

**Statement of General Charles E. Wilhelm, commander-in-chief, U.S.
Southern Command, March 23, 2000**

POSTURE STATEMENT OF GENERAL CHARLES E. WILHELM, UNITED STATES MARINE
CORPS
COMMANDER IN CHIEF, UNITED STATES SOUTHERN COMMAND

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss my strategic assessment of the U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR). In September, I will conclude three years as the Commander in Chief of U.S. Southern Command. During my tenure, I have visited each country in the AOR at least twice and met with every Minister of Defense, U.S. Ambassador, and many of the Presidents and other key regional military and civilian leaders. These visits and meetings have allowed me to gain an in-depth personal perspective of the region. In this posture statement, I will provide my personal assessment of security and stability conditions in the hemisphere, outline U.S. Southern Command's strategic priorities, comment on the status and effectiveness of our counterdrug and engagement activities, and conclude with my vision for the future.

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

Today, the USSOUTHCOM AOR is a testament to the vision and efficacy of our National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement. Thirty-one of thirty-two countries have democratically elected governments and free market economies. Cuba alone is an isolated vestige of the Cold War era. During the past twenty years, we have seen the hemisphere shed its robes of military dictatorships and communist governments and attire itself with cloth cut from the bolts of democracy, rule of law, and human rights. Despite this success, I have observed disquieting changes during the past year in the region's political climate and in the philosophies of new leaders. After a decade in which democracy flourished in the AOR, there are now subtle -- and not so subtle -- indications that popular support for democratic ideals is declining, while misguided tolerance for autocratic government is increasing. Recent events in several countries raise doubts about the depth and durability of democracy in the region, as well as the future growth of free market economies.

Colombia. Shortly after assuming command and making my initial assessment of security and stability in the region, I stated that I considered Colombia to be the most threatened nation in the AOR. I stand behind that assessment, but I am also encouraged by what I see in Colombia today. Served by first class civilian and military leaders, Colombia demonstrates a level of national organization not present two years ago. Although the recently reported upsurge in coca production is cause for concern, that concern is partially mitigated by the improved performance of Colombia's security forces during tactical engagements with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and others who are aiding and abetting drug traffickers. Cooperation between the armed forces and national police has improved, with forces demonstrating new levels of competence in air-ground coordination and intelligence sharing. An aggressive program to restructure the armed forces is underway and Plan Colombia provides a comprehensive national strategy to defeat drug traffickers. With our help, Colombia can succeed; but Colombia is not the only country where democracy and stability are challenged.

Ecuador. The political and economic crisis in Ecuador has gone from bad to worse.

The military's involvement with Ecuador's recent coup was very disturbing. Even within the military, confidence in democracy and a free market economy is at low ebb. In Ecuador, as in other nations in our AOR, democracy and free market reforms are not delivering tangible results to the people. Today, many are worse off economically than they were before the restoration of democracy. Ecuador begs the question: Can democracy survive without an economic system that produces adequate subsistence and services for the majority of its citizens?

Panama. In accordance with the Panama Canal Treaty of 1977, we successfully transferred the Canal to the Government of Panama on 31 December 1999. Articles IV and V of the Permanent Neutrality and Operation of the Panama Canal Treaty stipulate that the U.S. and Panama ensure the permanent neutrality of the Panama Canal. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has assigned the mission of defending the Panama Canal to the U.S. Southern Command. Pursuant to the provisions of the Neutrality Treaty, we are prepared to fulfill these responsibilities. Spillover from violence in Colombia threatens Panama. The threat is most immediate in the Darien and San Blas Provinces, where insurgents and paramilitary forces rest, resupply, traffic in drugs and arms, clash with each other, and terrorize Panamanian citizens. Although these forces present no immediate and direct threat to Canal operations, the insurgents could easily overwhelm the limited capability of the Panamanian National Police stationed along the border. While not an overt threat to Panamanian democracy, Colombian insurgents constitute a localized threat to Panamanian sovereignty and citizens in the border region.

Venezuela

Venezuela's new constitution, the 26th in its history, won an overwhelming endorsement of 70 percent of the voters during the national referendum. This new constitution significantly increases the powers of the president and permits him to serve two consecutive terms in office. The constitution also establishes a new unicameral congress and a judiciary to replace previous institutions widely regarded as corrupt. Venezuela now has an opportunity to restore the people's faith in government institutions. It remains to be seen if those goals will be realized.

