today. I look forward to substantive dialogue.