



# Integrated Country Strategy

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## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

**FOR PUBLIC RELEASE**

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## 1. Chief of Mission Priorities

The United States has deep historic ties to the Dominican Republic and generally enjoys broad support from both the government and the public. The country's location at the crossroads of regional transportation routes, its status as a top American tourist destination, the family connections for over two million U.S. citizens of Dominican descent, and our strong security relationship make its continued development and stability vital to U.S. interests. However, due to the recognition of the PRC in 2018, the United States faces increasing challenges in ensuring it remains the Dominican Republic's partner of choice. Many of the long-standing weaknesses that we have labored for decades to overcome are now entry points for an alternative model of development and governance that would be antithetical to U.S. interests and the democratic values we share with the Dominican Republic.

The Mission's priority therefore is to protect and consolidate our position by helping the Dominican Republic overcome two key challenges: socio-economic exclusion, particularly entrenched and racially-motivated nationalistic sentiment that continues to prevent the full exercise of human rights or economic participation of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent or those that are perceived to be of Haitian descent; and weak governance and institutions, which abet widespread corruption and uneven application of the rule of law. A Dominican Republic that makes progress on these issues will be in a stronger position to remain a close U.S. partner and counter authoritarianism. While Dominican public opinion widely supports our efforts to strengthen institutions and fight corruption, prevailing attitudes oppose our efforts to address socio-economic exclusion.

To achieve the broad range of Mission goals, we will use robust public diplomacy programming to leverage one of our greatest assets here: highly favorable public views of the United States. We also must overcome two years of backlog in Consular work, which has undermined the interpersonal ties that are the bedrock of our strong relationships with Dominicans by preventing us from doing our daily work of reuniting families and facilitating legitimate travel. We will maintain our robust engagement with government, private sector, and civil society

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across the full range of Mission priorities and continue to fund security and development assistance programs and institutional reform efforts.

- **A more inclusive Dominican Republic with strong institutions that stand against authoritarianism**

The Mission will encourage the Dominican Republic to join like-minded partners to combat the deterioration of democracy in the region and promote free and fair elections both within the Dominican Republic, and abroad. The government's participation in the December 2021 Summit for Democracy as well as its efforts via the Alliance for Development in Democracy with Costa Rica and Panama demonstrate the Dominican Republic's desire to play a larger role in shaping regional strategies for promoting democracy in the Western Hemisphere in line with U.S. priorities. The Mission already works closely with civil society organizations and the government to strengthen institutions that provide the foundation for a prosperous democracy, but more needs to be done to ensure the Dominican Republic's growth also benefits socio-economic groups that remain excluded from the formal economy and live on the margins of society. The Mission will continue working with the government to promote respect for human rights of all Dominicans, including groups discriminated against due to race, national origin, disability, gender, or LGBTQI+ identification. The Mission will continue to promote positive and mutually beneficial relations between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, which is both a humanitarian imperative and perpetual source of diplomatic friction that could derail other priorities. This includes continuing to work towards a resolution for the nearly 300,000 Dominicans of Haitian descent who are currently stateless. In addition, we will press for increased democratic participation by all members of society, including LGBTQI+ individuals and Dominicans living in rural communities. Because the Dominican government and the public are largely resistant to a more inclusive society that provides equal protections for both those perceived to be Haitian and LGBTQI+ communities, sustainable change will require a concerted effort to shift public opinion.

- **A secure and healthy Dominican Republic that supports U.S. security**

The Mission's highest priority is safeguarding the safety and security of the estimated 300,000 U.S. citizens who reside in the Dominican Republic and the three million U.S. citizens who visit each year. The Mission also seeks to protect both the Dominican Republic and the United States from illicit drug trafficking, irregular migration, as well as threats to public health and our economy. While the Dominican Republic is a key security partner in the Caribbean region, high crime rates, corruption, weak enforcement of anti-corruption laws with few prosecutions, and a lack of transparency hamper its development. Lack of accountability for public officials has led to wide distrust of public institutions. The current administration has taken steps in the right direction to investigate corrupt individuals, including within its own party, but much remains to be done to overcome an entrenched culture of cronyism. We will continue to provide technical assistance and training to improve the criminal justice system, reform institutions, and counter corruption. Identifying and minimizing the spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, and African Swine Fever (ASF) remains a key priority. While the Dominican Republic has weathered the effects of COVID-19 fairly well in global terms, it has struggled to adequately respond to the recent emergence of African Swine Fever which threatens food security and economic stability, both in the Dominican Republic and in the United States. The Mission will work closely with its counterparts in the government to help eradicate ASF and mitigate other public health threats. Eradicating these diseases is critical to the stability and efficacy of the country's health care system, and continued economic growth, particularly of the tourism sector. Failure to eradicate ASF also threatens the U.S. pork sector, a \$20 billion industry with more than a half a million jobs. It also poses a risk to food security and the economic well-being of Dominican farmers, many of whom are small backyard farmers who rely on their pigs for their livelihood.

- **An economically stable Dominican Republic that remains a strong U.S. commercial partner**

While the Dominican Republic has enjoyed sustained economic growth over the past 20 years, its current debt of more than seventy percent of GDP hampers its economic growth and stability. The Mission will work closely with Dominican authorities and the private sector to

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promote competitiveness, trade, and investment as important engines for economic growth to ensure the United States remains the Dominican Republic's number one trading partner. The Mission will also continue efforts to promote viable paths to critical infrastructure development that do not rely on PRC loans, donations, or non-transparent bids from state-connected firms which are often difficult for the Dominican Republic to refuse given its development priorities despite the strings attached. To continue our strong commercial partnership and help reduce corruption, we will offer technical assistance to develop transparent laws and a level playing field for foreign investment. Additionally, promoting sustainable energy sources and protecting the Dominican Republic from natural disasters and environmental challenges, including environmental degradation, hurricanes, and earthquakes will improve the lives of Dominicans by improving food security and protecting infrastructure. We will also renew our efforts to help the Dominican Republic face the challenge of climate change, to which it is highly vulnerable.

