



The Road to the High Level Consultative Group Meeting

The Merida Initiative was conceived in 2007 as a multi-year, \$1.4 billion effort. The U.S. Congress has appropriated \$1.3 billion since the program's inception in FY2008. The U.S. and Mexican governments have built on the foundations of the Merida Initiative to establish four strategic pillars to guide our cooperation and institutionalize our partnership: Disrupt Organized Crime Groups; Strengthen Institutions; Create a 21st Century Border; and Build Strong and Resilient Communities.

The March 23 High Level Consultative Group brings together Mexican and U.S. Cabinet members. It is the culmination of a process of strategic planning that was initiated by President Calderon and President Obama at their summit meeting in Guadalajara in August 2009. The meetings building up to this event have included:

- September 2009: U.S. Secretary of State and Mexican Foreign Secretary to establish the four strategic pillars and to create a Policy Coordination Group to guide the substance of these pillars.
- October 2009: At the Deputy Cabinet level to clarify and strengthen programs proposed for Pillars I and III.
- November 2009: At the Deputy Cabinet level to clarify and strengthen programs proposed for Pillars II and IV.
- January 2010: Policy Coordination Group to assess progress and make recommendations to the High Level Consultative Group for consideration on March 23, 2010.

To implement the new strategic framework, the following structure will continue to guide bilateral cooperation between both countries:

- **High Level Consultative Group:** This cabinet level group meets annually and provides guidance to and receives reports from the Policy Coordination Group.
- **Policy Coordination Group:** This Deputy and Assistant Secretary level group meets to clarify and strengthen the many areas of cooperation in each of the Pillars and to target Merida Initiative resources. They have produced work plans and new cooperative arrangements in all key areas.
- **Bilateral Coordination Group:** This coordinating group meets monthly at the Mexican Foreign Ministry to review the progress of Merida Initiative programs, develop communications strategies, and seek ways to accelerate deliveries.

The four pillars of enhanced cooperation against organized crime are:

- **Pillar I - Disrupt Capacity of Organized Crime to Operate:** Diminish the power of Mexican organized criminal groups by systematically capturing and incarcerating their leaders, reducing drug trade revenues by interdicting drugs and diminishing production, and stopping the flows of illicit funds and arms.
- **Pillar II - Institutionalize Capacity to Sustain Rule of Law:** Enhance the capacity of Mexican public security, border, and judicial institutions to sustain the rule of law.
- **Pillar III - Create a 21st Century Border Structure:** Facilitate legitimate commerce and movement of people while curtailing the illicit flow of drugs, people, arms, and cash.
- **Pillar IV - Build Strong and Resilient Communities:** Strengthen communities by creating a culture of lawfulness and undercutting the lure and power of drug trafficking organizations.

Under the leadership of the High Level Consultative Group, important innovations and strategic advances have been made in the Merida Initiative partnership, including:

- A working group was established in December 2009 to focus exclusively on the violence in select border cities. This working group made a field assessment of the San Diego-Tijuana and El Paso-Ciudad Juarez corridors in December 2009 and January 2010 respectively, seeking ways to enhance cooperation on the border and better target Merida Initiative resources in order to reduce the levels of violence and curtail the operating space of Drug Trafficking Organizations in these key regions.
- A further step toward closer cooperation will be taken in May 2010 when the Merida Bilateral Implementation Office will open in Mexico City. This office will provide a venue for officials from the U.S. and Mexico to work together on a daily basis on Merida Initiative projects, strengthening coordination, and improving the pace of deliveries. This shared workspace will be used for the implementation of Merida Initiative training and equipment projects only and will not, in any way, have an operational or law enforcement focus.

The Merida Initiative is an unprecedented partnership between the U.S. and Mexico to fight organized crime and associated violence while furthering respect for human rights and rule of law. As we continue to evolve our process of policy coordination and work ever closer on a day- to-day basis, we will reach our collective goal of a safer and more productive hemisphere.

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