



# Fact Sheet

## The Merida Initiative - *An Overview*

In December 2008, Mexico and the United States signed the first Letter of Agreement (LOA) for the Merida Initiative, opening a chapter of historic cooperation and acknowledging the shared responsibilities of the United States and Mexico to counter drug-fueled violence threatening citizens on both sides of the border. Through five years of implementation, the Merida Initiative has led to a new architecture for bilateral security cooperation, provided tangible support to Mexico's security and judicial institutions and helped to galvanize U.S. efforts to stop the flow of weapons, money and the demand for drugs. Initially signed by presidents Calderon and Bush, the Merida Initiative continues under Presidents Peña Nieto and Obama.

With \$2.1 billion in appropriated funds from the U.S. Congress, the Merida Initiative has delivered nearly \$1.2 billion in equipment and training to date. The Strategic Framework for implementing the myriad of Merida Initiative activities and programs is referred to as the Four Pillars, each of which pulls together Merida Initiative programs under strategic objectives. Taken together, these four objectives will strengthen both of our societies in the fight against organized crime and violence and will help drive the transformation of our bilateral security relationship.



### **PILLAR ONE – Disrupt Capacity of Organized Crime to Operate**

Diminish the power of Mexican organized criminal groups by systematically capturing and incarcerating their leaders and by reducing drug trade revenues by interdicting drugs, stopping money laundering, and diminishing production. Through equipment, technology, aviation, and training, the Merida Initiative will support better investigations, more captures and arrests, successful prosecutions, and shipment interdiction.

### **PILLAR TWO – Institutionalize Capacity to Sustain Rule of Law**

Enhance the capacity of Mexican public security, border and judicial institutions to sustain the rule of law. Merida Initiative programs will strengthen the capabilities of key institutions to improve internal controls, further professionalize the military and police, reform corrections institutions, and implement justice sector reform.

### **PILLAR THREE – Create a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Border Structure**

Facilitate legitimate commerce and movement of people while curtailing the illicit flow of drugs, people, arms, and cash. The Merida Initiative will provide the foundation for better infrastructure and technology to strengthen and modernize border security at northern and southern land crossings, ports, and airports. Professionalization programs will transfer new skills to the agencies managing the border and additional non-intrusive technologies will assist in the detection of criminal activities.

### **PILLAR FOUR – Build Strong and Resilient Communities**

Strengthen communities by creating a culture of lawfulness and undercutting the lure and power of drug trafficking organizations. By implementing job creation programs, engaging youth in their communities, expanding social safety nets, and building community confidence in public institutions, Merida Initiative assistance will test new initiatives to strengthen Mexican communities against organized crime.

## **PILLAR ONE – Disrupt Capacity of Organized Crime to Operate**

- Four CASA 235 maritime surveillance aircraft, valued at \$50 million each, were delivered to SEMAR. The CASA is a patrol aircraft that allows the Mexican Navy to further increase vigilance and control over their territorial waters.
- A secure, cross-border telecommunications system between ten U.S. and Mexican border sister cities, valued at \$13 million dollars, has been established. This system provides public security forces on both sides of the border the capability to request and exchange information regarding active criminal investigations.
- License plate recognition equipment has been installed at 73 toll booths throughout Mexico's major highways to detect stolen and suspicious vehicles and link the data to Plataforma México, Mexico's criminal justice system database.
- Nine UH-60M Blackhawk helicopters were delivered—three to the Mexican Navy (SEMAR) and six to the Federal Police. These aircraft have proven invaluable in confronting criminal organizations who would otherwise have used the advantage of difficult terrain to operate with impunity.

## **PILLAR TWO – Institutionalize Capacity to Sustain Rule of Law**

- The Government of Mexico (GOM) opened the Mexican National Academy for Penitentiary Administration in Xalapa, Veracruz in May, 2009 with support from the Merida Initiative. The Academy has almost 7,000 newly recruited officials. Mexican prisons are working to receive international accreditation. To date, a total of 14 facilities, 9 Federal and 5 State, have received accreditation and one additional State facility has been recommended for accreditation.
- The Merida Initiative has provided \$8 million of training and equipment support to the national vetting program at the state and federal levels, a major effort by the GOM to stamp out corruption and build trustworthy institutions.
- As Mexico transitions to an oral accusatorial judicial system, training has been provided to 7,700 prosecutors, investigators and other personnel in transitioning to the accusatory system, organized crime, human trafficking, anti-kidnapping, money laundering, fugitive apprehension and forensic sciences. Additional support includes developing mock courtrooms, virtual classrooms and courseware development, key training elements worth over \$2.5 million dollars.
- From February until June 2013, 1,498 state and municipal police officers received training, the largest block of training directly provided to police officers in the history of the Merida Initiative. This exceeds the number of Mexican state and local police trained during the entirety of 2012 by roughly 40 percent.

## **PILLAR THREE – Create a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Border Structure**

- Delivery of over 300 canines trained in the detection of narcotics, weapons, ammunitions and currency to the Federal Police, PGR and SAT is ongoing. Each of the agencies is in the process of building or remodeling their own K-9 team training academy. Additionally, trainers are being certified to train officers in Mexico.
- Launched in December 2013 with Merida Initiative support, Viajero Confiable is a GOM trusted traveler program similar to the U.S. Global Entry program that allows expedited clearance for pre-approved, low-risk travelers. Currently, Viajero Confiable is operating at airports in Cancun, San Jose del Cabo and Mexico City, with plans to expand to 10 additional airports in 2014.
- The acquisition and use of non-intrusive inspection equipment (NIIE) continue to be a critical component to securing the borders of Mexico in the fight to detect and prevent the flow of illicit goods. Through the Merida Initiative, the Border Security program has contributed \$112 million in technology including non-intrusive inspection equipment, improvement of infrastructure, and personnel training in the areas of border security.

## **PILLAR FOUR – Build Strong and Resilient Communities**

- Merida Initiative Culture of Lawfulness (COL) programs aim to instill a sense of individual responsibility to uphold the rule of law in Mexico, with the larger goal of reducing crime and corruption. COL education is now part of the junior high school curricula in 31 states and federal entities. During the 2013-2014 school year, 9,084 schools gave COL instruction to 808,000 students. Schools that have taught the COL course in previous school years report fewer fights, better communication between students, greater knowledge about the rule of law and bullying, and more respect for school regulations.
- COL has supported the placement of citizens' watch booths in 73 local offices of the Mexico City district attorney. The booths are staffed with observers who provided information to people reporting crimes. Over a period of 18 months, more than 16,250 people were surveyed about the services received, and this information has helped the district attorney's offices improve markedly.
- The Merida Initiative's Drug Demand Reduction (DDR) effort is aimed at strengthening Mexico's drug addiction diagnosis, treatment, and data-gathering infrastructure, to facilitate long-term reduction in illegal drug consumption. Technical assistance provided through the DDR program has led to the creation and expansion of drug treatment courts in Mexico. Currently, it is financing a \$200,000 project with Mexico's first drug treatment court, located in Guadalupe, Nuevo León. The Organization of American States will use the results of a diagnostic survey to create an evaluation framework that the GOM can follow to expand such courts throughout the country. Additional Mexican states are expected to implement drug courts within the coming year.