

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Office of the Spokesman

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Fact Sheet

Combating Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico

Today, Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Tom Shannon announced the Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico. Under this comprehensive strategy, the United States will work with partner countries to combat transnational and other gangs that commit crimes in Central America, Mexico, and the United States through both prevention and enforcement. It will help prevent youth from entering gangs and strengthen the fight against gang-related violence and other crimes. This strategy is one component of a larger regional security plan that was discussed between President Bush and Guatemalan President Berger and Mexican President Calderon, and now under development by the Central American countries.

Criminal gangs are a threat to the security and stability of the communities in which they operate. Gang members prey on communities, families, and children by employing tactics such as extortion, murder, and other crimes. Gangs move with impunity across borders, and gang violence threatens fragile democracies.

The Strategy sets forth five areas in which the United States will work with our neighbors to combat criminal gangs:

- 1. Diplomacy:** The U.S. will work with partner countries, the international community, the private sector and Non-Governmental Organizations to identify resources and make legal and policy improvements that help protect youth and combat crime.
- 2. Repatriation:** The U.S. will work with our partners in Central America and Mexico to share information and improve the process of returning gang members who have come to the United States illegally and, where feasible, help returning gang members be productive members of their communities.
- 3. Law Enforcement:** Regional police and justice officials will collaborate to track down criminal gang members, including by working through a new Central American Fingerprinting Exploitation initiative, and to pursue criminal gang members through joint law enforcement efforts such as the new Transnational Anti-Gang Unit in El Salvador.
- 4. Capacity Enhancement:** The U.S. will share knowledge and tools with countries to improve law enforcement and prevention. This includes providing training, knowledge, and tools through mechanisms such as the Regional Gangs Program, The Organization of American States' Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (OAS/CICAD), and the International Law Enforcement Academy in El Salvador.

- 5. Prevention:** The U.S. will work with our neighboring countries to develop prevention programs and national and regional policies that protect our youth by providing alternatives to joining criminal gangs and helping members leave gangs.

The strategy to combat criminal gangs from Central America and Mexico will increase communication and information sharing at all levels of government and between governments. Implementing the Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico will involve most U.S. agencies, including the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Agency for International Development as well as partner governments in the region . This strategy enhances U.S. interagency and international cooperation, increases coordination, and systematically enhances linkages between foreign governments and U.S. Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies.