



**Erika Mouynes: Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Panama**

Erika Mouynes is the former minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of Panama. She served in two administrations as Panama's vice minister of multilateral affairs and cooperation (2019) and chief of staff of the Ministry of Trade and Industry (2004). Mouynes was instrumental in negotiating the US–Panama Free Trade Agreement and investment partnerships in the telecommunications, logistics, mining, and oil and gas sectors. Mouynes has vast experience in the private sector as a board member of several publicly traded companies and women-focused not-for-profit organizations.



**Mauricio Rodas: Former Mayor of Quito, Ecuador**

Mauricio Rodas, former Mayor of Quito (2014–2019), hosted the UN Habitat III conference and held leadership roles in major global city networks. He is now a Professor at the University of Pennsylvania and a Senior Advisor at the Arsht-Rockefeller Resilience Center, leading urban climate initiatives. He co-chairs the World Economic Forum's BiodiverCities Commission and launched the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network's Global Commission on Urban SDG Finance. Rodas advises cities globally through Meridio Consulting and, in 2019, was recognized among the world's 100 Most Influential People for Climate Policy.

Members, including former heads of state and other high-level experts, will be appointed as the group's work unfolds, ensuring a dynamic and robust engagement of leadership and expertise. Team members will reflect the geographic diversity of the region as well as having a wide range of thematic expertise.

### Experts

The Working Group will be supported by a widely representative group of experts with knowledge of the evidence basis, experience in building multi-stakeholder coalitions, and crafting and implementing practical solutions to the challenges.

### Objectives of the Mesoamerican Working Group on Security and Democracy

#### OUTCOME 4:

Public policy to disseminate the recommendations of the working group, stimulate debates within societies to promote new approaches, and amplify the voices of civil society to hear their views and experiences, and increase their input into relevant policy-making processes.

#### OUTCOME 1:

A comprehensive review of the threat posed by organized crime to security and democracy in Latin America that highlights the harms that it causes.

#### OUTCOME 2:

Policy innovation to promote an actionable agenda of recommendations that can help prevent and combat organized crime in Latin America in a way that respects democratic norms and fosters sustainable security.

#### OUTCOME 3:

Enhanced collaboration within societies of the region and between states of Mesoamerica to promote strategic alignment and networks among stakeholders to reduce the harms caused by organized crime.

For more information, visit:

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**DETAILS?**



**Grupo de Trabajo  
Mesoamericano sobre  
Seguridad y Democracia**

# THE MESOAMERICAN WORKING GROUP ON SECURITY AND DEMOCRACY

**FOSTERING FRESH APPROACHES AND  
NARRATIVES TO REDUCE THE HARMS CAUSED  
BY ORGANIZED CRIME IN LATIN AMERICA**



**GLOBAL  
INITIATIVE**  
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL  
ORGANIZED CRIME



The region stretching from South America through Central America into Mexico faces some of the most acute organized crime-related problems in the world. Through violence and corruption, criminal actors threaten security, destabilize democracy, undermine governance and cause a wide range of harms. Not only are communities, states and the region under threat, but the consequences reverberate globally as a result of trafficking of a wide range of goods, particularly drugs; the smuggling of migrants; financial crimes and the knock-on effects of instability. Alongside drug markets, environmental crimes such as illegal mining, logging and fishing are also having a growing impact on the region and the well-being of our planet.

Heavy-handed responses, while electorally attractive, have proven no guarantee of long-term stability. Indeed, in some cases they exacerbate the problem they are intended to solve, alienating communities and reducing trust in institutions, while violating human rights. And, while mass incarceration of suspects and perpetrators can be popular, prisons are notorious for being incubators of organized crime.

As a result, fresh thinking and approaches are needed to reduce the harms posed by organized crime, and to safeguard security and democracy in a sustainable way that upholds the rule of law, human dignity and fundamental freedoms. This is the challenge to be addressed by a high-level group of current and former senior public officials, respected academics, and representatives of civil society and the private sector in the Mesoamerican Working Group on Security and Democracy.



