The Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) opposes cuts in foreign assistance to the “Northern Triangle” region in Central America and supports the U.S. Congress in exercising its full oversight, appropriations, and legislative authority to remedy these cuts.

In March 2019, the Trump Administration announced its intention to cut off $500 million in foreign assistance to the Northern Triangle (Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala), based on the contention that these countries were sending migrants to the U.S.-Mexico border. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was instructed to reprogram $450 million in Fiscal Year 2018 funding, and to review remaining Fiscal Year 2017 funding. Rather than withholding desperately needed programming aimed at reducing violence in and stabilizing Northern Triangle nations, the United States needs to work more closely with these countries to address the drivers of violence and violent conflict. Halting U.S. foreign assistance to this region will increase the drivers of violence and fuel further displacement and migration to the United States.

The Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) opposes cutting off vital U.S. foreign assistance to Northern Triangle nations. We support the U.S. Congress in exercising its full oversight and appropriations authority to remedy draconian cuts that are not in the interest of our national security and not based on sound policy. AfP supports the bipartisan United States–Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives that will target drivers of violence that lead to migration in this region.

The U.S. Administration suggested Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala were “sending people up” intentionally. However, these countries are not sending their citizens to the United States; on the contrary, displaced persons from Central America are fleeing violence, insecurity, and economic strife in their home countries. Additionally, the history of U.S. Government involvement in all three countries dating back decades to civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala has factored into the negative conflict dynamics manifested today.

These cuts will fuel further displacement and instability and undercut U.S. national security by having a drastic, negative impact on the violence which is driving people to leave these countries. For every 10 additional murders in the Northern Triangle from 2011-2016, six more children migrated to the United States. The U.S. government correctly analyzed the violent conflict dynamics in these three nations and established aid programs that address the drivers of violence. Such drivers include insecurity, transnational crime, gender-based violence, and the rule of law. By halting U.S. assistance and programs that directly address these issues, the United States will weaken local government and civil society’s capacity to improve the situation on the ground, augmenting the flow of civilians fleeing conflict, violence, and insecurity at home.
Evidence

The Administration has justified the funding cutoff by arguing assistance is not effective, and should be conditional. Yet, data from U.S.-supported programs indicates assistance addresses the drivers of migration. A rigorous impact evaluation found crime prevention and violence reduction programs have been successful. While El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras consistently rank among the most violent countries in the world, El Salvador has been able to reduce violence by one third.

The U.S. Government’s Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) included USAID programs to “improve citizen security by strengthening community capacity to combat crime and by creating educational and employment opportunities for at-risk youth.” These programs significantly reduced expected levels of crime victimization and violence, increased expected levels of citizens’ sense of security, and increased satisfaction with police performance. A successful cutoff of foreign assistance to this region will also set a dangerous precedent and allow the Administration to implement further, drastic foreign assistance cuts to other countries, which would be harmful to U.S. national interests.

Legislative Action

Rather than taking punitive and abrupt action to repudiate local partners and shut down programs underway, the United States needs to work with Central American governments and civil society to better target desperately needed programming aimed at reducing violence. Real deterrence requires addressing the drivers of violent conflict at the source and partnering with local actors on the ground, so people can be secure in their home countries without being forced to flee.

We recommend the U.S. Congress exercise its full oversight and appropriations authorities to ensure that foreign assistance is aligned with American national interests and values. We applaud Members of Congress who have introduced legislation to remedy the cuts to the Northern Triangle.

As of June 2019, legislation to address the violence in the Northern Triangle includes:

- The bipartisan United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Representatives Engel and McCaul in April. The goal is to address the root causes of violence and migration including economic, governance, and security sector issues.

- The Central America Reform and Enforcement Act was introduced in the Senate by Senator Schumer and 36 others in May.