Peru. In Peru, democracy, while imperfect, survives. We can best support the positive elements of this democracy by maintaining and sustaining our engagement initiatives with Peru's security forces and by ensuring that recent substantial gains made in the campaign against drugs are not lost. Free and unfettered elections in Peru would be an encouraging sign that Peruvian democracy will endure.

Paraguay. Paraguay remains one of the youngest and most fragile democracies in the hemisphere. The present administration is drawing increased fire from political foes. Authorities in Paraguay and Argentina have been unable to locate General Oviedo, who may be linked with plots to unseat Paraguay's current government. To their credit, the Paraguayan Armed Forces have remained detached from political intrigues. They demonstrated this clearly by supporting the constitution during the political crisis of March 1999, when Vice President Argana was assassinated.

Haiti. For the present and immediate future, challenges to Haitian democracy include abject poverty, a weak economic system, corruption, and a growing association with the drug trade. During January of this year, the United States Support Group Haiti was disestablished, ending more than five years of continued U.S. presence. During this period, U.S. Forces constructed 49 schools, 21 kilometers of roadway, drilled 43 new wells, repaired 203 existing wells, provided medical attention to 140,988 Haitians, trained 250 Haitian health providers and distributed 261 tons of food, medicine, and clothing. In the foreseeable future, USSOUTHCOM will remain engaged in Haiti through humanitarian assistance programs. However, Haiti's future remains uncertain. The upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections will give us an

indication of the nation's future. We must ensure Haiti takes the high road toward democracy and does not veer away from democratic and free market reforms.

Assessment Summary

After years of positive trends in the region, both democracy and the future of free market economies are confronting serious challenges. We have compelling reasons to increase our vigilance and engagement in the AOR and to rededicate our commitment and resources to supporting democracy. To this end, we have developed the following strategic priorities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Complete the 21st Century Architecture

The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Panama and return of U.S. bases required us to re-establish an effective theater architecture as a top priority. Our post-Panama Theater Architecture is sound. All the pieces are now in place with the exception of our Forward Operating Locations (FOLs). To achieve the objectives of our Counterdrug (CD) Campaign Plan, we must better position our assets to conduct sustained CD operations throughout the Source and Transit Zones. FOLs provide us the required operational reach to conduct these operations. Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions from the FOLs will enhance the effectiveness of U.S. Detection, Monitoring, and Tracking (DM&T) operations and improve our support for Partner Nation interdiction operations. The FOL in Manta, Ecuador is my number one priority. Manta is critical for conducting deep Source Zone air coverage with Airborne Early Warning aircraft, and it is the only FOL that enables us to achieve full coverage of Peru, Colombia, and the drug producing areas of Bolivia. On November 15, 1999, we concluded a 10-year access agreement with the Government of Ecuador. This agreement addresses congressional concerns and should clear the way for funding the necessary operational improvements to allow unconstrained DM&T operations with all types of aircraft used in CD operations. The design and engineering plan for airfield improvements to satisfy our own mandated safety requirements were completed this month. Construction will commence just as soon as funding becomes available. The FOLs at Aruba and Curacao, funded in the Fiscal Year 2001 budget request, are required for effective, rapid response DM&T operations in the northern Source Zone, which includes the Guajira Peninsula of Colombia and the Venezuelan border region, as well as a large part of the Transit Zone. The formal 10-year access agreement with the Kingdom of the Netherlands was signed on March 2, 2000. Having reached long-term accords on Aruba and Curacao, one of our remaining challenges is to negotiate an FOL site in Central America. This FOL would provide air coverage in the Eastern Pacific and Central America to keep pressure on the Transit Zone as we build CD capability in the Source Zone. We are currently evaluating prospective sites.

Setting the Command Anchor in Miami

We need to confirm Miami as the permanent site for U.S. Southern Command Headquarters. We are now in our third year of operation "on the ground" in Miami. As I stated previously, for a variety of reasons Miami has proven to be the single "right" location for USSOUTHCOM's headquarters. However, at this moment we own no physical facilities in Miami, and the network of rental and lease agreements for the headquarters is becoming increasingly unwieldy, inefficient and, most importantly, uneconomical. The most cost-effective option to anchor the headquarters in strategically appropriate Miami is to purchase the headquarters building and land. We are working with the Office of the Secretary of Defense to gain

approval and funding to purchase the headquarters building and associated grounds in Fiscal Year 2002. While I do not believe we need to hold the deed for every facility, I am convinced that we are best served by owning our headquarters.