A serious threat to security and democracy

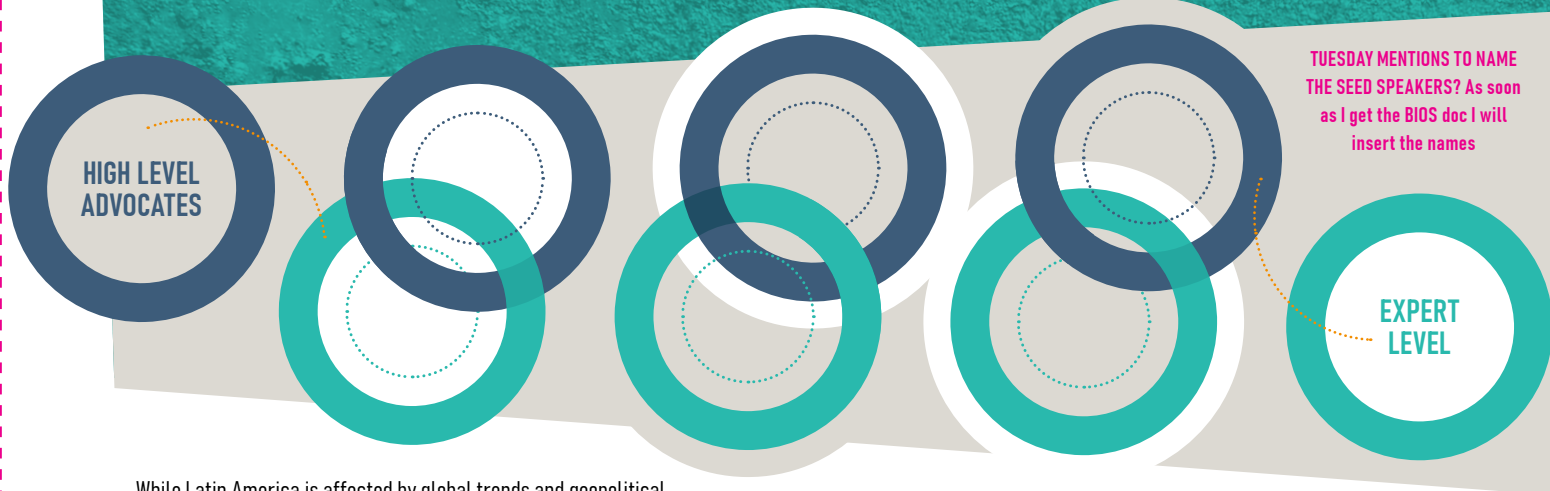
The Global Organized Crime Index (2023) shows that Central and South America have criminality scores above the global average while resilience scores are relatively low. While some of the region's criminal actors are part of transnational networks, state-embedded actors are also deeply engaged in illicit economies in Mesoamerica.

The considerable leverage of state-embedded actors with links to criminal groups is a major impediment to the implementation of anti-organized crime strategies. Furthermore, private sector actors who facilitate organize crime have few incentives to remedy a situation they profit from. Collusion between political, criminal and business elites often leaves civil society actors and community leaders isolated in reducing vulnerability and standing up to intimidation and violence. In some cases, they pay the price with their lives. This state of affairs presents a major challenge to communities, societies and the region as a whole.

The Working Group

Although the primary responsibility for addressing these challenges rests with the region's governments, an independent Track 2 process can provide food for thought to stimulate new policy approaches. Such a format can enable open debates, an opportunity to develop new approaches and narratives, and participation of a wide range of stakeholders from affected communities who may not normally have a seat at the table. Furthermore, engaging experts from the Mesoamerican corridor provides a unique opportunity to compare experiences and lessons learned, and foster cross-border cooperation against a transnational threat.

The Mesoamerican Working Group on Security and Democracy is conceived as a high-level, non-governmental forum that will develop evidence-based responses to violence and citizen insecurity caused by organized crime in Latin America. The working group brings together current and former heads of state and other office bearers from the region, alongside experts from academia, the private sector and civil society. This will unite champions of change from several levels of government (from former heads of states to mayors) with grass-roots advocates from civil society and other influencers of fresh approaches. It aims to promote an actionable agenda of recommendations to prevent and combat violence, organized crime and insecurity in Latin America within a framework that respects democratic norms.



While Latin America is affected by global trends and geopolitical shifts, this working group seeks a 'custom-made' approach to addressing one of the most salient challenges in the region.

Led by former president of Costa Rica Carlos Alvarado Quesada, the working group will focus on policy responses to reducing the harms caused by organized crime in the region through people-centric approaches that will sustain security, development and democracy. The Working Group will be coordinated and supported by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. It will look at a comprehensive range of issues, including the socio-economic roots of crime, enablers of crime (including corruption), community resilience, and how to strengthen democratic norms and institutions. By incorporating progressive interventions into policy and security strategies, the Working Group can help communities pre-emptively address emerging threats, build resilience and safeguard citizens' well-being.

The Working Group also aims to build trust and cooperation among regional partners while advocating for inclusive, rule-of-law-based responses to transnational organized crime, helping ensure long-term security and prosperity for the region and beyond. As an independent yet informed body, the Working Group will draw on proven, evidence-based good practices, encourage innovation, listen to and amplify voices of affected communities, and leverage the experience and networks of high-level participants. Through its research, reflections and recommendations, the Working Group aims to position itself as an independent body at the forefront of public debate and policy reform on issues of security and democracy related to organized crime in Mesoamerica.



Champions

Carlos Alvarado Quesada: Former President of Costa Rica

Carlos Alvarado Quesada served as the Republic of Costa Rica's president from May 2018 to May 2022. In 2019, he was named one of TIME's 100 Next emerging leaders worldwide. Alvarado's prior government leadership service included a tenure as minister of labour and social security (2016–2018), minister of human development and social inclusion (2014–2016), and executive president of the Joint Social Welfare Institute, responsible for implementing social protection and promoting poverty alleviation programmes