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Statement for the U.S. Helsinki Commission:

I am delighted my colleagues are holding this important hearing today, and I am grateful for the opportunity to share some thoughts and a statement on this important topic. It is truly unfortunate that it takes horrific events for us in America to stop and examine how our taxpayer dollars are being expended in support of supranational governance overseas in ways that wreak havoc and upend principles of sovereignty for others. My deepest sympathies are with the Bitkov Family today, and with all of those whose lives have been irreparably altered by egregious violations of law and order.

The UN's International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) is an unwieldy beast. All organizations, even those created with the best of intentions, must have proper oversight and accountability mechanisms built-in. While initially created to root-out corruption and uphold rule of law, CICIG both in principle and application has become an extrajudicial, partial and unfair arbiter in Guatemala. Since its inception in 2007, the U.S. has spent more than \$44.5 million on CICIG. While our U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley has called on the entity to remain intact, she has also called on the organization to be less overt and political, saying it should not be in the paper every day. Unfortunately, the continued conflicts of personalities between Guatemalan politicians and leadership of CICIG has kept many in deep conflict over various charges of corruption and challenges of leadership. No organization should be beholden to one man in the way at CICIG is intertwined with Commissionr Ivan Velasquez. An entity that is truly unbiased should continue its mission regardless of who is in charge. This is in part why we - and others who financially support CICIG - must increase oversight over this body, ensuring our funds are spent responsibly. CICIG should be operating to root-out real corruption, rather than building up or tearing down political winners and losers. It pains me to see sovereignty continually thrown by the wayside as has been the case in Guatemala. It is unfair to average citizens. It has been unfair to the Bitkovs. It is unfair to all who seek a free and prosperous Guatemala.

Today I wish the CIGG never was established. I wish that we could have spent all these funds and all this time working yes on corruption issues, but also on transnational crime. Or on creating economic opportunity for both Guatemalans and Americans. Or on strengthen the actual government of Guatemala established by the people of Guatemala. As long as we keep using our resources to drive political wedges and undermine what freethinking human beings made in the image of God want their country to be, we will fail to seize the true opportunities for growth before us.

Respectfully,



Michael S. Lee
United States Senator