

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES



INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE CONTROL COMMISSION

cicad

FORTY-FIFTH REGULAR SESSION

May 6 - 8, 2009

Washington, DC

OEA/Ser.L/XIV.2.45

CICAD/doc.1736/09

7 May 2009

Original: English

**SPEECH BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES**

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CICAD 45

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The Hemispheric Antidrug Strategy was adopted in 1996. Since then it has served as the road map that has guided our efforts in addressing and combating the production, trafficking, and consumption of illegal substances in our region. It was drawn up on the basis of consensus reached at a time of marked worldwide expansion in the phenomenon and it was adopted at a time when no other region of the world could point to such an initiative of regional responsibility.

The Plan of Action we adopted in 1998 has, in turn, shown us the tasks to be carried out both at the hemispheric level as well as within our countries and groups of experts. Over the intervening years, we have organized the actions of CICAD and of its Executive Secretariat around that plan.

Over those thirteen years, we have made much progress. However, we must acknowledge that during that time, the world has changed and that our enemies, the criminal organizations dedicated to illegal drug production and trafficking, have also changed.

The crossborder nature and immense size of these criminal organizations have been familiar to us for some time. What we have to tackle now, as noted by Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the UNODC, at the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs meeting this March, is the fact that the drugs economy is more than just cartels buying enormous properties, businesses, and aircraft. It can now challenge, much more directly, the stability of the democratic state. The drug mafias no longer only corrupt officials so they can attain specific goals: they now seek to buy authorities, elections, and political parties, and even to set their own people up in positions of power. We therefore cannot ignore the threat they pose to security and development.

After the dismantling of various cartels that took place during the 1990s, the organizations restructured themselves to operate on the basis of local networks, which has led to a substantial increase in microtrafficking. This new dominant trend in the market has in turn fueled the emergence of a variety of crimes associated with the drugs problem.

The current expansion of the international and local networks engaged in this drug trafficking and the increased consumption of a wider variety of narcotic and psychotropic substances, particularly among young people, have also been encouraged by the emergence and globalization of new information and communications technologies. These technologies have allowed the old drug cartels to adapt to new production and trafficking models, evolving from situations with a high concentration of functions and pyramid-shaped power structures to the creation and operation of local, national, and international networks that are managed

horizontally, wherein the hierarchies are spread out more broadly and where the participants in trafficking activities do not have exclusive ties to one single network.

Also, recent years have seen the continued development of new substances for illicit consumption. For more than a decade, amphetamine-type stimulants have been, after cannabis, the substances responsible behind the world's largest consumption problems, and, globally, amphetamine and ecstasy usage is now double that of cocaine. But more important for us the fact that this expanding market is now reaching wide and deep into Latin America and the Caribbean, creating new problems and diluting the separation that used to exist between producing countries and consuming countries. With the emergence of synthetic drugs and the spread of consumption into new regions, drug use is now found in almost all the countries of our region and in almost all of them, to a greater or lesser extent, drugs are being produced.

For all those reasons, we must admit that we are living in a time of challenges. It is true that, essentially, our hemisphere has been able to reach consensus on and construct the pillars that support the regional policy for tackling such a complex problem as the drugs issue. We can feel satisfied that we have a political body, the CICAD, a Strategy and its Plan of Action, and a system for their evaluation and follow-up, the MEM.

However, realizing what has changed in our circumstances leads us to conclude that we must embark on a new phase in the hemispheric commitment that will enable us to progress more homogeneously in the deployment of the region's antidrug policy. To summarize, I think the time has come to begin the review of our instruments and to bring them up to date with the realities imposed by the contemporary drugs phenomenon.

We are not, of course, the only ones who have detected the need for such a review. Events to be held during 2009 will have results that will be crucial in enabling the international community to make progress with tackling this phenomenon, which has so many negative repercussions for our societies. Within the United Nations, this has been a period for evaluating the progress made and for seeking out the agreements and consensuses that will permit multilateral action over the coming ten years.

We ourselves have reported, through the Chair of CICAD at the recent meeting of the United Nations Commission on Narcotics, on the progress of the OAS member states in meeting the goals and objectives set out in the Political Declaration of the 1998 special session of the UN General Assembly on the global drugs problem.

In her report, the chair gave an overview of the activities taken in our hemisphere in pursuit of the objectives and targets addressed by the UN's follow-up and evaluation work over the past decade, and she described the progress made in the six key areas that the United Nations monitors. However, she also had to indicate the constraints still hampering hemispheric action on those same tasks. In particular, she had to admit there were still structural weaknesses preventing full execution of the hemispheric antidrug strategy.

The fact is that many of our countries still lack the basic institutional structure needed to ensure effectiveness in reducing drug use, trafficking, and related crimes: in other words, a

National Antidrug Strategy with an adequate budget and a central authority with the power to coordinate the range of agencies involved in that strategy's implementation.

