

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman**

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MEDIA NOTE

**The United States and Guatemala
Implement the Merida Initiative**

The U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala Stephen McFarland signed a letter of agreement today with the Government of Guatemala implementing the Merida Initiative, a multi-year regional effort to combat organized crime, gangs and the trafficking of narcotics and firearms. Minister of Government Salvador Gandara signed the letter on behalf of the Guatemalan government. Today's signing of the letter provides an initial \$3,650,500 in FY2008 funding for the first year of the Merida Initiative. It obligates an additional \$550,000 to the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala.

Under this agreement, the Guatemalan Ministry of Government will participate in the following five projects fully funded by the U.S. Government: Central American Fingerprint Exchange, \$400,000; Central American Vetted and Sensitive Investigative Units (SIU), \$500,000; Transnational Anti-Gang Initiative (TAG), \$1,225,000; Improved policing and police equipment, \$975,500; and improved prison management, \$550,000. These Merida Initiative programs are being provided under the U.S. Department of State's International Narcotics Crime and Law Enforcement (INCLE) program.

Representatives of the Government of the United States and the Government of Guatemala will meet quarterly to review qualitative and quantitative progress towards achievement of the project goals and objectives. These evaluations are in addition to the ongoing monitoring of the programs and activities conducted by each government.

Other non-INCLE Merida Initiative components and regional INCLE funds that benefit Guatemala, such as regional law enforcement training programs and judicial, improved border inspection technical assistance and firearms interdiction training, are provided for separately. Based upon requested FY2009 and FY2010 Congressional appropriations, the United States hopes to continue to provide future funding for these and related Merida Initiative.