Broaden and Expand the Resource Base

Many of the nations in our AOR are burdened with problems that frustrate internal development and threaten political stability. Nations of this region do not fear external powers and spend less per capita on arms than any other part of the world. While we welcome the corresponding low probability of an arms race or regional conflict, we have growing concerns about the durability of fragile democracies in the AOR. In last year's posture statement, I described our need for resources as both unique and critical. Our engagement mission is to nurture and strengthen thirty-one democracies through combined operations, combined exercises, training and education, military-to-military contact, security assistance, and humanitarian assistance programs. In past years, we have accomplished much with focused, frugal engagement efforts throughout the AOR. Because of subtle changes in the political climate and growing economic challenges mentioned earlier, I see a need to increase our engagement in several areas. First, U.S. Southern Command's available foreign military financing (FMF) is an excellent security assistance tool, but totaled only \$3 million last year and was earmarked exclusively for the Caribbean. This level of FMF assistance seems out of balance for an AOR of this size, particularly as we assist Partner Nations in shoring up democratic institutions and professionalizing their military. Secondly, I am concerned about cuts in manpower, specifically the Reserve Component (RC) assistance that we receive in our engagement programs. Reserve Components support 55 percent of all our exercises and 30 percent of our deployments to the AOR. In 1999, over 25,000 Reserve Component personnel provided more than 550,000 mandays in support of theater engagement activities. Additionally, U.S. Southern Command used more than 28,000 Reserve mandays for counterdrug exercises and operations. Our engagement exercise program, which is tethered to the availability of Reserve and National Guard forces, requires increased RC support for additional Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) directed exercises this year, such as two New Horizon deployments to Haiti and Medical Readiness Exercises (MEDRETE) for Nicaragua. Third, I am concerned about the level of support for our Humanitarian and Civic Assistance Program (HCA). HCA provides excellent mission essential and austere environment training that includes deployment, command and control, employment, sustainment, and redeployment for U.S. Reserve and National Guard forces. HCA projects throughout the AOR improve basic medical, transportation, and education infrastructure within our Partner Nations. These efforts support emerging democracies and project a benevolent image of the U.S. in the eyes of the most deprived citizens of these nations. Increased funding is needed to sustain the progress we have made. Despite our many engagement successes throughout the region, corrupting influences of drug trafficking, domestic and international terrorism, illegal migration, illicit arms sales, money laundering, and organized crime still pose a growing danger to the foundations of democracy and economic development. The recent proposal for a Colombia Emergency Supplemental attests to the seriousness of our resource needs for counterdrug operations. The proposed funding will enable us to support the building of significant counterdrug capabilities in the Source Zone, primarily for Colombia while reinforcing successes in Peru and Bolivia and addressing some emerging requirements in Ecuador, Panama, Brazil, and Venezuela. Increased funding, for both engagement and counterdrug operations, will send a resounding signal to this region of its importance to the United States.

Resuscitate ISR Capabilities

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance resources support U.S. Southern Command's engagement activities, force protection, counterdrug, and contingency operations. ISR capabilities must provide predictive and actionable intelligence to preclude strategic, operational, and tactical surprise in the AOR. Our current ISR capabilities fail to meet all of our requirements, particularly where we need to be proactive rather than reactive in force protection and counterdrug operations. The lack of adequate ISR resources is my number one readiness issue. The Joint Staff and the entire intelligence community are working diligently with the U.S. Southern Command on this issue. Potential improvements are on the horizon, but the reality is that we need more and better ISR support today.

Increase National and DoD Strategic Awareness

When viewed in the context of our National Security Strategy and its twin tenets of Engagement and Enlargement, this hemisphere is our foremost success story. Whether we got where we are through skill or good fortune is a moot point. What is important is preserving the significant gains that have been made over the past 20 years. Historical analysis reveals that in terms of governance this is a tidal region. Democracy ebbs and flows on about a 20-year cycle. As I have mentioned throughout this report, my concern is that we may be watching the tide change. Fortunately, the tidal analogy has its limits. While we can't control oceanic tidal changes, through adequate attention to the region, thoughtful and selective engagement, and frugal but sufficient resourcing of worthwhile initiatives, we can effectively influence important events in Latin America and the Caribbean.

