



**Remarks by James F. Mack, Executive Secretary, Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD). Secretariat for Multidimensional Security, Organization of American States, at the Opening Session of the XII Meeting of the CICAD Expert Group on Demand Reduction
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Thanks to the work that this CICAD Expert Group on Demand Reduction did at last year's meeting in Mexico City, the Western Hemisphere's understanding of the importance of treating drug dependence as a disease has advanced considerably. The new Hemispheric Drug Strategy, approved by CICAD in May of this year and endorsed by the OAS General Assembly a month later, incorporates all of the key concepts that this expert group included last year in the declaration of basic principles of drug treatment.

As we all know, our good friend, the late chair of our expert group, Dr. Carlos Rodriguez Ajenjo, Technical Secretary of the Mexican Council Against the Addictions (CONADIC), led this group's successful efforts last year to draft the Declaration of Principles of Drug Treatment. That declaration will stand as his lasting legacy that will guide us for many years to come.

Drug abuse and dependence are threats to individual health and to the integrity of a country's health care system. Drug abuse imposes burdens on individuals and their families. It represents a significant cost to society as a whole. Those costs have been examined by some of our Member States through a CICAD research program: the costs of drug abuse and dependence are high. They are borne by governments -- through their health care institutions, their justice and prison systems, and their social security mechanisms. The costs are also borne by employers, whether public or private, who must absorb the lost productivity caused by drug and alcohol abuse. The costs are borne by spouses who see their family's financial wellbeing, cohesion, and peace of mind undermined by the addiction in their midst. The costs are borne by mothers and fathers who see a child slipping away from them into a drugged world they do not understand and feel helpless to deal with.

But, drug use and abuse can be prevented. Drug dependence is a preventable *disease*. *Governments*, civil society organizations, schools, parents and communities owe it to themselves, and to their children, to invest heavily, as groups and as individuals, in efforts to discourage drug use and to make the use of drugs socially unacceptable.

But in this forum, we are focused on the consequences of sustained and frequent drug use over time. Drug treatment is a subject on which CICAD has been working with Member States and NGOs for nearly twenty years to help close a large gap in the availability and accessibility of drug treatment for the people who need it. CICAD is providing training for drug treatment counselors here in Mexico, and throughout Central and South America, and has helped most of our member states develop a regulatory framework for drug treatment centers. This work is continuing with the development, through this expert group, of clinical protocols for the treatment of different population groups -- for dually diagnosed patients with drug dependence and mental health disorders, and also for women, adolescents and prisoners who are problem drug users.

Recent scientific evidence has shown us that prolonged use of drugs changes the brain, and that these alterations are particularly acute in adolescence when the brain is still developing. This is a waste of young brains.

The treatment and management of drug dependence can be successful -- that is if properly done by well-trained drug counselors and clinical staff – and if the drug-dependent person remains in treatment for sufficient time.

Detoxification for two or three days is not drug treatment. The patient who is drug- or alcohol-dependent needs therapy for a much longer time to bring him or her back to full functionality. How to do that, in the best possible way, is the subject of this technical meeting.

Over the next three days, the CICAD Expert Group on Demand Reduction will make recommendations to OAS Member States regarding how to include drug treatment in their national health care policies and programs; how to deal in a clinical setting with patients who suffer from both drug dependency and mental illness; and how to train an adequate workforce for drug and alcohol treatment. Drug treatment is only as good as the quality of the workforce that provides it.

Our guiding principles here are: compassionate, qualified care for drug abusers; equal access to quality health care, without discrimination; with full protection of human rights for drug-abusing patients. This is what the new hemispheric drug strategy calls for. This is what its plan of action will aim for. This is what the Executive Secretariat of CICAD is committed to making a reality.