

# THE MERIDA INITIATIVE: A CONTINUATION IN THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE



On Wednesday, [May 14, 2008] the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee passed the “Merida Initiative to Combat Illicit Narcotics and Reduce Organized Crimes Authorization Act of 2008.” Also known as “Plan Mexico”, a less than popular name due to its resemblance to “Plan Colombia”, the initiative calls for a foreign aid package of close to \$1.6 billion meant to combat drug trafficking and organized crime in Mexico. A bulk of the money has been specifically designated to fund the acquisition of military equipment such as helicopters and weapon systems. This is, in my opinion the worst plan proposed at the worst time.

For one, it fuels a widespread speculation that the so-called “aid” is part of a larger strategic national security initiative, “a sort of Marshall Plan for Latin America, that runs parallel to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.” It also begs to question whether infusing Mexico with a multibillion military project will have the same effect as it has had in Colombia, where an increase in human rights abuses and paramilitary violence have taken place since Plan Colombia was implemented seven years ago.

While President Felipe Calderon touts his government’s revamped efforts to address widespread drug-related violence in the country and while he views the Merida Initiative as a much needed step in the right direction; widespread reports of human rights violations and abuses at the hands of Mexican security forces have hit an all-time high. Opposition groups in Mexico have denounced the initiative as a ploy to strengthen the military’s policing role in Mexican society, to increase counter-intelligence and anti-subversive mechanisms and to provide the government with resources for stronger involvement in the affairs of individuals, all of which has been disguised under the umbrella of a drug war, such as was the case with Plan Colombia.

While the social components of the initiative seem to hit the high notes of an otherwise flat symphony, some wonder whether these represent mere demagoguery. As the Latin American Working Group has rightly pointed out, not a penny of the Merida Initiative will provide aid to reduce poverty, it further skews aid to Latin America in the direction of security assistance

rather than aid for public health, poverty reduction, and disaster assistance. The Merida Initiative also does nothing to solve the problems on our side of the border that increase violence in Mexico and Central America: the United States’ demand for illegal drugs and the flow of U.S. firearms into the region.

What is in the package is a strong military and strategic component that falls short of sending U.S. troops to Mexican soil, such that it provides strict guidelines for the training of Mexican troops, it counsels Mexican agencies on U.S. requirements enlisting private U.S. enterprises to assist in anti-narcotics equipment and guidance and provides for mere human rights and ethics “suggestions” in dealing with bystanders and society at large. In other words, the “aid” has been formulated as an incentive and reward to Calderon’s government, and a slap in the face to Human Rights defenders in Mexico.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. As Bloggers Unite celebrates this remembrance with the credo “that all people are born with basic rights and freedoms that include life, liberty, and justice,” it is imperative that we take a closer look at the effects that our involvement in different regions and countries around the world is having to its citizens. The Merida Initiative, Plan Colombia, The Iraq war, have all been sold to the American public as efforts in democratization, peace, prosperity and security, all of which have shown exactly the opposite. They have destabilized regions, fueled insurgencies, increased violence cycles and most importantly they have threatened the core principles of the rights to life, liberty and justice. □

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See [www.groundswellonline.org/groundswell/2008/05/merida-initiati.html](http://www.groundswellonline.org/groundswell/2008/05/merida-initiati.html)

*HR6028 or the Merida Initiative gives 1.5 billion dollars over the next 5 years to Mexico and Central America for the war on drugs. Over 2/3 of this money goes to Mexico, and it appears that most will be distributed in 2009 and 2010. On June 10, 2008, HR6028 was passed by a large majority. Only 22 Democrats voted against it, none of whom were from Texas. However two of the most progressive members of Congress, John Conyers and Dennis Kucinich did vote against it.*

*It is clear at this point that the war on drugs is doing nothing for the citizens of the United States of America, which has more people in prison than anywhere in the world, while remaining first in drug use as well. Isn't it also clear that it is doing nothing for the citizens of the rest of the world? It has produced a hell on earth in Colombia. Do we want to allow this*

*disaster to be spread to Mexico?*

*Furthermore, why are we giving any law enforcement money to the fraudulently elected government of Mexico, the same government that is responsible for so much repression in Oaxaca? We can't even give medical care to children here but we can pay the government of Mexico so that it can continue its horrendous policies.*

*The war on drugs is nothing but a cover for a war on both human rights and popular resistance to oppressive regimes. Act to prevent this bill from becoming law. The Merida Initiative is now in the Senate, and should be vulnerable for no other reason than it adds to our huge debt.*

**Contact your Senators and Representatives  
about this now! -Guillermina Williams**