

Vice President Pence: President Trump Is Building a Secure and Prosperous Future for Central America

Last week, I had the opportunity to join our global partners from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador at the Northern Triangle Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America in Miami, Florida.

These nations have courageously pursued the fight against corruption, crime and drug trafficking. They've undertaken structural reforms to establish a stronger foundation for economic growth, and they are working in close cooperation with regional partners, business communities and multinational institutions to implement long-term solutions to the problems facing Central America.

But despite these efforts, Central America continues to be plagued by gangs and vast criminal organizations that drive illegal immigration and illegal drugs.

And the consequences of this rampant crime are not restricted to the Northern Triangle. The American people are reminded of the terrible cost of drug trafficking, gang violence and illegal immigration every day—in the gangs and violence that plague our streets and on the faces of families and friends who have fallen prey to the scourge of drug addiction.

President Donald Trump has made it clear that this must end, and under his leadership and Central America's, this will end.

Already, President Trump has taken decisive action to protect the American people from the harshest consequences of illegal immigration and the transnational drug trade. And this

president has ordered the creation of an aggressive strategy to dismantle the criminal cartels that have spread across our nation.

Our president has wasted no time in removing gang members, drug dealers and criminals off the streets of America.

And thanks to President Donald Trump, illegal crossings at America's southern border are down nearly 70 percent since the start of this year.

To keep America safe, President Trump knows that we must confront these problems at their source. We must meet them—and we must solve them—in Central and South America.

We are proud to support programs that strengthen civil society, improve education and literacy and spur economic growth in impoverished areas of the region.

American assistance in business development and agriculture in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras in recent years has created more than 40,000 jobs and lifted tens of thousands of families out of poverty.

And even in this time of fiscal challenges, President Trump has made clear our commitment to this region by requesting an additional \$460 million for security and prosperity in Central America.

But we know the most important work throughout the region is to be made by the nations and the people who call it home. A secure and prosperous Central America requires nothing short of national transformation on an ongoing basis from within—in the economy, in civil society, in the halls of government.

And a more prosperous Central America, built on a foundation of democracy and the rule of law, will be an inspiration to other nations in this hemisphere and beyond.

We need only look to the nation of Venezuela to see what

happens when democracy is undermined. That once-rich nation's collapse into authoritarianism has pushed it into poverty and caused untold suffering for the Venezuelan people.

We must, all of us, raise our voices to condemn the Venezuelan government for its abuse of power and its abuse of its own people, and we must do it now.

And across the wider region we must show Venezuela and its people that there is a better path—the path of democracy, of justice and above all else, we must show Venezuela that freedom is the only path to true prosperity and to a brighter future for their people.

But we must always remember that security is the foundation of prosperity. In the Northern Triangle, we must pursue new and stronger partnerships in a word to drive out the criminals, the cartels, the gangs and all who would undermine a future of peace and safety for your people.

In the Northern Triangle, we ask with great respect that nations maintain and seek to expand their commitment to tackle these problems head-on. We urge them to cement the gains that they have made and make renewed progress toward our shared goal of security and prosperity in Central America.

Together, I know we will build on the foundation of friendship between our lands and between our people. With determination and renewed commitment to the principles that make security and prosperity possible, and with President Donald Trump in the White House, I know we will step forward together in the Western Hemisphere and meet the glorious future that awaits us. {eoa}