COUNTERDRUG EFFORTS

Regional Threat

The danger of drug trafficking to the Andean Ridge nations is real, immediate, and growing. The illicit drug industry has become a corrosive force without precedent, relentlessly eroding the foundations of democracy in the region, corrupting public institutions, poisoning youth, ruining economies, and disrupting the social order. Colombia is key to the region's stability. Colombia's problems are not contained by her borders, and are spilling over into neighboring countries. Venezuela has deployed 10,000 troops along the Colombian border to prevent intrusions by Colombian insurgents. Peru and Ecuador also deploy forces along the Colombian border to deter the FARC, paramilitary forces, and drug traffickers from unwanted incursions. Ecuador's current economic plight makes it nearly impossible for the government to deploy sufficient military forces to prevent illegal border crossings. FARC and drug trafficker incursions recently prompted the Brazilian Army to reinforce military garrisons along its border with Colombia and spurred the government to continue development of the \$1.4 billion Amazon Surveillance System (SIVAM). As I mentioned before, FARC and paramilitary forces enter Panama with impunity to terrorize and extort Panamanian citizens, and to traffic in drugs and arms. To wage an effective, long-term counterdrug campaign, countries of the region must cooperate to develop a common strategy and coordinate their actions against drug traffickers. A collective regional response is required to provide effective border security and to expand and sustain the impressive counterdrug results achieved by Peru and Bolivia.

U.S. Assistance to Colombia and Neighboring Countries

Counterdrug (CD) Campaign Plan. U.S. Southern Command, as part of the Interagency team, has developed a three-phased regional CD Campaign Plan that

supports the goals, objectives, and intent of Presidential Decision Directive (PDD)-14 and the National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS). The focus of Phase I is on assisting Partner Nations to improve their CD capabilities, and where required, develop new ones. This approach requires the U.S. to help organize, train, and where necessary, equip Partner Nations to conduct air, riverine, and ground CD operations against drug traffickers. Phase II will entail decisive regional operations to neutralize organizations involved in the illicit drug trade. During this Phase, Partner Nations will isolate drug producing areas from traditional markets and transit points and extend security force presence into production areas. Phase III will sustain successes achieved during the first two phases by preparing Partner Nation forces to adapt CD operations to drug traffickers' constantly changing tactics. Aggressive interdiction efforts in the Transit Zone will be conducted during all three phases.

Counterdrug Supplemental Bill. The proposed counterdrug supplemental will assist Colombia in implementing its strategic plan for counterdrug operations. The supplemental is consistent with the overarching National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS), supports goals 4 and 5 of the Strategy, and will enable United States Southern Command to more effectively execute its Counterdrug Campaign Plan. Colombia and its Andean Ridge neighbors fully appreciate the regional problems that are caused by the illegal drug industry, and have demonstrated the willingness to pursue solutions at the regional level. Success in these efforts will require continued commitment from the U.S. The United States has provided initial training, limited infrastructure support, technological support, and equipment to foster commitment and to improve Partner Nation capabilities to fight drug trafficking within their borders and throughout the region. Ninety of our 119 CD training support deployments for Fiscal Year 2000 are scheduled for Andean Ridge countries. In addition, seven of our nineteen Tactical Analysis Teams (TATs) are located in the five Andean Ridge countries, and more than 100 Joint Planning and Assistance Teams (JPATs) deploy to the region annually, providing CD training and assessments for host nation security forces. We also provide support for Andean Ridge ground, air, and riverine programs. If approved, supplemental funding will enable us to aggressively pursue existing programs that have already demonstrated their merit, and initiate new ones such as the Colombia CD Brigade, which can be decisive as we seek a comprehensive solution to the drug challenge.

Support to Ground Programs.

