



Durbin Requests Government Study on Firearms Trafficking to Mexico & Central America

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) today sent a request to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to update its January 2016 reports on efforts to combat firearms trafficking from the United States to Mexico, Belize, and Guatemala. Additionally, Durbin requested that GAO include in these updated reports an assessment of efforts to combat firearms trafficking to the other Central American countries in the Northern Triangle – El Salvador and Honduras.

“Violence perpetrated by criminal organizations in the Northern Triangle has killed thousands and has prompted many residents of these countries to flee to other countries seeking safety. The trafficking of firearms for use by these criminal organizations has also facilitated other types of criminal activity, including narcotics trafficking and human smuggling,” Durbin wrote. **“Recent trace data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives indicates that a significant percentage of crime guns seized in Northern Triangle countries originated in the United States. GAO’s assessment of the efforts of U.S. agencies and their Central American counterparts in addressing this firearms trafficking would be an important contribution to the debate.”**

In 2016, the “Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Firearms Trafficking to Mexico Have Improved, but Some Collaboration Challenges Remain,” and “Building Partner Capacity: U.S. Agencies Can Improve Monitoring of Counter-Firearms Trafficking Efforts in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico” reports provided by GAO gave valuable insight into addressing firearms trafficking by examining: (1) the origin of crime guns that were seized in Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize; (2) the effectiveness of collaboration among U.S. agencies tasked with combating firearms trafficking; (3) the

status of coordination between U.S., Mexican, and Central American agencies in combating firearms trafficking; and (4) how well U.S. agencies were measuring progress in combating this trafficking.

GAO's 2016 report on Mexico found that about 70 percent of crime guns seized in Mexico and traced through ATF's crime gun tracing program had originated in the United States, and "most were purchased legally in gun shows and at gun shows in the United States, and then trafficked illegally to Mexico." GAO found that U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)'s mission includes "interdicting the illegal export of weapons and other contraband out of the United States." However, CBP has said it only conducts outbound inspections at the southern border "when resources permit"

Full text of the letter is available [here](#) and below:

March 8, 2019

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

I write to ask the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to update its January 2016 reports entitled "Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Firearms Trafficking to Mexico Have Improved, but Some Collaboration Challenges Remain," and "Building Partner Capacity: U.S. Agencies Can Improve Monitoring of Counter-Firearms Trafficking Efforts in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico." I further request that GAO include in these updated reports an assessment of efforts to combat firearms trafficking to the other Central American countries in the Northern Triangle: El Salvador and Honduras.

The security concerns and law enforcement challenges resulting from firearms trafficking to Mexican and Central American criminal organizations are serious. In 2016, GAO provided valuable insight into addressing those challenges by examining: (1) the origin of crime guns that were seized in Mexico, Guatemala and Belize; (2) the effectiveness of collaboration among U.S. agencies tasked with combating firearms trafficking; (3) the status of coordination between U.S., Mexican, and Central American agencies in combating firearms trafficking; and (4) how well U.S. agencies were measuring progress in combating this trafficking. An update to GAO's 2016 analysis will help Congress assess the current state of agency efforts and collaboration to stop the illicit trafficking of firearms and firearms parts to Mexico and Central America, and this will inform Congress' legislative, oversight and appropriations activities.

It would be of further assistance if GAO's updated analysis covered all three of the Northern Triangle countries in Central America: El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Violence perpetrated by criminal organizations in the Northern Triangle has killed

thousands and has prompted many residents of these countries to flee to other countries seeking safety. The trafficking of firearms for use by these criminal organizations has also facilitated other types of criminal activity, including narcotics trafficking and human smuggling. Recent trace data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives indicates that a significant percentage of crime guns seized in Northern Triangle countries originated in the United States. GAO's assessment of the efforts of U. S. agencies and their Central American counterparts in addressing this firearms trafficking would be an important contribution to the debate.

I appreciate the work GAO has done on the issue of firearms trafficking in the past, and I urge GAO to provide updated reports to Congress as swiftly as possible. Thank you for your consideration of this request.