

FIRST SPECIAL SESSION
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**PRESENTATION BY MR. LANCELOT SELMAN PRINCIPAL REPRESENTATIVE OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AND CHAIRMAN OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DRUG
ABUSE CONTROL COMMISSION (CICAD)**

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It is my pleasure to see so many delegates here today, not only because the work before us requires your presence, but because the preliminary discussions we had in Trinidad and Tobago have helped us prepare for this moment when the Commission takes the MEM as its main agenda item.

As we commence this Special Session of the Commission, I invite you to remind ourselves of the principal objective of CICAD to strengthen the capacity of member states individually, and regionally, to combat the problem of illicit drugs. This problem continues to be the major threat to the good governance, security and health of most of our states. More basically, illicit trafficking and abuse of drugs continue to damage our communities, and our very families—there are few who are not in some way affected.

There are some strong signals of success. The decrease in the quantity of illicit drugs moving through the Caribbean corridor; record levels of cocaine seizures in the United States; a significant breakthrough in the Republic of Venezuela in the successful treatment of addiction; are but a few of many signs of success. Indeed, it is heartening to see that so many of our young people—who are the prime targets of the traffickers—are in fact now more aware of the changes to them of drug abuse. The fact is that successes in one area are frequently offset by new and disturbing developments in other areas. For example, the decline in net coca cultivation in some areas is offset by the potential for new production in other areas.

Meanwhile, through the perversion of traditional and legal business practices and the exploitation of advances in modern technology, criminal organizations have learned to become more effective and successful. The integration of criminal money into the legitimate economy is a growing problem. Polydrug trafficking and trafficking in illegal firearms are becoming more and more an integral part of the criminal drug industry. Greater quantities of drugs are remaining in traditional transit locations, leading to increasing levels of consumption and new areas of addiction in those locations. There is the emergence of informal communities sustained and dominated by drug organizations.

Over the last decade and a half or so, as the new phenomenon exploded into a multi-faceted national and international threat requiring urgent concerted attention, our common efforts have been dominated by the first need to design and install a

legislative, administrative and enforcement infrastructure to enable the implementation of programmes against drug trafficking and drug abuse.

On one level, multilateral instruments, such as the 1988 Vienna Convention, and the Anti-Drug Strategy in the Hemisphere, and multilateral organizations, such as CICAD, multinational and multi Agency Task Forces have all been the order of the day. On the national level, the role of National Commissions is more and more prominent, both in terms of conceiving strategies and operations and in terms of bringing a clear picture to citizens of just what is the threat and the national response. And indeed we have made significant progress in developing this architecture.

Implementation on the other hand, has been uneven. There are reasons why this is not completely unexpected. The common enemy is a transnational, borderless crime, requiring integrated, concerted action by a large number of countries. Differences in languages and legal systems, diversity of culture, disparity in financial, economic and human resources, all conspire against uniformity of pace of implementation. I am certain that we will find that this is where the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism gives us a huge advantage.

Per force, national self interest, fear, and paucity of information have all contributed to affecting, and at times impeding the level and type of cooperation and the relationship and dialogue that are essential for the most effective assault on this common threat.

In recognition of all this, in April 1998 in Santiago de Chile, our Heads of State and Government mandated the creation of an objective, governmental mechanism to evaluate progress against the problem of illicit drugs on a common, shared basis as the beginning means of pooling and better co-ordinating our efforts.

The task of developing and implementing this Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM), consistent with the Anti-Drug Strategy in the Hemisphere was assigned to CICAD, and ultimately to its specially created Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) and then the Group of Governmental Experts (GEG).

The MEM was meant by the Presidents and Prime Ministers to provide the Hemisphere with a single process of evaluation of the anti-drug efforts of all member states. It was meant to be a process which would be transparent, and within which participation would be equal.

The evolution of the MEM process through CICAD has been an outstanding example of multilateralism and the principle of a "level playing field" --converted into action.

The entire Mechanism was designed by the Inter-Governmental Working Group open to all member states. The evaluation work, which has been original and highly

demanding, has been carried out by a Group of Experts comprised of representatives of all 34 states working together using common criteria.

Each member state has had two formal opportunities to comment on two draft reports prepared by the group of experts.

As we advance towards a new millennium, the MEM allows us to be in perhaps the best of positions. We have the opportunity to enjoy co-ownership of an evaluation of our combined efforts, thereby offering the advantage of greater knowledge of the problem that we jointly face. Working together as we have done on this process, both at the Policy as well as the Technical level, will I am sure, foster greater understanding and more productive relationships. It certainly has done so among the experts, who indeed, I wish to commend and congratulate most sincerely. I have had the privilege of observing the experts at work on each occasion that they have come together. This personal experience allows me to attest to their outstanding approach to an extremely challenging mission in uncharted waters. Their commitment, dedication, and competence have enabled this work to be available today for our consideration.

Any reference to the Governmental Experts Group must include the sterling contribution of the Support Group drawn from the staff of CICAD whose commitment to excellence cannot escape notice. I extend special thanks to them on behalf of the Commission.

And now, with so much behind us after so much effort it comes to the Commission this week, to surmount an equal challenge. The review and adoption of these reports at this Special Session, their presentation at the Third Summit in Quebec next April, and the release to our national communities, are critical tasks. More than ever, at this final stage, we can take nothing for granted. We must make certain that this product reaches its objectives.

To complete the vision of Santiago, we and the Summit in Quebec City must achieve, as a result of the work of the MEM, a series of key actions and a level of political commitment from all our Capitals, so that the MEM is fulfilled.

The MEM was conceived not as an end in itself, but as a basis for our common progress, and for mutual understanding. I suggest that we keep to our vision of it as being the single most effective step in our efforts to meet the primary objective of CICAD to strengthen the capacity of member states.

I look forward to a productive and successful session. I thank you.