We have helped the Colombian Army (COLAR) organize, train, and equip their first Counternarcotics Battalion (CN BN), which became operational December 15, 1999. Manned by more than 900 professional soldiers and based at the Joint Task Force (JTF)-South headquarters in Tres Esquinas, the CN Battalion is comprised of a headquarters company and three maneuver companies. The Battalion completed an extensive three-phase training program conducted by U.S. Special Forces at a cost of \$3.9 million and received \$3.5 million in individual and unit equipment, and medical supplies to enable stand-alone operations. The CN Battalion is designed to conduct ground and airmobile CD operations in coordination with the Colombian National Police. Colombian armed forces and police units will receive integrated intelligence support from the Colombia Joint Intelligence Center (COJIC). To provide urgently needed tactical mobility, the Battalion has received 18 refurbished UH-1N helicopters (and accompanying spare parts), which were provided by the Department of State (DOS). Based at Tolemeida and Florencia, these helicopters are crewed by 25 contract pilots and 14 Colombian copilots trained in the United States. Contract pilots will be phased out as additional Colombian pilots complete their training. DOS is also providing follow-on support equipment (armament and portable hangars), and has

budgeted \$2.1 million of monthly Operations and Maintenance funds to sustain this crucial capability. The Colombian Joint Intelligence Center became operational on December 22, 1999, and is currently supporting national police, military, and JTF-South CD operations. It produces real-time targeting information, terrain and weather analysis, force protection vulnerability assessments, and intelligence estimates. The United States Government (USG) provided \$4.9 million for construction of the COJIC facility, installation of networked computers and communications equipment, base infrastructure upgrades, and defrayal of operating expenses through mid-June 2000. Three U.S. subject matter experts are deployed to the COJIC through June 2000 to observe and assist COLAR and Colombian National Police intelligence specialists manning the facility. We are also improving Tres Esquinas, where Joint Task Force-South, the COJIC, and the CN Battalion are colocated. Thus far, we have spent more than \$600,000 on force protection improvements alone. Other upgrades are underway, including extension of the existing aircraft runway and construction of an aircraft parking ramp. Planning is ongoing to establish, train, and equip two additional CN Battalions and a COLAR CN Brigade headquarters during 2000. The second CN Battalion will begin training in April, followed several months later by the third Battalion, which will complete its training in December 2000. While the basic organization of the second and third Battalion will closely parallel the first, some organizational refinements will be made. Improvements will include the inception of a reinstruction company, to provide a reservoir of trained replacement forces, and the consolidation of support elements (reconnaissance, medical, mortars), into a Support Battalion. Soldiers assigned to all of the new Battalions will be vetted to eliminate human rights abusers.

Support to Interdiction Programs. We continue to conduct cooperative air interdiction efforts with Peru and Colombia and are using the security assistance program to upgrade the capabilities of A-37, Tucano, and C-26 aircraft. We have teamed with the Interagency to develop a CD Air Interdiction Plan to enhance current Government of Colombia (GOC) capabilities. This plan will maximize Colombian operational effectiveness focusing phased air interdiction operations against drug smuggling aircraft in southern and eastern Colombia. Operations will integrate Relocatable Over-the-Horizon Radar (ROTHR), U.S. tracker and detection aircraft, and Colombian air force and national police aircraft. Training began in February 2000 and will be followed by several months of focused air interdiction operations. The proposed supplemental funds air-to-air radar and an upgraded communications package for two of the Colombian Air Force's (COLAF) C-26 Merlin aircraft. These modified aircraft will enable the COLAF to track and intercept aircraft moving cocaine from inland laboratories to the Colombian coasts for transshipment to the United States. The supplemental also: (1) improves COLAF tactical surveillance and intelligence capabilities by providing Forward-Looking Infrared Radar (FLIR) for low-altitude, long-duration reconnaissance aircraft; (2) improves collection from ground-based radars (GBR) by funding upgrades to current GBR's and fielding an additional GBR at Tres Esquinas; and (3) corrects operational and safety deficiencies at the Forward Operating Location (FOL) in Manta, Ecuador to allow sustained operations by U.S. Navy, Air Force, and Customs aircraft in the deep Source Zone and the Eastern Pacific. The proposed supplemental will go a long way toward correcting one of Colombia's longest standing and most crucial operational deficiencies -- inadequate tactical mobility. As previously mentioned, 18 UH-1N helicopters have already been delivered to Colombia to provide air mobility for the inaugural CN Battalion. These aircraft were provided through a coordinated effort by the Department of State and Department of Defense. If the supplemental is approved, 15 additional UH-1N's will be upgraded; brought to standardized configuration and delivered to Colombia to support expanded mobility needs as the CN Battalion grows to Brigade strength.

