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Indigenous Peoples of Colombia, Panama and Peru

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Commission, it is an honor and a privilege to present this testimony to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. I welcome the opportunity to outline how the United States Agency for International Development is helping to address the challenges faced by indigenous peoples in Colombia, Panama, and Peru and throughout Latin America.

Over 30 million Latin Americans are indigenous. In countries such as Guatemala, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru, close to half the population is indigenous. In Latin America, indigenous peoples have, in general, not received the full benefit of development. They suffer from high childhood mortality rates, lack of education, low income levels, and high rates of crime and violence against women. They are often caught in the crossfire between opposing governmental factions and in Andean countries, targeted by narco-traffickers who pressure them to develop coca rather than sustainable licit agricultural products. They are also vulnerable to industries who want to use their territories for extractive industries, often without prior consultation. USAID programs work to empower indigenous peoples and assist them in mitigating the various factors that create the challenges they contend with.

In Latin America, USAID has a wide range of programs in the health, education, governance, economic growth, and environment sectors that support indigenous peoples.

COLOMBIA

In Colombia, there are approximately 1.4 million indigenous people. There is also a large mixed-race population, many of whom reside in indigenous communities and identify as Amerindian. USAID programs impact these communities throughout the country.

Indigenous peoples have been identified as extremely vulnerable to criminal activity and their protection is a priority of USAID's justice programs. USAID has created Justice Houses in Colombian towns located in rural conflict areas that contend with poverty, unemployment, and issues related to domestic violence, gangs, neighborhood conflicts, and displaced populations. These integrated, multi-agency service centers provide community-based alternative dispute resolution and conflict prevention. Since their inception, Colombian Justice Houses have assisted over 7.8 million citizens. While most indigenous communities have traditionally not been located in urban areas where most justice houses are located, they still benefit from easy access to identification cards, voter registration cards, dispute resolution services, and other assistance that justice houses provide. These "one stop shops" provide legal and social assistance that simplifies processes that have usually taken years to resolve under Colombia's traditional system.

USAID in Colombia has worked closely with over 50 indigenous organizations in the development of community "Life Plans", so that communities are better able to manage their territories and advocate for their rights. This strengthens the communities internally, as well as their relationships with outside actors and authorities. Each plan determines how the community will be administratively organized, how finances will be managed, decisions made, natural resources utilized, and from where, within the collective land, they will be extracted.

In addition, USAID is working with indigenous farmers to support traditional farming practices, including infrastructure development, technical assistance, identification of best practices, provision of materials, and improved market access.

Most recently, USAID/Colombia is leading a new approach to support natural forest management, based on payments for conservation/carbon sequestration. Experience showed that the financial results of natural forest, low impact extraction, on five pilot projects in the Pacific region was not profitable. The new approach is called "Improved Natural Forest Management" and it is part of a strategy to fight illicit crops in collective territories and at the same time support natural forest conservation efforts. The approach greatly supports community development and strengthened governance through capacity development and leadership building. In this program, USAID pays communities for natural forest conservation an amount per hectare per year (around \$35). This only happens after external verification has certified that no wood extraction has taken place in agreed upon conservation areas. These funds are paid directly to a steering committee of the indigenous communities and they must invest these resources in food security projects and on income-generating projects through a revolving fund. Cacao, rice, cassava, and fisheries have been financed with this mechanism. The aim is to strengthen the economic dynamic of these communities and develop a range of funding sources including revenues from carbon sequestration and payment for environmental services.

Other examples of assistance to indigenous groups and communities in Colombia include infrastructure projects such as the improvement to a meeting house for indigenous from the Putumayo Watershed, food security programs with the Siona, Embera and Bajo Baudó communities in the department of Chocó, and indigenous communities in Cauca, which includes the formation of an emergency warning system so threats to food security can be monitored through an interagency famine early warning system. In addition, through its Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) program, the Agency also provides emergency assistance and facilitates protection measures to indigenous leaders and communities who have been threatened or displaced by illegally armed groups.

PANAMA

There are approximately 100,000 indigenous people in Panama, constituting approximately six percent of the country's population. They live primarily in eastern Panama and within the Panama Canal Watershed. USAID assistance in these communities has largely been based on ecotourism, providing the wherewithal for communities to preserve their cultures while engaging in industries that protect their lands. Community participation is key to what makes these programs successful.

