

# State Perspectives on Combating Violence and Trafficking Along the U.S.-Mexico Border

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Cooperative state-to-state efforts between the United States and Mexico are successful and should be supported, attorneys general from both countries said at the Mexico Institute-sponsored conference, *State Perspectives on Combating Violence and Trafficking Along the U.S.-Mexico Border*, held at the Wilson Center on March 3, 2010.

Forensics training, law clinics, and investigative cooperation are part of a binational response to the shared problem of drug trafficking violence, which is severe on the Mexican side of the border and has caused fear of “spillover” into the United States.

“If we don’t deal with (drug trafficking violence) now, it will continue to spread,” Baja California Attorney General Rommel Moreno Manjarrez said.

Binational cooperation at the state level occurs through partnerships between U.S. and Mexican prosecutors, sometimes through formal memorandums of understanding. Prosecutors associations from both sides of the border also hold periodic joint conferences, aimed at fostering dialogue. The U.S. Conference of Western Attorneys General (CWAG) holds regular seminars and workshops for Mexican prosecutors, detectives, judges, and laboratory technicians, focusing on money laundering, evidence-handling, and forensics, said CWAG Chair and Colorado Attorney General John Suthers.



Mexican and U.S. states are sharing technology and technical expertise to solve crimes especially prevalent at the border, such as human trafficking, said New Mexico Attorney General Gary King. As an example of success, he cited the case of an investigator in neighboring Chihuahua state who used technology provided through state-to-state efforts to develop a technique to rehydrate the cadavers of victims in order to better lift fingerprints. King added that human trafficking is a problem on the U.S. side of the border. Safe houses holding migrants before they go to their final destinations can become “targets of opportunity” for organized crime, which can seize the individuals and hold them as hostages for ransom. He said a need exists to instruct U.S. officials on how to identify kidnapping victims since most do not self-report.

## Drug Trafficking Violence in Mexico

The attorneys general discussed the causes of drug trafficking violence in Mexico. Attorney General Suthers said U.S. drug consumption is a significant driver of the violence that has listed many Mexican police officers among its victims. “We need Americans to understand that U.S. demand is causing the deaths of many Mexican law enforcement personnel,” he said. “So we have a lot to be accountable for. We should let Americans understand that.” Both he and Attorney General King estimated that drugs are the root cause of 80 percent of criminal cases in their jurisdictions.



General Moreno pointed to the socioeconomic roots of violent crime. He stressed the need for “integrated” crime-prevention measures that include job creation and poverty alleviation. He emphasized the importance of criminal justice reform efforts, especially those that would strengthen alternative dispute resolution measures. In a similar vein and in response to a question from commentator and Mexico Institute Advisory Board Member Larry Harrington, chief policy deputy, Office of the Attorney General, State of Tennessee, attorneys general King and Suthers stressed the advantage of specialized drug courts as resources to better deal with drug offenders. “Drug courts in Mexico are an important resource; we can’t put everybody who does drugs in prison,” King said.

Attorney General Suthers said that federal reimbursement for the cost of jailing Mexican nationals was too low. He said his state spent in one year US\$64 million to incarcerate Mexican criminals, but that the corresponding federal reimbursement was only US\$3 million.

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