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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

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SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE
WEAPONIZATION OF THE FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT

December 20, 2024

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

I write to you today regarding the Department's efforts to promote cooperation in the Caribbean on addressing the root causes of crime and advancing public safety and security. Through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), the United States has supported a collaborative, multinational approach to improving the effectiveness of special prosecutors, improving anti-corruption measures, and promoting social justice.

However, recent reporting has raised concerns that the Dominican Republic, a primary partner in CBSI and a key strategic ally of the United States, is not living up to its commitments on human rights within its criminal justice system.

As a Member of Congress representing South Florida and serving on the Appropriations Committee, I am keenly aware of the level of funding distributed to the Dominican Republic through CBSI. As you demonstrated in your recent speech in the Dominican Republic, CBSI is a "bipartisan effort spanning multiple U.S. administrations – Republican and Democrat" with the goals of "tackling transnational crime, combat drug trafficking, to make our citizens safer."

As you're aware, the mission of the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs' Office of Western Hemisphere Programs (INL/WHP) is to develop policies and manage programs to help partner countries in the Western Hemisphere strengthen law enforcement and other rule of law institutional capabilities. One of the programs of INL/WHP is the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), which includes the objective of "improving rule of law by supporting the development of the justice sector" in CARICOM and the Dominican Republic.

As of 2024, the United States has committed more than \$1 billion in funding to CBSI, and the Dominican Republic has received [almost 23% of CBSI funding](#). A key benefit from CBSI programs in the Dominican Republic [includes](#), "Strengthening the criminal justice system by improving the timeliness and effectiveness of criminal prosecutions and providing dispute resolution services and improved access to justice."

Reports from international human rights organizations raise concerns that the Dominican Republic is failing to meet the civilian security pillar, particularly regarding persons deprived of liberty. This is a concerning development, particularly considering the significant amount of assistance provided by the United States to the Dominican Republic.

In April of this year, the Organization of American States' (OAS) Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) published its [annual report](#), which found glaring problems with the Dominican Republic's excessive use of preventive detention, a status that holds those who have not yet been charged with a crime behind bars for months or years at a time. The report states that "the Commission reiterates its concern about overcrowding, the excessive use of pretrial detention and the deplorable conditions of detention faced by this population."

In 1999, [the OAS found that](#) "the vast majority of prisoners, approximately 85%, were in preventive detention." The 1999 report concluded, "It is urgent that the criminal procedures be expedited to decide on the accusations pending against prisoners held in preventive detention, in keeping with due process and within an acceptable period, based on international standards in this area."

Over 25 years, little has changed. In that time, millions of dollars in foreign assistance from the United States has gone to the Dominican Republic, either directly, through CBSI, or other programs like the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC). In August, the White House announced a \$9.5 million investment through USAID to "strengthen the Dominican Republic's existing justice system" by "helping improve criminal justice institutions' performance" among other measures.

Chief among the criminal justice institutions in the Dominican Republic is the Public Ministry (MP). Reporting in Dominican media [makes it clear](#) that the MP is the root of the country's preventive detention problem, as 98% of the requests for "coercive measures" during the first four months of 2024 have involved the imposition of preventive detention. This has led to rampant overcrowding, lack of medical care, and other public health crises in prisons that are ostensibly funded by the United States government. Earlier this year, one of these facilities – La Victoria Penitentiary, the largest prison in the Caribbean – [caught on fire](#), leading to the tragic loss of at least 13 lives.

These rampant humanitarian crises are extremely troubling. The deep ties between our constituents in South Florida and the Dominican Republic further demand that both of our governments have an honest conversation about the crisis occurring in the Caribbean, particularly as the Dominican Republic is set to host the Summit of the Americas next year.

Accordingly, I would appreciate your prompt answers to the below questions:

1. What successful outcomes have been measured for CBSI's Caribbean Anti-Crime (CAC) program in the Dominican Republic? How does the State Department measure the efficacy of CAC's pillars on Pre-Trial Detention and Self Representation and Trial Advocacy, particularly for at risk and underserved communities?

2. How much of CBSI funding is funneled to the Dominican Public Ministry for the training of prosecutors, improvement of prison facilities, and related criminal justice strengthening programs, and how does the State Department measure the efficacy of these programs?
3. What progress has been made through CBSI-funded programs on the timeliness and effectiveness of criminal prosecutions in the Dominican Republic? Is the reduction of preventive detention rates a measurement of success for these programs?
4. When was the last time CBSI funds sent to the Dominican Republic were audited?
5. What commitments has the United States government received from the government of the Dominican Republic to reduce its prison population and implement measures beyond preventive detention?
6. How many U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents are currently incarcerated in the Dominican Republic, and of that amount, how many are under a preventive detention order?

Thank you for your attention to these questions and your continued work in making the region safer for the United States and the citizens of our partner nations.

Sincerely,



Debbie Wasserman Schultz

Member of Congress