



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Statement for the Record
United States Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control
Hearing on "US – Caribbean Security Cooperation"
February 1, 2012

Today's hearing presents an opportunity for the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control to explore how the Caribbean region has become a key transshipment point for drugs produced in South America and consumed in the United States. As the federal government curtails the flow of drugs across the U.S.-Mexico border, traffickers are increasingly turning to the Caribbean region as a route for shipping drugs into the United States. Regrettably, the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico has become an important entry and transshipment point in the Caribbean for drugs produced in South America and destined for consumption in the 50 states.

Puerto Rico is an attractive target for traffickers because, once drugs or contraband have entered the Island, they are within the U.S. customs zone and not subject to the same level of scrutiny as shipments from a foreign Caribbean nation to a U.S. state. Indeed, one report stated that cocaine seizures in Puerto Rico increased by 30% from 2009 to 2010. Not surprisingly, drug-related violence in Puerto Rico has reached a crisis level. Since 2006, the murder rates in Puerto Rico—and in the neighboring U.S. Virgin Islands—have risen steadily, and are now over six times the national average and over twice as high as that of any state. During the same time period, the U.S. homicide rate has significantly declined.

From the federal government's perspective, the death of an American citizen in Puerto Rico should be of no less importance than the death of an American citizen in Florida, New York, or Texas. Yet, to date, the federal government has not meaningfully altered its approach to combating the escalating drug-related violence in Puerto Rico, which is home to over 3.7 million American citizens. This is unacceptable. That is why I have called on the federal government to establish a "Caribbean Border Initiative," modeled after the successful Southwest Border Initiative, to deploy the level of personnel, assets, and other resources that are needed to successfully combat drug-related violence in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The federal government cannot maintain its current posture in the Caribbean while drug-related violence remains at unacceptably high levels in these two U.S. jurisdictions.

I hope that today's hearing will serve to focus the federal government's attention more fully on the devastating effect the international drug trade is having in its U.S. territories in the Caribbean.