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Marco Rubio Visits Caribbean, Commits to Foreign Aid Reform and Joint Security Efforts

In Jamaica, Guyana, and Suriname, Secretary Rubio promised continued aid delivered government-to-government, support for energy development, and stronger cooperation against transnational crime and gang violence.

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U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio says the United States wants to foster a closer working relationship with countries in the Caribbean in a number of areas, including security, energy and aid.

Mr. Rubio expressed these sentiments during last week's trip to the region, in which he made visits to Jamaica, Guyana, and Suriname. "We believe it is in our national interest to have a Caribbean region that is safe, stable, and prosperous," he said in the latter country, his last stop of the trip. "There may be things that we can do in collaboration with one another," he declared a day earlier in Jamaica.

Seeking to reassure Caribbean leaders, Mr. Rubio promised that foreign aid to the region would continue. "The difference is, we want to provide foreign aid in a way that is strategically aligned with our foreign policy priorities and the priorities of our host countries and our nation states that we're partners with." The State Department would be playing a greater role in the delivery of such aid government-to-government, he said, now that agencies such as USAID – which had typically supported the efforts of non-governmental organizations – have been eliminated.

On the topic of security, Mr. Rubio pledged to work towards "enhancing cooperation in combating transnational crime, ensuring the collective safety of our citizens and mutually secured borders." In Jamaica, he spoke of the importance of collaborating to fight the influence of gangs, indicating that "there is already significant policy alignment with both countries." Mr. Rubio acknowledged that a significant amount of the guns imported into Caribbean countries come from the United States. "We want to commit to doing more to stopping that flow at the same time as we do more to commit to increasing your capacity," he said to Jamaica's Prime Minister Andrew Holness.

In Guyana, Mr. Rubio spoke to the country's potential in becoming a regional powerhouse, especially in the arena of energy. "The most important thing you need to be a dominant presence in the world in data centers and artificial intelligence is reliable and affordable energy." The country's efforts in expanding agriculture production was also commendable, said the U.S. Secretary of State, "not just for the needs of your population, but for the region."

The United States wants to encourage that development, Mr. Rubio said, "because we think it creates a level of stability in the region which we share....It won't just help you, it will help all of your neighboring partners in the Caribbean Basin, in the region writ large." That prospect, according to Mr. Rubio, bodes well for the U.S. "We think that ultimately makes life in America safer and more prosperous as well." He promised assistance for Guyana in dealing with external forces that threaten that regional safety, including the increasing hostility of Venezuela. "There will be consequences for adventurism," Mr. Rubio warned.

During his visit to the region, Mr. Rubio also addressed concerns from Caribbean leaders about potential threats to countries in the region who continue to source healthcare workers from Cuba, promising to more carefully consider the nature of the agreements governing those working relationships.