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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission, thank you for accepting my statement for the record as I regrettably could not attend today's important hearing. I appreciate you and your staff's hard work to bring these stories and facts to light.

I want to focus on something that has for too long gone overlooked and without proper oversight from the U.S. Congress: the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala's (CICIG) expansion of authorities and prerogative beyond its mandate, and its level of effectiveness in building the capacity of Guatemala's own judicial system.

CICIG's mandate clearly states that the entity was established to support the Government of Guatemala by investigating and disbanding illegal security forces and clandestine security structures operating in the country. According to the mandate, CICIG is also tasked with strengthening Guatemala's own justice system so that an international body is no longer needed in the future. It appears that, after more than a decade of operation in the country, there is an unknown amount of progress in creating capacity for Guatemala's own judicial system; of so, CICIG is faltering in its mission.

Let me make clear that I support the intention and core mandate of CICIG to walk alongside Guatemala's public prosecutors to tackle the devastating effects that armed drug traffickers and gangs have had and continue to have on Guatemalan society and economy. The influence of illicit narcotics is the primary catalyst for the region's rampant crime and corruption, and the U.S. and international community should be a partner with the Guatemalan government in eliminating its malign influence. Yet we should be diligent in exercising oversight over any foreign entity which receives U.S. taxpayer funding to ensure our nation's own resources are used to advance national interests.

I applaud the Commission for looking into the issue of the Bitkov family as well as exercising oversight over the U.S.-funded CICIG.