## 2. Mission Strategic Framework

**Mission Goal 1:** A more inclusive Dominican Republic with strong institutions that stand against authoritarianism

- **Mission Objective 1.1:** Strengthened governance institutions protect Human Rights and counter corruption (Links to CDCS IR1.1, 2.1)
- **Mission Objective 1.2:** Decreased socio-economic exclusion and increased democratic participation (Links to CDCS IR1.1,1.2, 2.1, 3.1)
- **Mission Objective 1.3:** Dominican government becomes a leading promoter of democracy in the region (Links to CDCS IR 1.1)

**Mission Goal 2:** A secure and healthy Dominican Republic that supports U.S. security

- **Mission Objective 2.1:** Enhanced Citizen Security (Links to CDCS IR1.1, 2.1, 3.1)
- **Mission Objective 2.2:** Improved consular service delivery and emergency preparedness coordination that supports U.S. citizens and regularized migration patterns
- **Mission Objective 2.3:** Security and defense services disrupt and dismantle TCOs and illicit networks
- **Mission Objective 2.4:** Public health capacity increased and threats from pandemic infectious diseases decreased (CDCS IR1.3, 2.3, 3.3)

**Mission Goal 3:** An economically stable Dominican Republic that that remains a strong U.S. commercial partner

- **Mission Objective 3.1:** Critical infrastructure is protected from capture by anti-democratic actors
- **Mission Objective 3.2:** Threats from climate change and other environmental challenges are countered and disaster resilience enhanced (CDCS IR1.2, 2.2, 3.2)

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- **Mission Objective 3.3:** Rules-based commerce and investment enables mutual prosperity and reduces corruption

**Management Objective 1:** A more equitable, efficient, safe, and healthy workplace for all staff that enables a more effective Mission.



### 3. Mission Goals and Objectives

**Mission Goal 1** | A more inclusive Dominican Republic with strong institutions that stand against authoritarianism.

**Description** | In line with the [Interim National Security Strategy Guidance](#) to deter and defend against authoritarian threats, the Mission will support the Dominican Republic as it works to strengthen democratic institutions and practices in the country and region. The Dominican Republic's aspiration to be a strong democracy that puts its people first and systematizes anti-corruption and transparency measures serves long-held U.S. foreign policy goals. As such, the Mission will continue to support the Dominican Republic on this path as it builds regional ties and alliances that offer multilateral solutions to addressing national and regional challenges to democratic institutions. Specifically, the Mission will support the government's goal to ensure that economic growth benefits all Dominicans. This includes anti-corruption initiatives that bolster government institutions and practices, making public transactions transparent, reducing opportunities for corruption, and applying penalties swiftly and appropriately. The Mission will also support the Dominican government in prioritizing the civic participation of vulnerable populations, including but not limited to women and youth, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ persons, Dominicans of Haitian descent, and people living with HIV. We will work with our partners in the Dominican government and civil society and address longstanding human rights issues. The Mission will continue to press for a resolution for the nearly 300,000 Dominicans of Haitian descent who are currently stateless. The Mission will also continue to promote positive and mutually beneficial relations between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the improvement of which would have a net positive effect many bilateral and regional issues we face in the Dominican Republic.

**Objective 1.1 | Strengthened governance institutions protect Human Rights and counter corruption**

- **Justification |** Corruption diminishes public confidence in the government and deepens socio-economic exclusion and inequality. Inequality is a cause of social friction and prevents many from accessing the goods and services they need. The Dominican Republic ranked 137th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index. U.S. interests, both official U.S. government as well as private sector investments, are undermined by the corrosive effects of corruption. U.S. efforts to professionalize Dominican institutions work in parallel with investments in the integrity systems that hold public officials accountable.

The continued marginalization of women, Dominicans of Haitian descent, LGBTQI+ persons, and other underserved groups creates inequity of opportunity and contributes to poverty and exclusion from economic and democratic participation. Underscoring the important role of civil society and community engagement and improving the efficacy and credibility of these entities will reduce reliance on foreign assistance and other interventions for good governance, justice, and the enjoyment of human rights. Mission activities in support of this goal should increase civil society and community capacity to observe and report, advocate for community perspectives, and influence policy.

- **Linkages |** This mission goal supports EO 13985: Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government; the Presidential Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons Around the World; the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance; JRS Goals 1, 2 and 3; the National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality; the Presidential Memorandum on Establishing the Fight Against Corruption as a Core United States National Security Interest; and USAID's CDCS IR1.1, 2.1.
- **Risks |** Weak institutions permit human rights violations and corrupt acts to prevail with impunity. Continuing corruption and impunity in the Dominican Republic may result in increased distrust in governing institutions, increased inequality, lack of

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equitable access to justice, and reduced economic growth. In turn, these may open windows of opportunities for PRC exploitation. Mission Santo Domingo should mitigate this risk by maintaining the overall favorable public opinion of the United States and our values through FY2022 - FY2023 programs and partnerships and using existing relationships to promote positive, sustainable change.

**Objective 1.2 |** Decreased socio-economic exclusion and increased democratic participation

- **Justification |** Socio-economic exclusion is widespread in the Dominican Republic, stunting economic growth and preventing much of the population from fully realizing the benefits of living in a democratic society. Dominicans of Haitian descent, as well as those perceived to be of Haitian descent, face routine and widespread discrimination. Dominican women earn less than men, despite achieving higher educational outcomes. The Dominican Republic has the highest child marriage rate in the Latin America and Caribbean region. Surveys show that most members of the LGBTQI+ community regularly fear for their physical safety. Legislation aimed at protecting the rights of marginalized groups of Dominican society was stalled as of January 2022. Laws that are intended to guarantee opportunity for individuals with disabilities are poorly enforced, creating a situation in which many struggle to access education, employment, and healthcare. There is also a stark divide between the educational and economic opportunities available to Dominicans who live in rural communities, and those who live in major cities.