Let me restate that more clearly: we appreciate and support the efforts that, at a high cost and with external support, our countries are making to eradicate drug production and to combat drug trafficking and organized crime. We can even say that in several of those countries, the combat against the gangs has been successful and their criminal activities have been curtailed. But the flow of drugs toward all the countries of the Americas and toward Europe continues, in spite of all our interdiction efforts. Moreover, it is safe to say that it will continue as long as our energies remain focused on supply and do not target demand to the same extent. While there is a market for drugs, they will continue to flow; although some countries may be successful with interdictions, the lucrative trade of organized crime will relocate to other areas. And demand reduction is only possible if much greater emphasis is placed on education, prevention, and rehabilitation programs, particularly in the countries with the highest levels of consumption.

I repeat: I am neither ignoring nor dismissing the importance of interdiction policies. On the contrary: I believe they can be improved through greater cooperation in such areas as the fluid exchange of intelligence and tackling the illegal arms trade that supplies the drug traffickers. But assessments have shown that in most countries, there are still delays in developing and harmoniously interconnecting interdiction and demand reduction efforts, with the latter continuing to receive inadequate attention and resources. These limitations become clearer when contrasted with the high human, economic, and social toll that the drugs phenomenon continues to take from our societies.

All this must be taken into account in debating the effectiveness of strategies for tackling the drugs problem. We must wonder whether we can expect results when most of the countries have not been able to deploy their drug strategies in full. Comprehensiveness and balance, which are key factors in any strategy of this kind, have not been embraced – other than in official discourse – in the planning and execution of interventions.

We must remain aware that the expansion of globalization means that the success of national strategies is closely tied in with progress or setbacks in those of other countries. We must therefore be aware that the success of each of our countries in this undertaking will depend on the success of the others, and that failures or delays in one could be a determining factor in setting back the efforts of all.

So I think there can be no doubt that the time has come to review both our progress and the problems, old and new alike, that we have not yet been able to overcome. It is time to decide whether we need to redefine our Strategy and adapt our Plan of Action to these new realities. I support a much more comprehensive and balanced strategy, one that can pay keen attention to demand reduction as a major aim and can give that approach a real opportunity to demonstrate its effectiveness.

Such a review, undertaken with thoroughness and responsibility, must have a solid technical and scientific basis to support the renewed political commitment of the Hemisphere's countries toward the objectives of the Strategy and its new Plan of Action.

We have important tools that can help us in that. The consensus reached at the Vienna forum offers a foundation on which we can develop a review process and prepare new proposals.

The fact that there is no longer any discussion around the world about the risks of drug use can only serve as an auspicious foundation. Drug use is harmful to human health and to the state, and governments are obliged to inform their citizens of that and to take the steps necessary to eliminate or reduce the social harm to which it can lead.

A solid conviction has also been reached about the importance of basing drug policies on scientific evidence. The problems brought about by drug use are not only moral or ethical issues: they also entail an impact on health and the economic effects of abuse and treatment. The corresponding definitions and decisions must therefore be based on scientific evidence and points of view. This is a principle now accepted by all our governments and it is among the foundations of practically all the policies that have been implemented in the region.

Another important starting point in our analysis is the consensus that a person with a drug dependency is sick and should not be stigmatized but, quite the contrary, should be reincorporated into society. That is a principle that CICAD has upheld since its inception and that the Plan of Action of the United Nations Commission on Narcotics recently reaffirmed.

And, most importantly: all the countries of the world – and, among them, the members of CICAD – believe that tackling the drugs problem is still a joint responsibility, one that requires the development of comprehensive, balanced strategies, within a framework of respect for human rights and under the aegis of the international drug conventions currently in force.

On the basis of these convictions we must make a new effort to harmonize and, to the extent that we can, standardize our policies. In the demand reduction area, for example, the laws governing the possession of a given amount of drugs exclusively for personal use are, in our hemisphere, highly disparate. In some of our countries, the law states that no sanctions apply to such levels of possession; in others, prison sentences apply, in conjunction with treatment or educational measures; while in others, only a prison term is ordered – in other words, addicts are criminalized instead of seeking solutions to their illness.

In dealing with the scourge of drugs, not only does the compartmentalization of policies not work, it can also ultimately be harmful for us all. Organized crime has integrated logistics, integrated funding, integrated distribution channels, and, above all, an integrated power to corrupt. We need similarly integrated tools if we want to be as efficient as they are. As I have already said: in this undertaking the success of each one of our countries depends on the success of the others, and failure on the part of one could frustrate the efforts of all.

Now is the time to embark on this process of reflection, in which the main starting point and one guarantee of success will be our governments' constant awareness of the magnitude and importance of the problem and their conviction that reducing and ultimately eliminating the availability and use of illegal drugs and psychotropic substances is indispensable in ensuring the health and wellbeing of our peoples.

If that awareness and that conviction exist, I have no doubt that our governments will be able to take the next step, which is to guarantee the resources necessary for those policies to be implemented under the aegis of the principles of comprehensiveness and balance that, as I have already said, are the only principles that will allow us to attain our ultimate goal: a hemisphere free from the scourge of illegal drugs.