With USAID support, the Emberá and Woounan indigenous communities received technical assistance to develop sustainable tourism in the Panama Canal Watershed. They established contacts with tour operators, designed a webpage, recorded a CD of authentic tribal music, and produced a catalog of their products to sell on the internet. These projects also brought infrastructure such as water systems, thus improving their health and hygiene. These projects not only produced increased income for the indigenous communities, but also a newfound sense of community and confidence in their ability to be self sufficient and environmentally friendly at the same time.

Next month, USAID will implement a two-year cooperative agreement with the International Organization for Migration in the Darien Province of eastern Panama. This is an area prone to drug trafficking and other illicit activities. This program will target local governments and at-risk youth through technical assistance to local traditional governments and their indigenous populations to strengthen their participative political processes and thus better their ability to attend to community livelihood needs. Other activities will identify and promote economic opportunities for vulnerable youth as well as support youth projects that will benefit the community. These efforts will be complemented by a small grants program that will include training in fundraising techniques and grant management. In this way indigenous groups will be less vulnerable to victimization by criminal elements and others who wish to exploit them for their own gains.

PERU

Indigenous peoples make up over 45% of Peru's population. Some of the most effective programs USAID implements reflect a commitment to biodiversity and empowerment of indigenous peoples to protect and benefit from their natural heritage.

The Initiative for Conservation in the Andean Amazon is a regional program designed to strengthen indigenous organizations' efforts to protect and conserve the Amazon. Efforts focus on the management and conservation of the Manu National Park by strengthening communication capabilities, sustainable resource management, and knowledge sharing and conservation capacity throughout the Andean Amazon region.

Working with implementing partners, USAID/Peru is building the capacity of indigenous groups in sensitive ecosystems to generate sustainable livelihoods and equip them with business management skills and the ability to negotiate fair contracts for commercial timber production. The overall goal of this activity is to promote flexible, voluntary, and incentive-based mechanisms to attract private investments in sustainable forest management. The activity is mitigating environmental hazards associated with extractive industries and infrastructure development, and whenever possible, increasing indigenous stewardship and autonomy, while improving the quality of life for these communities.

Other efforts are designed to strengthen monitoring and enforcement of environmental regulations and to stem illegal/informal extractive activities, while institutionalizing consultative processes between government, indigenous groups, and the private sector. Through a new civil society and extractive industries transparency initiative, USAID/Peru will strengthen the capacities of indigenous people to exercise their rights to oversee the use of extractive royalties in on their lands. Training efforts will increase their participation in regional and district organizations and strengthen their own community-based organizations. Efforts will focus on the hydrocarbon-rich Amazon and the mining-rich Andes region.

USAID supports self governance for indigenous peoples in Peru. A recent USAID-supported exchange between indigenous groups from the U.S. and Canada and Peruvian indigenous communities facilitated the sharing of experiences on establishing and using property rights to enhance economic growth in native communities.

Finally, USAID project design procedures in Peru require all new activities to conduct an analysis of the potential impacts they may have on indigenous groups and disadvantaged people. Activities are required to mitigate any potential negative impacts on these communities and where possible, improve the health, social, and economic conditions of these groups.

BOLIVIA

In Bolivia, USAID has strengthened the participation of Quechua and Aymara communities in municipal and national governance activities. USAID/Bolivia's Integrated Development (ID) Program provides assistance to promote sustainable, diversified economic and social development in Bolivia's coca growing regions and associated areas.

Health and environment initiatives have been integrated into USAID's approach, strengthening overall impact, participation, and responsiveness to local needs. Most of the program's activities are carried out in the Yungas region of Bolivia—home to a majority population of indigenous and AfroBolivians.

This also includes improvement of rural roads and construction of bridges to make transportation to and from agricultural markets possible, which opens the doors to ecotourism, and other economic incentives. USAID's Economic Growth program directly supports the Bolivia Productiva pillar of the National Development Plan (PND) of the Government of Bolivia.

The forestry sector is a cornerstone sector in Bolivia's economic and social development. USAID's forestry program promotes greater opportunities for Bolivians from sustainable forest management and improving the competitiveness of Bolivian forestry exports through community forestry and better social, economic, and environmental practices. USAID is also working to strengthen forest regulatory systems.

BRAZIL

In the Brazilian Amazon, USAID is working with local partners to strengthen the capacity of the Xingu and Kayapo Indians so they can manage their own lands and forests. Brazil's indigenous population contains the largest number of uncontacted tribal peoples in the world. A recent survey indicated that there are at least 67 different communities that live in isolated tribal communities. There are also large Indian communities in urban areas. Indigenous Brazilians have made substantial contributions to the world's medicine with knowledge used today by pharmaceutical corporations, and to the world's nutritional, material, and cultural development in significant ways such as developing the domestication of cassava, which is still a major staple food in rural areas of the country.

