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REPORT OF PARAGUAY

**TWENTY-FOURTH REGULAR SESSION
INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE CONTROL COMMISSION
C I C A D / O A S**

As I begin my first speech as Principal Delegate to CICAD, allow me to convey cordial greetings from His Excellency, Raul Cubas Grau, President of the Republic of Paraguay, along with his best wishes that this Twenty-fourth Regular Session be crowned with the success that traditionally characterizes CICAD events.

Paraguay's new government, born of the will of its people expressed in the latest general elections, marks the definitive consolidation of a democratic process that with its ups and downs has finally taken root in my country, in a clear and unmistakable demonstration by the people of Paraguay that they support democracy and have resolved to join the concert of nations of the Hemisphere.

Despite the marked economic recession in Paraguay, the country remains resolutely determined to tackle the drug problem in all its manifestations, sparing no effort in the process, and attaching special importance in the budget to national anti-drug policy, in spite of the existence of other urgent social demands on the country's resources.

The Government of the Republic of Paraguay attaches the utmost priority to boosting its international cooperation with all countries in the region and the Hemisphere because it is aware that success in combating the drug problem will depend to a large extent on our ability to pursue policies and actions in collective, well-coordinated, and responsible partnership and to accept, frankly and sincerely, the principle of shared responsibility, eschewing unilateral procedures that have no part in these endeavors.

The Government of my country has done me the great honor of appointing me Executive Secretary of the National Anti-Drug Secretariat (SENAD), a body that reports to the Office of the Presidency. I took up the post on August 17, 1998, having previously been Director of the National Narcotics Office (DINAR), which reported to SENAD, which was in charge of drug trafficking control and interdiction.

SENAD is currently trying to implement its National Anti-Drug Strategy and the National Plan to Prevent Drug Abuse, fulfilling its role as the government body responsible for executing and getting others to execute government anti-drug policies, a function assigned to it in its statutes. It does so by coordinating the efforts of various Paraguayan state entities and by attempting to cover in a comprehensive, balanced, and coordinated fashion, all the main ingredients of the demand reduction, supply reduction, and control and interdiction programs, and so on.

Experience acquired in applying the National Prevention Plan prompts us to continue encouraging and strengthening the formation of Groups of Preventive Agents, as a much more effective community approach to drug abuse, fostering active participation

by different social agents in awareness campaigns in their own environments, as well as in devising and executing plans and projects.

Another major aspect to underscore in this area is the successful culmination of negotiations with the National Anti-AIDS Program run by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, which led to the signing of a Technical Cooperation Agreement. Its aim is to join forces in close and ongoing efforts to share information and know-how, considering the direct links between drugs, sex, and Aids, and, above all, to reinforce decentralization in the area of drug abuse, in the quest for a more effective impact on the integral development of Paraguayan youth, the largest segment of its population, based on solidarity and equity.

In the area of interdiction, SENAD has recently instituted strict control over clandestine airstrips mainly located in the eastern and northern parts of Paraguay, on the border with Brazil. It has begun the judicial procedures needed to seize, and subsequently destroy, those airstrips and it has set in motion the administrative procedures needed to collect the fines imposed on the owners, landlords, or occupants of the real estate on which those landing strips are seized.

So far, 14 clandestine airstrips have been seized by the judicial authorities, all of them located on strategic points of the border with Brazil and presumably used to smuggle various commodities, mainly marijuana and cocaine, to border markets.

Rigorous interdiction since early this year has resulted in an increase in the volume of drugs confiscated, principally cocaine, all of which comes from the border with Bolivia and crosses the Chaco Paraguayo by land or airplane, facilitated by the vast and border area, in which it is difficult to man permanent outposts and there are numerous alternative routes.

There has also been a marked increase in the use of regular bus transport on the Santa Cruz (Bolivia) - Asuncion (Paraguay) route. Those buses transport informal Bolivian salesmen bringing almost exclusively garments for the Paraguayan market, with drug consignments hidden in big bags of clothing, and in double linings of cardboard boxes sent as unaccompanied parcels, or in the soles of gym shoes. Given the huge amounts of cargo transported, effective control is extremely difficult.

The diversion of precursors or chemical substances needed to produce dangerous drugs is also taking place on an unprecedented scale. Even though Paraguay does not produce any of those substances, it recognizes that significant quantities of them are imported for local industry, albeit subject to regulations designed to avoid chemical precursors from being re-routed.

Investigations carried out by the Bolivian authorities resulted in the detection of a major diversion of chemical precursors to the black market in Bolivia and thanks to the excellent working relations between the anti-drug units on either side of the border the

case was followed up and pertinent documentation was delivered for subsequent use in the trial of those implicated in this crime.

That incident facilitated talks with the Government of Bolivia and the signature on May 28, 1998 in Asuncion of a "Memorandum of Understanding on Control of Precursors and Chemical Substances needed for the Production of Illicit Drugs" within the framework of the Agreement on Reciprocal Assistance for Prevention of Drug Abuse and Suppression of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotics and Pyschotropic Substances.

The above mentioned document establishes a permanent mechanism for the exchange of information on physical or juridical persons involved in the production, sale, importation distribution, transportation and/or storage of pprecursors and essential chemical substances; the obligation to report any of the previously specified activities or operations and to provide the documentation, proofs, and evidence needed to bring, amplify, or continue an investigation.

We are aware that the diversity and complexity of the problems associated with diversion of precursors and essential chemical substances calls for a high level of international cooperation, which, while respecting each country's own domestic laws, permits the adoption of legal norms establishing the legal framework for prompt and timely sharing of any information on the subject.

Another aspect of the drug problem in Paraguay concerns the cultivation of marijuana, which is tending to spread increasingly to new areas, such as peasant settlements, where it is camouflaged by traditional crops such as cotton, corn or cassava, which make it difficult to detect from the air.

Another factor is the traditionally organized nature of peasant communities, who have begun to put up resistance, with armed clashes and ambushes of the anti-drug personnel. They resort to various ways of stalling or impeding operations including, in particular, a permanent campaign of public denunciations in the mass media, claiming that anti-drug operations are a new way to repress peasant struggles for recognition of their rights.

Finally, it must be recognized that results do not always reward as much as they should the determination and effort permanently exerted by SENAD to fulfill its mission, either because it lacks the more sophisticated means that are a prerequisite for dealing successfully with organized crime, or because of the adverse circumstances that are part and parcel of this form of struggle.

Even so, with its successes and setbacks, SENAD will continue to strive to the utmost to achieve its objectives and fulfill the mission entrusted to it by law and which forms part of the new Government's policy against drug trafficking and related crimes.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH