

Vice President Pence: Security Is the Foundation of Prosperity

Vice President Mike Pence rolled out the red carpet Thursday for a group of very important leaders when the U.S. and Mexico jointly hosted the Northern Triangle Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America at Florida International University in Miami.

During the day, the vice president met with the leaders of the Northern Triangle—Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador—discussing matters of importance to not only those nations, but also the U.S. Promoting economic prosperity in those nations, through which as much as 80 percent of the illegal drugs sold in the U.S. is trafficked, has become a vital national security issue.

Vice President Pence met individually with:

- Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez (readout),
- Salvadoran Vice President Oscar Ortiz (readout), and
- Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales (readout).

Prior to the vice president's speech at the event, the White House issued the following statement:

President Donald J. Trump commends Mexico for its leadership in co-convening the Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America with the United States in Miami, Florida from June 15 to 16. The leaders of the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador—along with officials from Mexico, Canada, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Belize, Nicaragua, Spain and the European Union—will join Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Secretary of Homeland

Security John Kelly, Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross and Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin in a collaborative effort to address the economic, security and governance challenges and opportunities in the Northern Triangle region and in Central America more broadly.

The United States views the security and prosperity of Central America as key to regional stability and to the security of the United States. We affirm our strong partnership with Central America and the region in supporting our mutual priorities. The president applauds this conference and the efforts of our Central American and regional partners to work toward a future that achieves stability, security, prosperity and growth in the Western Hemisphere.

The president also affirms the importance of the 47th General Assembly of the Organization of American States, taking place in Cancun, Mexico from June 19 to 21. The president remains greatly concerned about the situation faced by the Venezuelan people and has instructed Secretary Tillerson to collaborate with countries in the region to move discussions on Venezuela forward during this important meeting. The United States stands with the people of Venezuela during these sad and troubling times for their country.

The White House also announced Vice President Pence will visit Central and South America later this summer. The plan currently includes stops in Cartagena and Bogota, Colombia; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Santiago, Chile; and Panama City, Panama, during the week of Aug. 13. During his travel, the vice president will meet with leaders from government and the business community to “reaffirm the president’s commitment to deepening bilateral trade and investment ties with the region and continue the administration’s support of security cooperation, business engagement, agriculture and infrastructure development.”

In his speech (see the video clip above for the full speech) to those in attendance at the conference, the vice president said, in part:

Since the founding of the Alliance for Prosperity in 2014, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador have devoted significant resources toward a brighter future for your people.

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

Your resolve is impressive and know today that you have the great respect of the president of the United States and the American people.

And on behalf of the president, allow me to assure you the United States of America stands with the nations and people of the Northern Triangle. We stand with you in your commitment to root out crime and corruption. We stand with you in your commitment to stop the scourge of drug trafficking once and for all.

And the United States of America stands with you as you build a more secure and prosperous future for the benefit of your people and the benefit of the Western Hemisphere.

In a word, we're in this together. As the president has said often, his highest duty as president of the United States is to keep America safe. But this president knows that your security and your prosperity are directly connected to ours.

This very gathering is a testament to President Trump's

commitment to a stronger, safer and more prosperous Central America. I'm pleased to announce, at the president's direction, that I'll be traveling to Central and South America later this year to continue to build on the good work being done at this conference.

The people of the United States have a special place in our hearts for the nations and the people of Central America, especially in the Northern Triangle of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

Your nations experienced your birth of independence when the United States was still in the youth of our own. We are bound together by history and geography. We are bound together by commerce and the nearly \$25 billion in goods and services that flow between us every year.

But most of all, we are bound together by friendship, by the rich traditions and contributions that the sons and daughters of the Northern Triangle have made to the fabric of American life and make to this day.

Be assured, the United States is proud of our strong partnership with nations in the Northern Triangle. We are committed to strengthening that partnership so that we can continue to address the significant problems facing our neighborhood.

You sit at the heart of the Western Hemisphere, where North meets South; and every day, countless people and products pass over your streets, through your airports, your seaports and across your borders. By and large, this flow of commerce and crowds benefits us both in the exchange of culture and goods and services.

But as we all know, Central America has been plagued, as well, by vicious gangs and vast criminal organizations that drive illegal immigration and carry illegal drugs on northward their journey to the United States. These

criminal syndicates wreak havoc everywhere their tentacles spread, as your people know all too well.

At this very moment, there is an estimated 85,000 active gang members in the Northern Triangle alone, and they bring untold misery, corruption and violence to your communities. One out of every five citizens in this region is a victim of crime every year—from theft, to extortion, to kidnapping, to human trafficking or worse.

But the consequences of this rampant crime are not restricted to the Northern Triangle. They radiate outward and swiftly reach us here in the United States. Central America is merely the beginning of a journey for too many migrants fleeing poverty and violence. It's merely a stop on the highway as people confront the merchants of death in the region.

Driven by the high demand for narcotics here in the United States, fully 80 percent of documented drug traffic travels through Central America—80 percent. The American people are reminded of the terrible cost of drug trafficking, gang violence and illegal immigration every day.

