

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-1304

March 8, 2019

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

I write to ask the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to update its January 2016 reports entitled “Firearms Trafficking: U.S. Efforts to Combat Firearms Trafficking to Mexico Have Improved, but Some Collaboration Challenges Remain,” and “Building Partner Capacity: U.S. Agencies Can Improve Monitoring of Counter-Firearms Trafficking Efforts in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico.” I further request that GAO include in these updated reports an assessment of efforts to combat firearms trafficking to the other Central American countries in the Northern Triangle: El Salvador and Honduras.

The security concerns and law enforcement challenges resulting from firearms trafficking to Mexican and Central American criminal organizations are serious. In 2016, GAO provided valuable insight into addressing those challenges by examining: (1) the origin of crime guns that were seized in Mexico, Guatemala and Belize; (2) the effectiveness of collaboration among U.S. agencies tasked with combating firearms trafficking; (3) the status of coordination between U.S., Mexican, and Central American agencies in combating firearms trafficking; and (4) how well U.S. agencies were measuring progress in combating this trafficking. An update to GAO’s 2016 analysis will help Congress assess the current state of agency efforts and collaboration to stop the illicit trafficking of firearms and firearms parts to Mexico and Central America, and this will inform Congress’ legislative, oversight and appropriations activities.

It would be of further assistance if GAO’s updated analysis covered all three of the Northern Triangle countries in Central America: El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Violence perpetrated by criminal organizations in the Northern Triangle has killed thousands and has prompted many residents of these countries to flee to other countries seeking safety. The trafficking of firearms for use by these criminal organizations has also facilitated other types of criminal activity, including narcotics trafficking and human smuggling. Recent trace data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives indicates that a significant percentage of crime guns seized in Northern Triangle countries originated in the United States. GAO’s assessment of the efforts of U.S. agencies and their Central American counterparts in addressing this firearms trafficking would be an important contribution to the debate.

I appreciate the work GAO has done on the issue of firearms trafficking in the past, and I urge GAO to provide updated reports to Congress as swiftly as possible. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Durbin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard J. Durbin
United State Senator
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Border
Security and Immigration