USAID programs for indigenous Brazilians have largely focused on protections for these isolated peoples and the lands they live on. Programs include building indigenous institutional capacity and ability to work with the Government of Brazil and NGOs, support for practices and policies aimed at guaranteeing the integrity of indigenous areas, creation of sustainable income-generating activities, and training for indigenous peoples in improved natural resource management.

ECUADOR

Indigenous territories are critical in Ecuador because they cover a fifth of the country, and globally because they contain some of the world's richest biodiversity. Ecuador's natural environments have been shaped and are intensely used by a diverse array of ancestral indigenous groups that have intricate relationships with and a complex knowledge of their surroundings.

Many indigenous peoples have a long-term vision that combines biodiversity conservation with sustainable use of renewable resources in a strategy to improve the quality of their lives. However, these territories are threatened by illegal logging, incursions by extractive industries, and drug-related violence.

USAID programs provide lowland indigenous groups with the technical and institutional resources needed to maintain their traditional territories and to determine their own futures. The work helps the Awa, Cofan, and Waorani indigenous groups to secure their lands, strengthen their institutions, improve their livelihoods, and support the long term conservation of their cultures and territories (over 1,400,000 hectares).

The program helps consolidate indigenous territorial rights through the establishment of legally defined boundaries, legal titles and permanent boundary markers, while improving the institutional capacity of indigenous organizations through training in administrative, technical, and logistical procedures. Assistance facilitates the implementation of ecologically sustainable economic activities consistent with cultural standards and long-term sustainable land use.

EL SALVADOR

In El Salvador, USAID's Artisan Development Program has worked with Salvadorians, some of them indigenous, in supporting activities that facilitate the marketing of traditional crafts for export to US markets. USAID has also funded ecotourism projects such as Eco-Experiencias El Salvador, which reinforces indigenous crafts and cultural values through projects that promote market-based eco tourism in biodiverse areas.

HONDURAS

In Honduras, The Garífuna (descendants of African, Arawak, and Carib peoples) have benefitted from a USAID-established "Garífuna Route" that promotes small-scale ecotourism, food fairs, and a Garífuna museum.

USAID HIV prevention activities reach almost 54,000 Garífuna per year. With an HIV prevalence rate of 4.5%, the Garífuna population is one of the most affected in Honduras. The Garífuna communities along the North Coast are primary beneficiaries of USAID's HIV program, which through three grants with local NGOs, provides mass media HIV prevention activities and voluntary HIV counselling and testing.

A USAID education program in Honduras supports the provision of decentralized technical assistance and teacher training, standards, curriculum calendars, and monthly standardized formative tests for all Honduran

children in primary school, including Garífuna and groups such as the Lenca in western Honduras. Out-of-school Garífuna youth and adults also benefit from the alternative education system, EDUCATODOS.

Garífuna also benefitted through USAID's Integrated Watershed Resources Management project, which provided the Garífuna community of Rio Esteban en Bafalte, Colón with assistance in watershed management, disaster preparedness, and tourism promotion, impacting approximately 4,000 Garífuna.

GUATEMALA

USAID/Guatemala's programs that impact indigenous peoples include outreach centers for at-risk youth, democracy programs that have dramatically increased indigenous representation in local leadership, improved municipal processes, and exhumations of over 175 Mayans who disappeared during Guatemala's "Decade of Terror."

USAID's strategy for assisting indigenous Guatemalans includes programs to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality and support local demand for assistance in family planning. USAID has trained Mayan midwives in Guatemala to address high infant mortality and provided nearly 90,000 persons with HIV/AIDS prevention services as well as providing health services to 400,000 poor indigenous persons from rural areas through local NGOs.

USAID has used \$15 million in food aid to assist the indigenous in food insecure areas, while providing training in nutrition and maternal and child health. Working with implementing partners including Mercy Corps and Save the Children, USAID has promoted programs that focus on better nutrition, (particularly in early childhood), improved hygiene, safe water management, and capacity building of community volunteers. USAID also assisted in the establishment of better agricultural and animal husbandry practices. Direct food aid has resulted in 9,590 metric tons of food being distributed. We've also helped in the design of an early warning system to assist Guatemalans in preparing for natural disasters that threaten food security.