Some Dominican leaders in government, business, academia, and the nonprofit sector recognize these divisions and are developing innovative solutions to overcome them. Embassy Santo Domingo will support Dominican entities who are building a more inclusive society by providing targeted support in the form of trainings, educational programming, exchange opportunities, and strategic grants. Embassy Santo Domingo will also work to cultivate a deeper appreciation for the U.S. values of human rights and inclusivity through innovative storytelling and stakeholder engagement.

- **Linkages** | JSP Goal 3 Strategic Objective 3.2- Equity and Inclusion; EO 13985: Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government; the Presidential Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons Around the World; the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance; and USAID's CDCS IR1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 3.1.
- **Risks** | Failure to achieve Objective 1.2 will result in continued inequity in Dominican society, creating a fertile environment for corruption and authoritarian values to grow, as seen in other countries throughout the region. A perpetual challenge is critics who allege that the United States is hypocritical for promoting equity and human rights overseas while ignoring its own domestic history and present struggles. This could serve as potential messaging space for hostile actors. It can be mitigated by avoiding language that ignores present and historical injustices in the United States and focusing instead on progress and values. We also must contend with the current situation in which most Dominicans do not support fully equal rights for LGBTQI+ individuals or Haitian descent populations. Direct messaging in the promotion of LGBTQI+ and Haitian descent rights is met with hostility by many. The Mission can minimize alienating audiences by empowering local voices who are well versed in the socio-cultural context, and therefore more likely to influence local opinion. The Mission can also focus its own messaging on the value of creating an inclusive society, and generally embracing a positive tone.

**Objective 1.3** | Dominican government becomes a leading promoter of democracy in the region

- **Justification** | Worldwide there is a disturbing trend of democratic backsliding and weakened trust in democratic institutions. This trend has been exacerbated by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and growing influence of non-democratic actors, including China and Russia, on the global stage. Fortifying regional democratic institutions is an urgent priority to ensure respect for human rights and prosperity of the

peoples of our hemisphere. The Dominican government has demonstrated its desire to be a champion for democracy in the Western Hemisphere through recent efforts to fight domestic corruption and strengthen government institutions, its prominent role in the 2021 Summit for Democracy, and through its multilateral efforts via the nascent Alliance for Development in Democracy. This promising trilateral cooperation with Costa Rica and Panama has among its goals the restoration of stability and democracy in Haiti- a shared U.S. priority. Mission Santo Domingo will intensify FY2022 - FY2023 efforts to support the Dominican government in these endeavors. Mission activities will include promoting and facilitating the Dominican government's activities in support of democracy around the region, including in Haiti. Civil society will play a crucial role in legitimizing these efforts as well as ensuring follow-through, and Mission Santo Domingo will facilitate the participation of civil society groups in all phases of these activities.

- **Linkages** | JSP Goal 3, Strategic Objective 3.1: Democracy & Governance; Interim National Security Strategy Guidance; and USAID's CDCS IR1.1.
- **Risks** | The Dominican Republic's potential role in Caribbean, Latin American, and Central American fora make Dominican support an important factor to advance U.S. priorities. Failure to implement Objective 1.3 would hinder U.S. efforts to advance human rights, democracy, and prosperity in the region. Key risks to achieving Objective 1.3 include: 1) Continued instability in Haiti and further deterioration of the economic or security situation, could lead to a mass migration event, and would distract the Dominican government from other priorities. 2) As the 2024 elections approach, some facets of Objective 1.3 could be deemed politically risky or unpopular with the Dominican public causing political instability in the DR. 3) Other actors, such as China, could try to exact competing multilateral commitments from the DR through debt relief or other forms of assistance that could require a weakening government willingness to pursue democratic strengthening and consolidation. To help mitigate these risks, the Mission will support the Dominican government's efforts to align with governments in the region to address regional issues, including instability in Haiti; and will undertake

activities that demonstrate the strengths of pluralism in democratic societies and continued dialogue with the government and citizens.

**Mission Goal 2 | A secure and healthy Dominican Republic that supports U.S. security**

**Description |** U.S. national security is intrinsically linked to the Dominican Republic's ability to address its security challenges given its close proximity and strong bilateral ties with the U.S. Protecting the nearly 300,000 U.S. citizens who reside in the country and the approximately three million U.S. citizen tourists who visit annually is the top priority of Embassy Santo Domingo. Thousands of Dominicans travel to the United States each year, boosting the U.S. economy but also requiring careful measures to protect the United States from irregular travel and the impact of illicit network activities. Most of the illegal narcotics transiting the Caribbean basin pass through the Dominican Republic before being smuggled to the United States. Dominican transnational criminal organizations (TCO) have well-established relationships with South American and Mexican TCOs and maintain their own supply chains, enabling Dominican TCO control of much of the mid-level distribution of cocaine and heroin in the northeastern United States. These criminal networks also participate in illicit financial activities, and human and weapons smuggling, posing additional threats to both regional and U.S. national security. Bolstering the Dominican health system's capacity to minimize the spread of infectious diseases, controlling the spread of HIV/AIDS, and keeping destructive and dangerous invasive species out of the United States are key to protecting the American people and economy. At the community level, organized crime and inadequate criminal justice systems undermine rule of law, enhance citizen insecurity, and disproportionately affect marginalized, underserved, and underrepresented populations. Mission programming directly protects U.S. national security by confronting these threats through capacity building that targets Dominican defense, security, and health services institutions.

This goal supports the Interim National Security Strategy Guidance goal of protecting the security of the American people; the State/USAID Joint Strategic Plan(JSP) Goal 1: renew U.S.

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leadership and mobilize coalitions to address the global challenges that have the greatest impact on Americans' security and well-being; Joint Regional Strategy Objective 3.1: protect U.S. citizens and ensure secure borders; JSP Goal 5: serve U.S. Citizens around the world and facilitate international exchange and connectivity; UNAIDS Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026; the forthcoming U.S. National Strategy on HIV/AIDS; and the U.S. COVID-19 Global Response and Recovery Framework.