Ultimately, these 33 UH-1N helicopters will be replaced by 30 UH-60 Blackhawks and additional H-60's that will be purchased by Colombia using its own funds. The selection of the UH-60 as the standard helicopter for Colombia's armed forces was based on its range, payload, survivability, versatility, service ceiling, and a variety of other factors. Other options including non-U.S. aircraft were considered; however, we support the Colombian decision and believe that important requirements such as training, maintenance, facilities, and contractor support will be simplified by the Blackhawk selection.

Support to Riverine Programs.

In the infrastructure-poor regions of Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia where the drug industry thrives, road networks are sparse to non-existent. The rivers that feed the Amazon Basin have become the highways that support the drug trade. To assist partner nations in their efforts to interdict drug trafficking on the rivers, we have instituted aggressive programs to train, equip and effectively employ riverine forces in Colombia and Peru. Colombia has long recognized the importance of its rivers to those who ply the drug trade. To provide better coverage of the rivers and to achieve greater operational efficiency, Colombia comprehensively reorganized its riverine forces during 1999. A fluvial brigade has been created with five organic battalions. In the past, riverine battalions were assigned to contiguous operating areas. Under the new concept, each battalion is assigned responsibility for two or more specific rivers. We subscribe fully to this approach, predict an upsurge in operational efficiency, and have already seen improved results from its implementation. The basic operating element within the Colombian riverine structure is the riverine combat element (RCE). With U.S. assistance, the Colombian Navy and Marine Corps have now fielded 25 RCEs against a projected requirement of 45. Simultaneously, seven support bases required for the support and sustainment of riverine forces have either been built or refurbished. With current funding, during FY 2000 we will help Colombia achieve its objective riverine force structure by procuring eight patrol boats, spare parts, night vision and radio-navigation equipment. While the Colombian riverine program is relatively mature, Peru's is in its formative stage. With U.S. Assistance, the Peruvians have established the Joint Peru Riverine Training Center near Iquitos in the Amazon region. With our help, Peru is making steady progress. During the past year four of 12 planned Riverine Interdiction Units (RIU) have been fielded and pressed into service. With currently approved funding we will assist Peru to expand its riverine capabilities by providing them twelve 25-foot patrol boats, six 40-foot patrol craft, spare parts, night vision devices and essential items of individual equipment. In tandem with training and provisioning initiatives, we are working closely with Colombia and Peru to better and more fully integrate riverine forces into their national interdiction programs.

U.S. SOUTHERN COMMAND ENGAGEMENT

Value of Engagement

I am a strong believer in our National Military Strategy. I am convinced that the three pillars of the strategy -- shape, respond and prepare -- are well chosen and are the right ones for these turbulent and unpredictable times. The potential of the strategy can best be achieved if we place proper and proportional emphasis and adequately resource each of the pillars. In this regard, I am convinced that if we

shape the international security environment skillfully, we will respond to fewer crises, and the uncertain future for which we are preparing will be far less uncertain. Based on this thesis, and because the U.S. Southern Command AOR is not designated a major theater of war, we have weighted our effort in the region to the first pillar of the National Military Strategy. Our theater engagement plan is the roadmap that guides our shaping initiatives. We group our engagement activities into two categories: crisis engagement and deliberate engagement. I will comment on the content and effectiveness of each.

Crisis Engagement

Hurricane Mitch. At a cost of more than \$200 million, Southern Command helped Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador recover from the heavy damage caused by Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Our disaster relief plan began with a 30-day emergency phase during which we saved more than 1000 lives and distributed more than 3 million pounds of food, 131,000 pounds of medical supplies, and 120,000 gallons of potable water. During Phase II, we began "rehabilitation" by restoring the infrastructure necessary to meet basic health and welfare needs of citizens in the affected countries. We constructed or reconstructed 260 kilometers of roadway, 25 bypasses, 3 clinics, and 4 schools. We also drilled 4 wells and provided medical attention to over 50,000 people. During the third phase, "restoration," we consolidated relief efforts with an existing exercise, New Horizons, and expanded the scope of the effort to include the Dominican Republic, which had been ravaged earlier by Hurricane Georges. More than 23,000 Guardsmen and Reservists from 45 states deployed into the region in two-week increments from February to August 1999. Collectively, the Guardsmen and Reservists built 7 bridges, 6 low water crossings, 15 culvert bridges, 27 schools, 1 community center, 5 dikes, and 240 km of roadway. They also drilled 21 water wells, diverted two rivers into their normal beds, and provided medical treatment to more than 262,000 people.

