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## 2018 Summit of the Americas

### Overview

The eighth Summit of the Americas took place in Lima, Peru, on April 13-14, 2018. The Summits of the Americas have been held roughly every three years since 1994 and serve as opportunities for the Western Hemisphere's heads of government to engage directly with one another and address issues of mutual concern. Congress expressed considerable interest in the 2018 summit, with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee holding a hearing in the lead-up to the event and several Members traveling to Lima to observe the proceedings and meet with the hemisphere's leaders.

The official theme of the summit was "Democratic Governance against Corruption." Accordingly, the leaders of the hemisphere committed to undertaking measures to increase transparency and combat corruption in their countries. They also discussed the ongoing political and economic crises in Venezuela, although Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro was not invited to attend. A group of 16 nations issued a declaration that called on Venezuela to hold free and fair elections and urged the international community to provide humanitarian aid to the Venezuelan people. The 115<sup>th</sup> Congress has enacted several measures intended to address these regional challenges and could consider additional efforts to support the summit agreements.

President Donald Trump was scheduled to attend the Lima summit as part of his first trip to Latin America since taking office. He canceled the trip on April 10, 2018, however, with the White House asserting that the President needed to remain in Washington to oversee U.S. military operations in Syria. It was the first time that a U.S. President did not participate in a Summit of the Americas. Vice President Mike Pence attended on behalf of the United States. He delivered a speech outlining U.S. priorities and met with several of the hemisphere's leaders. It is unclear whether the Vice President's efforts helped to alleviate concerns about the Trump Administration's policy agenda, which generally has been received poorly in the region.

### Background

The Summits of the Americas were established in the early 1990s during a brief period of consensus in the Western Hemisphere. After decades of civil war and military rule, 34 of the 35 countries in the region had established elected civilian democracies. Likewise, following the end of the Cold War, most of the governments in the region had moved away from state-led development in favor of economic liberalization.

To build on those shared values and develop a common agenda for the hemisphere's future, President Bill Clinton invited all of the democratically elected heads of

government in the hemisphere to attend the first Summit of the Americas in Miami in 1994. The summit attendees approved a comprehensive plan of action with 23 separate initiatives under four major themes: (1) preserving and strengthening the community of democracies of the Americas, (2) promoting prosperity through economic integration and free trade, (3) eradicating poverty and discrimination in the hemisphere, and (4) guaranteeing sustainable development and conserving the natural environment for future generations. Perhaps the most important initiative to emerge from the Miami summit was an agreement to work toward the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) that would include the entire hemisphere, with the exception of Cuba. The FTAA was never realized, but the process led to numerous bilateral and regional free trade agreements.

Although other Summits of the Americas also have produced some notable results, the hemisphere's leaders often have struggled to reach consensus on key issues over the past 15 years. Consequently, some analysts have criticized the more recent summits for producing superficial declarations that paper over fundamental disagreements. Others argue that the summits remain a valuable forum for strengthening hemispheric ties since they help foster interpersonal relationships among the region's leaders and focus policymakers' attention on regional challenges.

### Outcomes of the Lima Summit

#### Anti-corruption Initiatives

As noted above, "Democratic Governance against Corruption" was the overarching theme of the Lima summit. High-profile corruption scandals have weakened or brought down several Latin American presidents in recent years, including Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, whose government chose the summit theme. Kuczynski had denied a series of corruption allegations but resigned in the face of impeachment proceedings on March 21, 2018. Corruption also has contributed to the rejection of traditional political parties and an erosion of support for democratic governance throughout the region.

Summit attendees approved the Lima Commitment, which includes 57 actions to combat corruption in the region. Among other actions, attendees committed to reinforcing democratic governance by promoting high ethics standards, improving government transparency through the adoption of new technologies, increasing the transparency of campaign and political party financing, promoting stronger cooperation among the region's justice sector officials, and strengthening regional mechanisms to monitor governments' anti-corruption efforts. Some analysts are skeptical that governments in the region will enact such

measures, however, given that several of them have been implicated in corruption scandals.

The U.S. government currently uses a variety of tools to support anti-corruption efforts throughout the hemisphere. U.S. foreign assistance supports partner nations' efforts to improve government transparency, establish professional civil services, and strengthen justice sector institutions. It also helps strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations to hold their governments accountable and funds specialized anti-corruption bodies, such as the U.N.-backed International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and the Organization of American States (OAS)-backed Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras. Moreover, the U.S. government cooperates with nations in the region to carry out corruption investigations and prosecutions and imposes targeted sanctions against corrupt individuals.