### **Objective 2.1 | Enhanced Citizen Security**

- **Justification |** The public's distrust of the police due to high levels of corruption and disproportionate use of force was exacerbated by several extrajudicial killings of innocent Dominicans by the Dominican National Police (DNP) in 2021. This created a breakdown in the essential cooperation between the police and public that underpins effective public security efforts. Municipal-level violence has notably risen as a result. This situation is made more difficult by the Dominican Republic's standing as a major transit point for illegal drugs, migrant smuggling, and human trafficking to the United States and as a hub for illicit network operations. The Abinader administration responded by launching its National Citizen Security Strategy (NCSS) in March of 2021 to address citizen security and implement needed police reforms. The NCSS called for national level DNP policy and regulation changes that will target 16 municipalities through 2025. The Mission will support the GODR's efforts to enhance citizen security by supporting the NCSS implementation, assisting in the transformation of the Dominican National Police, supporting other government institutions devoted to improving citizen security, engaging with civil society at the municipal level to strengthen working relationships with the police, expand citizen security capabilities to ungoverned spaces to include the Haitian border, and addressing the drivers that push at-risk youth towards criminal activities. Improving citizen security in the Dominican Republic also requires a coordinated, collaborative Mission approach that improves the effectiveness, accountability, and transparency of the criminal justice system as a government response to deter crime.

- **Linkages** | Citizen security and reduced community-level violence is the foundation for improving the livelihood of Dominican citizens, ensuring democratic practices, and improving the investment and business enabling environment. Objective linkages are the State/USAID Joint Strategic Plan Goal 1, Strategic Objective 1.4- Peace and Security; the GODR National Citizen Security Plan, US citizens visiting and residing in D.R; and USAID's CDCS IR1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 3.1.
- **Risks** | Much of the successful consolidation of democratic gains achieved in the 2020 elections and the economic growth the Dominican Republic has generated over the past 20 years rests on the achievement of MO 2.1. Addressing long-standing Dominican citizen security concerns is therefore one of the current government's key initiatives. While cognizant of the difficulties the initiative faces, and despite working more comprehensively with local, national, and international actors than previous governments, underlying factors such as economic and social inequality, socio-economic exclusion of marginalized populations (particularly of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent, public distrust, and endemic corruption can undermine these key efforts. The political environment is also unsettled, a reality manifested in Congress' fragmentation and delays in dealing with fundamental reform legislation to address chronic corruption, cronyism, and inequality. At the municipal/community level, these issues, along with inconsistent application of the law and general distrust of the police handicap coordination with local security forces, undermining efforts to improve livelihoods and citizen security. On a global scale, the Dominican Republic ranks poorly on transparency and corruption indices. At the regional level, the Dominican Republic has low levels of literacy and high risk-factors among youth which lead to crime and violence. Quality data (both type of data and coverage) is limited, impacting the ability of decision makers to make informed decisions. Greater incursion of TCOs at the local level could jeopardize government efforts to improve citizen security. Current GODR investment in citizen security has led to initial success; however, budget challenges could lead to a reduced GODR investment that might diminish the policy's impact.



To mitigate the obstacles to achieving this Mission Objective, the USG must maintain its communication and coordination with all levels of the GODR, Dominican security entities, civil society, and international donors to ensure that this GODR policy priority receives the required attention and funding. Establishing citizen security is a permanent agenda item during the USG/GODR High Level Dialogue will help. Embassy scrutiny of PRC investments in this sector will be necessary to determine diplomatic mitigation approaches.

**Objective 2.2 | Improved Consular service Delivery and emergency preparedness that supports U.S. citizens and regularized migration patterns**

- **Justification |** In 2021, more than 343,000 Dominicans traveled to the United States as nonimmigrant visitors and an average of nearly 50,000 immigrate to the United States each year. As the Dominican Republic's tourism sector rebounds, U.S. citizens continue to account for the highest volume of travelers, visiting the country at above pre-pandemic levels that were approaching 3 million per year. The large flow of two-way travel between the two countries has significant economic benefits to the United States, but also creates a large risk of fraud and other vulnerabilities. Protecting the integrity of the U.S. immigration system through effective and efficient travel facilitation and partnership to enhance host country capabilities prevents harm to the United States and its citizens from criminal activity. Additionally, given the high-level attention consular and migratory issues have in bilateral discussions, timely, consistent, and transparent consular service delivery plays a crucial role in advancing other Mission policy priorities.

The Mission will work to decrease the risks faced by U.S. citizen residents and travelers including crime, natural and environmental disasters, and substandard medical care by preparing for and responding to emergency situations. Additionally, the Mission will help ensure that U.S. citizens are adequately informed of these risks and provide resources to increase their safety and health in the Dominican Republic. The Mission will address the severe consequences of service shutdowns during the pandemic and provide consular services in accordance with highest service standards, pressing for

more resources to facilitate travel, reunite families, and ensure the safety and security of U.S. citizens in the Dominican Republic

- **Linkages** | JRS Objective 3.1 Protect U.S. citizens and ensure secure borders, JSP Goal 5: Serve U.S. Citizens around the world and facilitate international exchange and connectivity.
- **Risks** | COVID-related backlogs in Non-immigrant and Immigrant visa services are untenable. The backlogs already significantly impact the reunification of families of U.S. citizen immigrant visa petitioners, and non-immigrant travel that bolsters economic linkages and U.S. travel and tourism. Not achieving the objective will further compound existing backlogs, exacerbate the economic damage of reduced travel, hamper our ability to assist U.S. citizens during crises, and drive-up irregular travel and the national security vulnerabilities it brings. Should the DR face an economic downturn the pressure for irregular migration could increase dramatically, threatening to undermine progress in reducing overstay rates and combatting- visa fraud and misuse of valid visas.

To mitigate the obstacles to achieving this Mission Objective, the USG must increase the capacity for consular services in the near term. The Embassy will conduct an aggressive review of activities and procedures to maximize efficiency and utilization of new tools and regulatory flexibility, as well as advocate for resources to accelerate backlog reduction. The Embassy will work towards milestones under this Mission Objective through frequent engagement with host government counterparts, the Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Government agencies, and Mission agencies with related equities.

