



The Presidential visit highlighted USAID programs and accomplishments. President Bush and First Lady Laura Bush completed their first state visit to Guatemala on March 12. In his official statement, President Bush congratulated Guatemalan President Berger for the *"steps taken to increase transparency, to reduce corruption, to modernize the civil service and to help improve Guatemala's record on human*

rights." President Bush mentioned the September elections and that *"the United States and the international community will support the people of Guatemala in holding free and fair elections."*

He also expressed U.S. support for President Berger's efforts in working with the United Nations to form an international commission to help investigate and prosecute organized crime in Guatemala (i.e. CICIG). He cited our joint fight against transnational gangs and agreed with President Berger that the issue needs to be addressed regionally.

In his remarks, President Bush further cited three sector areas that align with our current USAID program in Guatemala. First, he emphasized the importance of education and noted that with more than 40 percent of the Guatemalan population under 15 years old, *"a more hopeful future depends on teaching the younger generation the skills necessary to be able to succeed in the 21st century."* Second, he noted the need to expand access to health care and mentioned how USG programs have been providing health care and addressing basic health care needs. Finally, he highlighted how CAFTA can spread opportunity, provide jobs, and help lift people out of poverty. He mentioned his visit to Labradores Mayas and that he saw first-hand how trade can transform a small village from subsistence farming to selling high-value crops, like lettuce, carrots, and celery.



The President recognized USAID's contributions to Labradores Mayas and more broadly our contribution to agricultural diversification linking small farmers to external markets creating opportunities for important improvements in the lives of the families and their communities that are participating in this transformation out of subsistence agriculture and poverty. His made two

points in his remarks – *"one, that USAID, which is funded through the generosity of the American people, is helping people like you all throughout the region to realize your dreams."* He further continued, *"Secondly, free trade is important for a lot of people. It's important for our country, it's a gateway. It creates jobs in America just like it creates jobs here."* In his press conference later during the day, he described the visit to Labradores Mayas as *"really, really fun -- and really heart-*

warming. As a matter of fact, it was one of the great experiences of my presidency."



We understand that the Guatemalan government also raised the issue of obtaining an MCC threshold program during the closed bilateral meeting. The President later publicly asked Sec. Rice to follow-up on a request to review the Guatemalan case in the next few months. (Note: MCC Director Ambassador Danilovich and staff

members plan to visit Guatemala April 19-20.)

First Lady Laura Bush met with Mrs. Berger on the *Creciendo Bien* initiative and together visited the Safe Passage (*Caminos Seguros*) NGO, both supported by USAID through the USAID Alianzas program. In the former, Mrs. Bush was briefed on how the program was effectively addressing health and nutrition needs in 309 low-income rural communities (benefiting 26,850 women and 53,700 children under the age of five) and more importantly, how women became empowered in the process. The USAID Alianzas program has built partnerships with private firms (such as Wal Mart, Bayer, the Guatemalan sugar industry, Rotary Clubs, and faith-based organizations) which contributed \$2.6 million vis-à-vis USAID's share of \$800,000 or a 3:1 ratio.



Mrs. Bush toured the *Caminos Seguros* (Safe Passage) project, founded by an American woman, which assists hundreds of families (including over 600 children) who make their living scavenging the city dump through educational, vocational and medical support. Modest USAID assistance was provided for the computer laboratory and 75 scholarships for girls. Mrs. Bush toured the USAID-supported computer laboratory and met two female students who are recipients of USAID scholarship program. In both events, the USAID contribution was quite evident from the presentations made by counterparts and the conversations with program beneficiaries. Mrs. Bush was quite impressed with substance of the programs and the impact it has made on peoples' lives.

The visit was covered positively in local media. As in the other Latin American countries he visited, there were protests; but mission notes that the protests were small in scale and negative reaction about the visit was not as widespread or strong as one may glean from some reports by the international press. The President clearly generated incredible goodwill from the communities that he visited. Local communities have told USAID staff at the project sites visited that they hoped we realize that the protesters are a small group and do not necessarily reflect the more general population's sentiment.