### Collective Response to the Situation in Venezuela

The leaders attending the summit also discussed the situation in Venezuela. Since 2014, the Maduro government has consolidated control over Venezuela's institutions and the country has fallen into a deep economic crisis. Some regional leaders, such as OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro, have pushed for a regional response to the crises, but many countries have been reluctant to intervene in Venezuela's internal affairs. Regional dynamics have begun to change, however, as countries have grown increasingly concerned about mass migration from Venezuela. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), nearly 600,000 Venezuelans have sought asylum or received an alternative legal status from nations in the Western Hemisphere over the past three years. UNHCR estimates that 900,000 more may be residing in the region without authorization.

Although summit attendees were unable to establish consensus on a hemispheric response to the situation in Venezuela, 16 nations—including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and the United States—issued a joint declaration. They called on the Venezuelan government to hold free and fair elections, expressed their determination to continue promoting unilateral and multilateral measures to foster the restoration of democracy, reaffirmed their support for Venezuela's National Assembly, urged the international community and multilateral organizations to provide humanitarian aid for the Venezuelan people, and called on the Venezuelan government to allow aid distribution inside the country.

Vice President Pence called on the nations of the hemisphere to place additional pressure on the Maduro government. The Trump Administration has imposed targeted sanctions on Venezuelan officials for antidemocratic actions, human rights abuses, and corruption, and it also has imposed broader sanctions on the Venezuelan government's access to U.S. financial markets. The Administration reportedly offered technical assistance to help governments in the region develop the legal frameworks necessary to impose similar sanctions, but it appears that few, if any, have accepted that offer. To date,

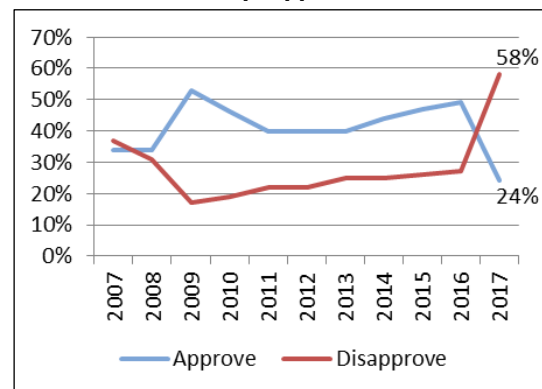
Canada and Panama are the only other countries in the hemisphere that have imposed targeted sanctions.

The U.S. government also announced at the summit that it would provide \$16 million of humanitarian assistance for Venezuelans who have fled their country. The funds will support UNHCR's regional response to the Venezuela crises and the humanitarian efforts of host communities in Colombia and Brazil. The U.S. government previously had provided \$3 million for UNHCR efforts and \$2.5 million for emergency food and health assistance for Venezuelans in Colombia, bringing total U.S. humanitarian aid for Venezuelans to \$21 million since FY2017.

### Regional Concerns About U.S. Policy

Since taking office, President Trump has aggravated several long-standing irritants in U.S. relations with the region. His criticism of allies' counternarcotics efforts, insistence on constructing a physical wall along the U.S.-Mexican border, and discontinuation of policies that have provided relief from deportation for nearly 1 million Latin America and Caribbean immigrants have been received particularly poorly. Several leaders in the hemisphere also have expressed concerns about the President's trade policies, including his withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement, renegotiation of the North America Free Trade Agreement, and imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. Over the past year, public approval in the Western Hemisphere of "the job performance of the leadership of the United States" has declined from 49% to 24% and disapproval has climbed from 27% to 58% (see **Figure 1**).

**Figure 1. U.S. Leadership Approval in the Americas**



**Source:** Gallup, *Rating World Leaders: 2018*, January 18, 2018.

Vice President Pence defended the Administration's policies at the summit. He declared that "America first does not mean America alone" and asserted that the United States seeks to "forge stronger and more balanced trade relationships" and "deepen our security relationships across the region." He also reiterated that message during bilateral meetings with the leaders of Canada, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. Although some analysts argue that the Vice President's efforts may have alleviated concerns about the Administration's policies, others contend that his assurances regarding U.S. engagement in the region were likely overshadowed by the President's absence.

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