**Objective 2.3** | Security and Defense Services Disrupt and Dismantle TCOs and Illicit Networks

- **Justification** | U.S. law enforcement agencies estimate 90 percent of cocaine trafficked through the Caribbean corridor en route to the United States transits the Dominican Republic. Drugs and other illicit substances bound for Europe also pass through the Dominican Republic in containers transshipped through its ports servicing the European market. TCOs also transport illicit substances through their

migrant smuggling networks. Dominican TCOs have well-established relationships with South American and Mexican TCOs and maintain their own supply chains, enabling Dominican TCO control of much of the mid-level distribution of cocaine and heroin in the northeastern United States. Relatively low levels of violence given the estimated drug flow indicates that systemic corruption remains a significant hurdle to disrupting trafficking and other transnational crime. The GODR seized a record level of drugs in 2021 and oversaw several successful law enforcement actions against TCO networks and their operatives. The USG must capitalize on historically high willingness by the GODR to cooperate with U.S. law enforcement in these joint efforts to accelerate future gains in combating TCO activities. U.S. programming and interagency efforts in the Dominican Republic under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) focus on combating transnational crime, countering corruption, and strengthening rule of law by bolstering the capacity of the DR security and defense services to disrupt, dismantle, investigate and prosecute transnational criminal organizations and other criminal entities that pose a threat to U.S. national security. Specifically, the Mission aims to combat illicit TCO activities in the areas of financial crimes, cybercrime, narcotics trafficking, weapons trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking, trade fraud, and intellectual property crimes.

- **Linkages** | This mission goal supports U.S. national level strategies prescribed in the U.S. National Drug Control Strategy, Caribbean Border Counternarcotics Strategy, Western Hemisphere Joint Regional Strategy, and the Interagency CBSI Framework – including efforts tied to U.S. Citizen Security Priorities and Programs. Key linkages at the regional/country level include the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) and the State USAID Joint Strategic Plan, Goal 1 Strategic Objective 1.4- Peace and Security.
- **Risks** | Permitting TCOs and illicit networks to operate with impunity in the Dominican Republic would result in increased crime and citizen insecurity and pose a grave threat to U.S. national security by expanding their role as a steppingstone for illicit narcotics, weapons, people, and money in close proximity to the U.S. mainland. The TCOs could exacerbate DR's high levels of corruption, and low governance

accountability and transparency to erode the democratic gains the DR has made. Mexican cartels to date do not have a strong presence in the DR, but if impunity were to continue, their footprint and operations in the DR could increase, to include the introduction of synthetic drugs into the DR drug shipments bound for the U.S. Increased domestic drug use could destabilize societal conventions and security, leading to economic decline and public health challenges. Adversaries could look to align themselves with an increased TCO presence in the DR to destabilize DR's democracy and achieve illicit gains through cybercrime activities. To mitigate the obstacles to achieving this Mission Objective, the USG must build institutional resiliency to corrupt influences by focusing some of its work on internal affairs. Additionally, buttressing the GODR's counter narcotics (CN) investigative and prosecutorial capabilities could impede potential in roads by other TCOs. Continued engagement by the USG with the GODR through tabletop exercises, joint activities, and training and equipment efforts will maintain strong GODR political will. The introduction of U.S.-supported drug demand reduction programming could help address increased drug use in the DR.

**Objective 2.4 | Public Health Capacity Increased and Threats from Pandemic Infectious Diseases Decreased**

- **Justification |** Now two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, health is front and center among global priorities and those of the Dominican Republic. Health system capacity to respond to these threats and mediate their impact is critical to protect the health and well-being of the Dominican Republic's citizens and to prevent spread across borders to the U.S. and other countries. Countries with healthy populations are more likely to be productive, prosperous, and peaceful. Identifying and minimizing the spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, and African Swine Fever (ASF) is key to protecting the American people and economy.

In the Dominican Republic and other countries, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) aims to achieve sustained epidemic control of HIV while also contributing to greater global health security to end the global AIDS epidemic as a public health threat. In the Dominican Republic, PEPFAR will continue to focus investments on providing high quality prevention, care, and treatment services to Haitian migrants and their descendants, who are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS and are less likely to access services, to help the country achieve epidemic control. In the Dominican Republic, there is FY2022 - FY2023 stigma and discrimination towards Haitian migrants, Dominicans of Haitian descent, and those perceived to be Haitian that impact access to health services, threatening their human rights and health outcomes. For example, in November 2021, President Abinader announced a resolution to "limit access to public hospitals across the country by illegal immigrants, except in emergency situations." The U.S. Government continues to identify opportunities to understand and address these challenges to ensure achievement of Mission Objective 2.4. The U.S. Government will also support the Ministry of Health to ensure commodity security, effective policy development and implementation, use of strategic information, effective human resource management, and laboratory capacity to advance the country's HIV program.

The U.S. Government will provide technical and financial assistance to strengthen the country's capacity to prevent the spread and minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which in turn will support a health system that is more prepared to respond to other public health and global security threats. This includes support to the Ministry of Health to strengthen epidemiological surveillance systems and tools, genomic sequencing, equitable and widespread vaccine distribution, contact tracing, and clinical interventions to detect, manage, and treat COVID-19.

ASF is an animal health emergency in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. While it does not threaten human (public) health, it does threaten economic stability, agricultural trade (estimated to be over 1.6 billion in 2019), and socio-economic and food security. It also risks marginalizing at-risk populations and perpetuating corrupt agricultural practices and policies and presents a severe risk to U.S. agriculture should it enter the

United States. U.S. Government technical and financial assistance for eradication of ASF will mitigate these threats, build increased capacity and resilience for disease and crisis management, and improve the Dominican Government's fiscal accountability.