Indigenous education in Guatemala has also been positively impacted. With 97% of indigenous children now enrolled in primary school, 76% percent of indigenous girls now finish primary school and a standardization of curricula has been established. Indigenous Guatemalans are also attending higher education institutes through USAID alliances with the private sector to increase university scholarships.

NICARAGUA

Programs that impact indigenous peoples in Nicaragua include EXCELENCIA, a current USAID education project that is developing the active teaching and learning method and a new curriculum to develop competences in intercultural bilingual schools on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. EXCELENCIA also includes development of applied research in specific education topics and development of teaching guides and student workbooks for the new competence-based curriculum in the local languages of Miskitu, Mayangna, and Creole English.

USAID/Nicaragua established five mediation centers in indigenous communities that are providing free legal services. Most of the cases handled by the centers in Sebaco and Mozonte are related to property rights issues involving communal lands. Indigenous community leaders have been trained as facilitators, providing legal advice, mediation, and legal education workshops to the Miskitus, Mayagnas, Tuasca, and Chorotegas indigenous groups.

Two legal assistance centers were established in Bonanza and Matagalpa that are focused on indigenous issues. These centers provide legal advice and assistance to indigenous peoples, including property rights. The center in Bonanza conducts work related to the prevention of environmental crimes and issues associated with the implementation of the Indigenous Land Demarcation Law.

In collaboration with universities and local institutions located on the Caribbean Coast, USAID created legal education brigades that carry out legal education workshops on the Autonomy Law, the Law of Languages and the Indigenous Land Demarcation Law in communities located in both autonomous regions. Twenty communities have been visited by the brigades, and leaders of seven other communities have participated in USAID-sponsored legal education workshops.

USAID helped establish the Human Rights and Justice Research Institute at the Bluefields Indian & Caribbean University (BICU) located in the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS). The Institute at

BICU was the first in Central America to specifically look at indigenous law and issues of regional autonomy. At the same time, USAID assisted with the creation of an Indigenous Rights Coalition to advocate for better access to justice and the protection of human rights for indigenous communities

Working with the NGO, Rainforest Alliance, USAID has provided assistance for forestry-based indigenous communities in the Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte (RAAN). Activities focused on organizational strengthening and improved technical and business skills for communities to enable them to negotiate effectively with the private sector. In forest areas heavily damaged by Hurricane Felix, “controlled wood” certification was introduced as a tool to guide sustainable management of community resources through the Forest Stewardship Council’s Controlled Wood Standard. The program, which ended in 2009, developed and strengthened value chains for forest products, building on the work started by the first community forestry companies in Nicaragua.

In the health sector, USAID’s FamiSalud community health program reaches 35 of the poorest communities in the Miskito indigenous municipality of Waspan, benefiting more than 3,600 families. FamiSalud provided \$262,372 for health activities in the municipality of La Cruz de Rio Grande, a municipality selected because of its high level of poverty, its identification as having the lowest index of human development in the RAAS, as well as the highest rate of mortality because women have limited access to prenatal care or medically-assisted childbirths.

Health activities include vaccination campaigns, child growth monitoring, hygiene programs, family planning, HIV/AIDS testing, maternity care, and deliveries by trained medical personnel.

USAID/Nicaragua is a long-time supporter of Intercultural/Bilingual Education (IBE), an educational program that tailors educational approaches and resources to the learning needs of Miskitu, Mayagna, Creole, and Rama speaking students. These programs support the Autonomy Law and the Law of Languages, which mandate the right to receive education in the languages of the ethnic groups in the RAAN and the RAAS. USAID provided \$3 million in assistance for 148 schools, including the development of educational materials in four local languages: Panamahka, Tuahka, Miskitu, and English, to benefit Mayagna, Miskitu and Creole group members.

This is only an overview of some of the work USAID does to empower and ensure the futures of these vulnerable communities. USAID continues to work with governments, indigenous communities, and NGOs to support indigenous peoples in ways that resonate with their highest aspirations.

USAID/LAC was recently represented at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York where we had an opportunity to outreach to indigenous participants. We also sponsored an event focusing on our initiatives for indigenous peoples in the areas of conservation and sustainable resource-based economic development and other USAID programs in the region.

CONCLUSION

Indigenous peoples are among the most marginalized in the region. USAID and its partners are working to improve their lives in ways that are consistent with their cultures, values, and interests. We believe our work is significant and the communities we impact have responded favorably. Through focused efforts on the strategic needs of indigenous peoples, we will continue to see progress.