Operation Fundamental Response.

At the request of the Government of Venezuela, Southern Command provided emergency assistance to the victims of torrential rains and floods that ravaged Venezuela's northern coast in December, 1999. During the emergency phase in late December, we delivered more than 237.5 tons of food and 190 tons of other relief supplies; rescued or relocated more than 5,500 flood victims; transported more than 363,000 pounds of relief supplies; produced and distributed thousands of gallons of fresh water; and provided medical treatment to more than 700 people. During January, we began "rehabilitation" and focused our efforts on the production and distribution of potable water. We produced over 2,891,686 gallons of potable water from 13 Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Units (ROWPU) deployed to Venezuela from the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and the United States. The majority of these water purification units are manned and serviced by dedicated National Guard personnel from Puerto Rico, West Virginia, North Dakota, and Florida. On February 11, we began a phased withdrawal of our forces from Venezuela and will complete the withdrawal in early March.

Deliberate Engagement

Southern Command's strategy of engagement stresses shared ideals to shape cooperative opportunities in the AOR countries. Our goal is to create the conditions that support the development of institutions to advance democracy, promote

regional stability, support hemispheric cooperation, and foster economic opportunities. During 1999, at the modest cost of less than \$105 million, we conducted more than 2800 engagement events throughout the AOR in activities such as disaster relief, professional military training, medical training and assistance, joint and combined exercises, and counterdrug operations. On the personal level, these events were conducted by more than 55,000 of our servicemen and women -- America's best ambassadors of democracy and the subordination of military forces to civilian authority. The long-term benefits to the U.S. from these engagement activities far outweigh the costs.

Engagement Payoff

Theater Engagement is the most cost efficient and militarily effective means for achieving U.S. national security goals and objectives in the AOR. Our Theater Engagement Plan advances national and regional strategies. In coordination with our DoD and interagency partners, we provide countries throughout the AOR with the capabilities and resolve to counter drug trafficking, international terrorism, and other transnational threats; to professionalize and restructure their armed forces; and to strengthen democratic institutions. The development of these capabilities in Partner Nations reduces the likelihood for U.S. military intervention in crises and the requirements for U.S. support during disasters. To be truly successful, our engagement activities require consistency to ensure a balance of programs for short-term development, mid-term access and growth, and long-term influence. Military-to-military contacts, combined training, equipment transfers, foreign military financing, seminars, and exchange programs provide near-term development and enhance cooperation with security forces in the region. Resident professional military education at U.S. schools and the foreign military sales program enable us to shape and influence events in the region for the long term.

CONCLUSION

I have now served at Southern Command for 29 months. Shortly after assuming command and making my initial assessment of security and stability conditions in the AOR, I published my vision for the hemisphere. Succinctly stated, this vision is of "a community of democratic, stable, and prosperous nations successfully countering illicit drug activities and other transnational threats; served by professional, modernized, interoperable security forces that embrace democratic principles, respect for human rights, and subordination to civil authority; and are capable and supportive of multilateral responses to challenges." Today, almost two and a half years later, I still hold that vision. However, I am not as sanguine today as I was two years ago that my vision will be realized. During the past year, I have detected a growing malaise in attitudes toward democratic reform which is fueled and compounded by the adverse social, economic, and political conditions, spawned wholly or in part by drug trafficking and the other transnational threats that it breeds. These forces are weakening the fabric of democracy in the region. We cannot be discouraged by this turn of events. Now, more than ever, we need to strengthen our engagement, defeat the scourge of drugs, and shape the security environment to achieve regional goals and objectives that support and sustain our national security interests. Our needs are modest but the return on investments will pay significant dividends to our children and grandchildren. I urge your continued support for our theater architecture requirements, anchoring the command headquarters in Miami, broadening our resource base, and resuscitating our ISR capabilities.