Mission objective 2.4 supports Mission Goal 3 given the close proximity to the U.S. and global threat of domestic health threats, including HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, and ASF. The direct costs associated with HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 include serious implications for health care budgets, overburdened health systems, and higher medical costs for those with the diseases in addition to the broader pandemic impact of COVID-19 on the Dominican education system, tourism, and the economy. Indirect costs are associated with the losses to the economy, and to patients and their families, including the loss of current wages, the cost of absenteeism, and the loss of household savings due to illness.

- **Linkages** | Mission objective 2.4 will align and support multiple high level strategies and policies, including the Sustainable Development Goal 3 of ending the global AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030, the UNAIDS Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026, the forthcoming U.S. National Strategy on HIV/AIDS, the U.S. COVID-19 Global Response and Recovery Framework, the Global Health Security Agenda, State-USAID JSP Goal 1, Strategic Objective 1.1: Leadership in strengthening global health security, and USAID's CDCS IR1.2, 2.2, 3.2.
- **Risks** | There are multiple risks the Mission faces in achieving this objective. In the case of HIV/AIDS investments, HIV prevalence, transmission, and mortality could increase significantly, particularly among the highly vulnerable Haitian migrant population in the Dominican Republic – further exacerbating the social and economic exclusion of this marginalized group. As a result, the Dominican Republic would face grave challenges in achieving epidemic control. In the case of COVID-19 and other pandemic threats, transmission and illness could increase, thus impairing the country's health system capacity to respond to those and other health threats and increasing the risk of transmission to the U.S. and other countries around the world. Not only would this impact health outcomes, but it would have rippling effects on tourism, education, and the economy. Failure to eradicate ASF would threaten the US pork sector (a \$20

billion industry supporting more than half a million jobs). It would also provide an opportunity for PRC criticism of USG motivations and methods and an opening for direct PRC assistance, including unsafe vaccines. Further, it would risk the food security and economic well-being of Dominican farmers. GODR federal budget shortages could reduce required GODR investments in the health sector and impact its ability to combat increased disease transmissions.

To mitigate these risks, the USG must ensure that its foreign assistance is targeted and impactful. The Mission has established an interagency sub working group devoted to health-related foreign assistance coordination and the Embassy's Front Office will continue to engage with GODR leadership to encourage transparency, collaboration and investment that is required.

### **Mission Goal 3 | An economically stable Dominican Republic that that remains a strong U.S. commercial partner**

**Description |** Over the last two decades, the Dominican Republic has been one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America. Its strong growth has reduced poverty, facilitated greater volumes of bilateral trade and investment with the United States, led to growing tourism and cultural exchanges between the two countries, and has established the Dominican Republic as a model for the region.

However, the viability of these trends is at risk due to a number of structural shortcomings. Endemic corruption and weak governance damage perceptions of the business climate, hold back the country's development, and disadvantage U.S. firms. These shortcomings create openings for authoritarian actors whose investments lack high-standards, transparency, and competitiveness. Environmental degradation and vulnerability to climate change threaten the country's biodiversity and the sustainability of some of its key industries, notably agriculture and tourism. Fraud and organized crime, including narcotics trafficking, undermine legitimate trade and travel between the Dominican Republic and the United States. Structural inequality and the treatment of workers of Haitian descent, especially in the agricultural sector, raise

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questions about the Dominican Republic's compliance with the letter and spirit of the DR-CAFTA trade agreement.

Mission Goal 3 seeks to identify a range of activities the mission can take to reverse these trends and ensure the country's continued strong growth benefits all its citizens, while maintaining the United States' status as the Dominican Republic's top trade and investment partner.

**Objective 3.1 | Critical infrastructure is protected from capture by anti-democratic actors**

- **Justification |** It is essential that the Mission, in coordination with the Government of the Dominican Republic, takes a proactive approach towards securing critical infrastructure, ensuring that there is limited space for non-market-based actors to gain further ground in controlling and developing these assets. For several years, the People's Republic of China have been aggressive in competing for control of critical infrastructure across the Caribbean. In the Dominican Republic they have already had success expanding their influence into software and ICT through Huawei's dominant role in supplying equipment for the 5G network.

The Dominican Republic is the U.S. Government's most important trading partner in the Caribbean and, if we can succeed in building a robust investment screening process, can serve as an example to the region of the economic and security benefits that come with managing critical infrastructure assets in accordance with market-based principles. Additionally, The Dominican Republic is a key partner in combating illegal trafficking of goods, illegal immigration, and other national security priorities. It is therefore vital to US interests that, in addition to market driven influence for conventional critical infrastructure like roads, bridges, or ports, that modern infrastructure such as port scanners, cyber security hardware and software, and other monitoring equipment be built and developed by market driven, and ideally U.S.-based, solutions. Projects led by anti-democratic actors, such as those offered consistently by companies with links to the PRC, would undercut the security of these operations and lead to diminished USG



ability to work with our local partners to monitor and intercept illegal activity in the region.

- **Linkages |**

- JSP 2.1.1, 2.3.1
- JRS 3.3.2, 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3, 4.2.1, 4.2.2
- Interim National Security Strategy, pages 17-18
- July 18, 2021, White House “National Security Memorandum on Improving Cybersecurity for Critical Infrastructure Control

- **Risks |** Allowing non-democratic state actors to exert further influence in critical infrastructure in the Dominican Republic could undercut a variety of U.S. policy positions. Without a sufficient US response, Chinese entities could continue to gain control of key pieces of other critical infrastructure, such as power generation facilities, key transportation assets and nodes, and identity management systems the government relies on to provide citizen services. To mitigate this risk, we will advertise tender processes to U.S. firms and use high-level advocacy, technical assistance, and U.S. Government reporting to promote fair and transparent bidding procedures, in order to ensure U.S. firms operate on a level playing field with their competitors.

Well before the COVID 19 pandemic, anti-democratic actors like the PRC were already providing an alternative stream of resources to developing economies in the region via low interest rate loans or other favorable financing for large public projects; such projects were often also awarded to large Chinese State-Owned Enterprises. These financial mechanisms and direct Chinese investments into key infrastructure projects have often been tied to specific Chinese geopolitical positions, such as favorable treatment of Chinese investments, or change in posture towards Taiwan.