We see it in the gangs and violence that plague our streets and cities. We see it in the news with the names of the victims and their families. And we see it on the faces of our families and friends who have fallen prey to the scourge of drug addiction.

President Trump has made it clear that this must end, and under his leadership and yours, this will end.

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

This president has ordered the creation of, in his words,

an “aggressive strategy to dismantle the criminal cartels that have spread all across our nation,” and our administration has wasted no time under the leadership of Secretary Kelly in removing gang members, drug dealers and criminals off the streets of America.

The president’s leadership is already making a difference. Criminal organizations such as MS-13 are being decimated and going directly into prison.

And thanks to President Donald Trump, illegal crossings at America’s southern border are down nearly 70 percent since the start of this year. And we are grateful for our partners in Mexico and across the Northern Triangle who have contributed to our progress in this area.

But to further stem the flow of illegal immigration and illegal drugs into the United States, President Trump knows, as do all of you, that we must confront these problems at their source. We must meet them—and we must solve them—in Central and South America.

The United States’ partnership with the Northern Triangle is built to accomplish this vital mission. It’s what brings us here today. In terms of security, the United States of America is helping train your police forces. We’re supporting your attorneys general as they target drug traffickers, gang leaders and corruption. We’re sharing information to better disrupt the flow of weapons and cash into criminal hands.

The United States is proud to support programs in the Northern Triangle that strengthen civil society, improve education and literacy, and spur economic growth in impoverished areas.

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.

Rest assured, under the leadership of President Trump, the United States will continue to work with our partners to support the programs that prove effective.

Even in this time of fiscal challenges, I'm pleased to report that President Trump has made clear our commitment to this region by requesting an additional \$460 million for security and prosperity in Central America.

But as you all know, the most important work throughout the region is to be 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. In the Northern Triangle, we ask you with great respect that you maintain and seek to expand your commitment to tackle these problems head on.

Through the Alliance for Prosperity, you have already made sustained annual commitments in recent years exceeding \$2.8 billion to stimulate growth, improve safety, root out corruption, end the environment of impunity and enact other important reforms. These are vital investments in your future.

Yet continued action is more necessary now than ever before. On behalf of the president, we urge you to cement the gains that you have made and make renewed progress toward our shared goal of security and prosperity in Central America.

Working together, we will continue to build professional and accountable civilian police forces throughout the region. We'll continue to support your campaign against public corruption and to strengthen the rule of law.

And together, we'll continue to provide more people with a

path out of poverty—to give the citizens of Central America a better path and a brighter future. But to accomplish these goals, the nations of Central America must continue to work with new partners—in the business community, in government and in the faith community—to foster stronger and more robust civil societies and economies, to stanch the flow of illegal drugs and illegal immigration and to combat gang violence and organized crime.

A flourishing economy gives people a reason to put down roots in the land of their birth and to grow, rather than fleeing to the north. Good-paying jobs give people an alternative to a life of poverty, hopelessness and crime.

By fostering opportunity in the cities and towns of Central America, we'll keep families together. We'll create stronger and more stable communities where your sons and daughters can climb the ladder of success and build a brighter future for themselves, their loved ones and your nations as a whole.

The surest way to make progress toward opportunity and prosperity is for the nations of the Northern Triangle to continue to break down barriers to job creation and growth, to reform their tax and regulatory systems and to root out corruption at every level of government.

This room is proof that businesses also see tremendous opportunity in the Northern Triangle and beyond. Businesses from North and Central America are so well represented here, as are the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

These institutions and industry leaders I can assure you want to partner with your nations to improve the investment climate, to create jobs, to spur the kind of growth that will build a foundation for a brighter future for your nation and for ours.

And on behalf of the president and all the American businesses represented here, I can promise you we want you to grow. We want to export more goods and services to your countries because your success is our success.

These are the new and stronger partnerships that'll be necessary for a more prosperous Central America. 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.

It's vital that that the Northern Triangle expand its security cooperation and integration not just with the United States, but also with the other nations of Central America—Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama.

So too must we continue to work closely with Mexico to

cripple drug traffickers and disrupt criminal organizations as they seek to travel north. And we cannot overestimate the importance of strong borders. Under President Donald Trump, the United States' borders will be strong. But the borders of the United States will always be open to legal immigrants and the lawful flow of commerce. But we will make sure our borders are closed to those who would do us harm—and it will be impassable to the drugs that are besetting our families and communities.

Today, we pledge to strengthen the bonds that join the United States, the Northern Triangle and all the nations of Central America together in this New World.

Let today mark the beginning of a new era here in the New World—of partnership and progress throughout our neighborhood for the benefit of all our people.

As the Old Book says, let us “encourage one another and build each other up,” just as, in fact, we are doing.

Together, I know we will build on the foundation of friendship between our lands and between our people. Together, we will reach new heights of safety and security and peace and prosperity. And together, with the help of all the leaders gathered here, with your determination and renewed commitment to the principles that make security and prosperity possible, with President Donald Trump in the White House, and with God's help, I know we will finish the task before us. We will step forward together in the Western Hemisphere and meet the glorious future that awaits us. {eoa}