

Statement of Gil Kerlikowske on Southwest Border & Drugs

National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy

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Thank you Secretary Napolitano. I am pleased to be with you, the Attorney General of the United States, the Homeland Security Advisory Council Members, the HIDTA Directors, and the other State and local law enforcement professionals here with us today and on the phone. I recognize the fact that some of our greatest assets in our efforts along the Southwest border are the tremendous talent and energy resident in law enforcement agencies across our Nation. I am grateful to Secretary Napolitano and her team at DHS, as well as Attorney General Holder and the men and women at the Department of Justice who played an instrumental role in developing the *Counternarcotics Strategy* we are releasing today, which will help leverage that talent and energy against one of our most significant challenges of the day.

There has been a lot of discussion, as there should be, about the drug and violence-related challenges faced by the Government of Mexico and the steps they need to take to defeat the drug cartels. I have nothing but the greatest respect for the courageous efforts made by President Calderon in taking on the cartels. He and his Administration deserve our sustained support.

In my first few days in office, I have heard from many of my former colleagues in State and local law enforcement. We talked about the importance of working together as one team to stop the flow of drugs into our country and the southbound flow of bulk currency and weapons. This is a large, complex, and important undertaking. I applaud DHS Secretary Napolitano and Attorney General Holder for their strong emphasis on working to stop the flow of money and guns that fuel Mexican drug cartel violence. Clearly the money and weapons are just as important to the cartels as the drugs. DHS and DOJ are actively engaging and listening to state and local officials.

We know the border problem does not stop in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, or California. The tentacles of the drug cartels are in many of our communities. They operate in our cities, suburbs, rural areas, in our national parks and our public lands, and even in our prisons. Without the help of State and local law enforcement, Federal authorities will never have the detailed knowledge of how local drug cartel cells and their drug, money, and weapon distribution networks operate.

The shipments of bulk currency and weapons that slip across our border with Mexico every year don't appear out of thin air. Illegal organizations, operating throughout the continental United States, collect and move their contraband through our local communities. They have built networks of stash houses, organizational cells specialized in drugs, guns, and money, and a virtual army of couriers with vehicles and advanced communications and logistics.

Federal authorities are doing a better job in communicating, but they are not the only ones with the obligation to do better. I know this is already happening, but let me reiterate that State and local law enforcement has to put the vast array of data collected in the course of daily police work to full use in our national effort against the drug cartels. We won't beat back this tough challenge through border interdiction alone. The best way to partner with President Calderon

and the Mexican authorities is to gain a deep understanding of the traffickers' operations. That means we have to collect, analyze, and disseminate vast quantities of information, invest the time in complex investigations, use all of the legal investigatory tools available to us, and conduct operations such as controlled deliveries of drugs, money, and weapons which enable us to see deeply into drug trafficking organizations.

Part of the Obama Administration's efforts to turn this problem around, in addition to previous initiatives announced by DHS and DOJ, is through the document we are releasing today, the *National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy*. Each chapter contains specific recommended actions, developed by teams of experts from throughout our government, to enhance our operations. ONDCP is committed to ensuring implementation of all parts of this comprehensive plan.

Let me briefly highlight some elements of new counternarcotics strategy that will provide concrete guidance toward that end. Specifically, the *Strategy* will direct agencies to:

- *Improve and integrate border databases:* To make cases and arrests, local officers must have access to updated information that is fully integrated with all relevant data sources.
- *Upgrade and standardize communications on the Southwest border:* Federal, state, and local officials need to be able to speak to each other, in cases of an emergency, and also in the conduct of normal operations each day in the field.
- *Develop Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) technology:* Various agencies have deployed ALPR technology to assist in controlling access to facilities and in monitoring areas of high crime and border crossings. The *Strategy* tasks all agencies to work to ensure these systems can talk to each other, which is vital for bulk currency and weapons interdiction.
- *Enhance interior enforcement.* We must expand interior enforcement against trafficking of drugs, money, and weapons, working through Federal, state, and local task forces.
- *Increase capacities of U.S. Attorney's Offices to handle Southwest border drug investigations and prosecutions:* State and county prosecutors on or near the SWB have an almost unbelievable case load – more resources at the Federal level will help release some of the pressure they are under.
- *Expand Federal bulk cash concealment detection training.* DEA and ICE train state and local officers in concealment “trap” detection and methods of courier debriefing. IRS's bulk cash initiative is a pilot program which seeks to provide state and local officers with standardized training in evidence exploitation. These programs empower state and local law enforcement agencies to help with this vital mission.

In addition, we also make a firm commitment to accountability and transparency. We will provide a public report on implementation of this *Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy* as part of the first Obama Administration National Drug Control Strategy, to be released early next year. This will not only ensure accountability, but will make it clear that combating the flow of drugs, money, and weapons across the Southwest border must be a core element of our Nation's approach to the entire drug problem.

I look forward to working with my colleagues here today, as well as our partners and friends in state and local law enforcement across the Nation to ensure we make rapid progress on the full spectrum of border enforcement issues.