Although the Dominican Republic’s economy was not as heavily impacted as other countries in the region by COVID, it still finds itself in a difficult financial position and is thus unable to fund and adequately manage many needed improvements in Dominican infrastructure, from broadband access to critical ports and other transportation initiatives. Without increased support from the Mission’s interagency team, there is

significant risk that the Dominican Republic will be forced to look more closely to Chinese and other less transparent infrastructure solutions to meet its development needs. To mitigate the obstacles to achieving this Mission Objective, the USG must continue to maintain open avenues of communication with the Dominican government, creatively develop and provide viable favorable options for infrastructure growth and financing, and support increased technical capacity and resilience to disasters that impact infrastructure growth. We will seek to maximize the Dominican Republic's eligibility for financing through U.S.-sponsored entities like the Development Finance Corporation, as well as international finance institutions like the Inter-American Development Bank.

**Objective 3.2** | Threats from climate change and other environmental challenges are countered and disaster resilience enhanced

- **Justification** | The Dominican Republic is one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America, but its economy depends on an energy matrix that is overwhelmingly skewed towards fossil fuels. The government is interested in pursuing more renewable energy but has yet to be convinced of the commercial viability of solar and wind energy. The Dominican government would like to be a regional leader and has shown it can be supportive of U.S. positions in international fora.

As a small island nation, the Dominican Republic is extremely vulnerable to Global Climate vulnerability. According to the German watch 2016 - Climate Risk Index, the Dominican Republic ranks eleventh among the countries in the world most affected by weather events (with neighboring Haiti ranked 3rd worldwide). This vulnerability will only worsen as climate variability continues to bring more extreme storms, landslides, floods, and droughts, as well as slower climate variability effects, such as sea level rise and a gradual reduction in water quality and quantity. In the Dominican Republic, climate variability is already negatively impacting the stability of the freshwater supply, agroecological systems and critical coastal resources important for disaster risk reduction, food security and economic growth, with disproportionate

effects on vulnerable populations and the tourism industry.

In the largest Dominican cities, Santo Domingo and Santiago, climate variability will bring more intense storms and increase flooding risk, endangering the lives and livelihoods of the hundreds of thousands of urban poor living illegally along the cities' riverbanks and negatively impacting already tenuous access to potable water.

Vulnerable coastal populations and tourism investments are also threatened by global climate variability impacts. Coral reefs along the island's coastline are badly deteriorated, with over 60% already dead. With a one-meter rise in sea level (the middle of the range predicted by the end of the century), almost 200,000 people in the Dominican Republic would be affected by permanent flooding. Of more immediate concern, higher intensity hurricanes are likely to cause catastrophic damage to key watersheds and food growing regions, negatively impacting food security for the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and exports to the United States and the EU.

- **Linkages |**

- JSP 1.2.1; 2.3.1; 2.4.1; 2.4.2; 2.4.3
- JRS 4.1.1; 5
- CDCS IR1.2, IR2.2, IR3.2
- Interim National Security Strategic Guidance pages 11-13. 17-18

- **Risks |** It is expected that the FY2022 - FY2023 impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic will be a major risk factor for implementation of Objective 3.2 due to the external shocks (natural, financial, economic) that have adversely affected GODR capacity to advance or finance key programs needed to address priority development issues related to this objective. As the government prioritizes the economic recovery, it could defer on opportunities to transition to clean energy that it sees as in conflict with economic growth. Further, climate change, natural, and environmental impacts or shocks (hurricanes, earthquakes, drought, flood, pests, etc.) will continue to worsen and damage infrastructure and livelihoods. Communities are facing economic and food security impacts due to COVID-19. Also, the instability in Haiti has also slowed down or prevented transboundary collaboration and has exacerbated the migration of Haitians

into the Dominican Republic in search of better safety and better life opportunities. This has created tension in bilateral relations and within communities. To mitigate the obstacles to achieving this Mission Objective, the USG must continue to support increased technical capacity and resilience to the impacts of natural disasters, assist with environmental and natural resources, and maintain strong communication and coordination with Dominican military, emergency operations organizations, and environmental management entities.

**Objective 3.3 | Rules-based commerce and investment enables mutual prosperity and reduces corruption**

- **Justification |** trade and travel linkages. There are gaps in the government's implementation of DR-CAFTA that disadvantage U.S. exports. Widespread fraud challenges consular officers' ability to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate travel, contributing to a high nonimmigrant visa refusal rate. Illegal drugs and proceeds from narcotics trafficking, fueled by corruption, intermingle with legitimate trade. Perceptions of corruption and weak rule of law undermine the investment climate and discourages U.S. foreign direct investment. Meanwhile, while the United States remains the Dominican Republic's top trade partner, the People's Republic of China is challenging our position. The PRC – which has already eclipsed the United States to become the top trade partner of most countries in South America – takes advantage of institutional shortcomings like corruption and opaque contracting processes to secure commercial and investment opportunities for its firms.

In order to push back against these trends and remain the partner of choice is to promote clear rules, it is important for the U.S. to take steps to promote a level playing field for U.S. firms, and enforcement to penalize firms and individuals who impede rules-based commerce and travel through criminal activities like fraud, corruption, and narcotics smuggling.

- **Linkages |**
  - JSP 2.1.1, 2.1.4, 2.2.1, 2.2.4, 3.2.3

- JRS 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.3.1, 4.3.2, 4.3.3
- Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, pages 15-18; 19; 20-21
- April 26, 2021, White House “Executive Order on Worker Organizing and Empowerment”
- October 14, 2021, Statement from Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen for the Joint IMFC and Development Committee
- **Risks** | Absent meaningful fiscal reform, the Dominican Republic’s large public debt burden could undermine the country’s macroeconomic stability, discourage foreign investment, and leave the country vulnerable to offers of debt relief that come with strings attached that are not in the country’s interests or ours. To mitigate this risk, we will use available assistance and high-level advocacy to promote policies that are fiscally sustainable.

