

Mexico: Threats Won't End Drug Crackdown

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MEXICO CITY -- Mexican President Felipe Calderon said Saturday that drug traffickers' threats against his government would not stop a military crackdown against them, and he demanded that the United States do more to fight the sale and consumption of drugs domestically.

In an exclusive interview with The Associated Press aboard his presidential plane, Calderon said he would push President Bush to respect migrant rights and do more against drugs in the U.S. when the two meet on Tuesday in the colonial city of Merida, [Mexico](#).

"We are, at the end of the day, putting our lives on the line in this battle, and the United States has to come up with something that is more than symbolic gestures, much more," Calderon said. "Mexico can't diminish the availability of drugs while the U.S. hasn't reduced its demand. It's an elemental equation."

Calderon said members of the federal government have received threats from drug traffickers.

"There have been a lot of threats -- whether they have been false or real -- but they won't stop us from taking action," he said during his return from a visit to southern Chiapas state, where he marked his first 100 days in office.

Hoping to end a bloody turf war between cartels, Calderon has sent thousands of troops and federal police to areas controlled by drug traffickers, including Mexican cities along the U.S. border, his home state of Michoacan, and the Pacific coast resort of Acapulco. He also began extraditing drug lords to face justice north of the border, something that the United States had urged Mexico to do for years.

The Mexican leader criticized the U.S. decision to extend walls along its southern border, arguing that both countries should focus on improving the Mexican economy to keep people from seeking work in the U.S.

"Mexico should be prosperous and not require its people to leave," he said.

But he added that no measures -- not walls or migration accords or even a booming Mexican economy -- will completely stop Mexicans from working illegally in the U.S. because the trend is built into the fabric of both countries' cultures.

"No amount of jobs or investment can stop it completely," he said.

Recognizing that, he said he supported Bush's proposal to allow Mexicans to seek temporary work visas for the U.S., and he promised to fight to protect migrants from a "culture of persecution" in the U.S.

Calderon welcomed Bush's visit to Latin America and urged the U.S. leader to make the region a priority once again, after immigration reform and other important issues for Mexico took a back seat to security following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

There's a Mexican saying: 'Better late than never,' " Calderon said.

Bush's visit to Mexico will cap a five-nation tour of Latin America, a trip aimed in part at countering Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's growing influence.

However, Calderon _ a close ally of the U.S. who has sparred with Chavez _ rejected the idea that he would lead the region's anti-[Venezuela](#) campaign.

"I am not interested in playing a role with Bush in that aspect," he said, adding: "The United States has a lot to do to regain respect in Latin America."

Calderon also said there is no evidence of terrorists operating in Mexico, despite a recent Internet threat against countries exporting oil to the United States. He said Mexico takes every threat seriously, but has no reason to believe it would be a target for attacks, mostly because it refused to support the U.S.-led invasion of [Iraq](#).

"Mexico has only been respectful of other countries," he said.