DR-CAFTA has been largely successful, but the liberalization of rice trade could displace Dominican farmers and turn public opinion against the trade agreement. To mitigate this risk, we will encourage the Dominican government to help transition rice farmers to other crops, and we will use public diplomacy to highlight the other benefits of CAFTA-DR, as appropriate.

Higher trade and travel volumes between the Dominican Republic could raise risks of immigration fraud and drug trafficking. To mitigate this risk, consular and law enforcement agencies will continue to work with the Dominican government to increase its capacity to crack down on fraud and illegal activities.

The 2024 election could bring to power a government that is more protectionist and/or hostile to foreign trade and investment. Heightened trade with the PRC could displace U.S. exports and investment and worsen the problem of pervasive corruption. To mitigate these risks, we will work with both the government and with all political factions to explain the benefits of CAFTA-DR and to reinforce the importance of fair, transparent, and predictable regulations governing foreign trade, licensing and permitting procedures, and public procurement.

## 4. Management Objective

**Management Objective 1** | A more equitable, efficient, safe, and healthy workplace for all staff enables a more effective Mission.

- **Justification** | The Mission currently maintains ongoing operations in Santo Domingo and consular agencies in Puerto Plata and Punta Cana. The Dominican Republic is in a Zone 4 seismic area, the highest possible rating for the potential of a severely damaging earthquake. Combined with the island's susceptibility to hurricanes (the season for which generally spans May to December), post's posture must account for an extremely high risk of natural disaster with catastrophic failure of infrastructure. Emergency preparedness activities, including broader utilization of SAFE for accountability, managing exercises that test our responsiveness, and continual upkeep of emergency supplies and training efforts are extremely resource intensive. Post's elevated emergency preparedness workload and chronic under-resourcing (most acutely in the RSO section) constrain post's ability to keep up and remain adequately prepared. Establishing an emergency preparedness coordinator will help to close this chronic gap and improve post's preparedness baseline.

While our Chancery and an OBO-built residential compound meet construction seismic standards, the Mission leases more than 50% of the housing pool, consisting of 160+ residences. After a 10+ year project following the 2010 Haiti earthquake to eliminate seismically unsound housing from the housing pool, post's housing includes a significant number of high-rise apartments that do not meet SHEM fire/life safety standards, documented through the mitigation letter process. Post has determined, in consultation with OBO, to remove and replace high-rise apartment units above the fourth floor or that are otherwise inaccessible to host nation emergency response. However, the housing market in Santo Domingo is exceptionally constrained (as demonstrated in the difficult, decade-long effort to replace seismically unsound properties). Post has been unable – after extensive searches – to locate sufficient off-compound housing to meet its housing needs in a manner that is compliant with both

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seismic and fire/life safety standards. The chronic shortage of available housing is exacerbated by Post's continuing growth (10-12 USDH positions in 2022 alone). Post will work to increase its rental benchmark limits, advertise more broadly for housing via social and traditional media, and use other means to find adequate, appropriate housing, which allows post additional flexibilities in leasing residences that conform to basic fire safety standards.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on our staff and our management, effectively changing the way that many of us work and the way we think about our workplace needs. Viewing the "reset" offered by the gradual return to the physical workplace as an opportunity to reinvent our workplace, we will focus on better incorporating specific staff needs into Mission Santo Domingo. The country team, management section, and post's Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Accountability (IDEAA) Committee are focused on institutionalizing a culture of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in our workplace. Internal lines of effort include establishing dedicated resources for DEIA activity, training, education and awareness-building, community-informed reviews to mitigate entry points for bias in internal services and policy-making, and intercultural activities. Post's Talent Care Committee will focus on improving the workplace, including working conditions, staff development and training, policies and processes, communications, new technologies, and other workplace wellness needs. The LE Staff Committee will be reinvigorated with the introduction of bylaws, broader participation, and regular direct access to the Front Office and Management to discuss specific concerns faced by our LE staff.

- **Linkages |**

- JSP Goal 4, Objective 4.1, Sub-Objective 4.1.3., Objective 4.2, Sub-objective 4.2.3., Objective 4.3, Sub-objectives 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.4
- JRS Management Objective
- E.O. 13985: Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce

- **Risks |** Inadequate emergency preparedness risks the loss of life and/or property and accompanying significant degradation in mission readiness. High volumes of TDY travelers risk isolation or inability to be served by post emergency response without strong COM accountability procedures. Inadequate stock of supplies to sustain Post's own emergency team would also result in an inability to meet a core requirement to provide assistance to private U.S. Citizens in the event of a major crisis. Post mitigates this risk by reviewing supplies regularly and ensuring supplies are dispersed properly and updated as needed. Annually, staff turnover is around 30 percent, meaning that personnel well-trained in crisis preparedness and management are constantly departing. Post mitigates this risk by drilling regularly and utilizing a variety of exercises to ensure constant training of our team. Creation of the full-time emergency preparedness coordinator position is the most important aspect of how post plans to best mitigate these risks.

Insufficient housing poses a risk to the Mission's ability to meet its foreign policy goals and objectives in Dominican Republic and regionally. Without sufficient housing, personnel needed by agencies at post may not be able to transfer to post or agencies will be forced to house them in hotels at greater expense and lower long-term comfort. Post mitigates this possibility by adjusting its outreach and advertising for residences while seeking mitigation for fire safety requirements through an OBO-approved mitigation letter.

Failure to address inequitable and exclusive workplace practices, or to adapt to late- and post-pandemic workforce realities risks the Mission's ability to fully draw on the diverse talents of our team to further our mission; greater attrition in our workforce; and continued challenges in attracting the highest quality, diverse pool of potential employees. To mitigate these risks, we will invest in our people and workplace flexibilities; including active DEIA programming that addresses policy, community engagement, and education; updating recruitment, hiring, and retention practices; leveraging best practices to expand workplace flexibilities and virtual work options;



promoting improved work-life balance; and supporting continued resilience among our workforces.