

## SUB-REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON DRUG INFORMATION NETWORKS (DINS)

### OPENING REMARKS BY OAS REPRESENTATIVE

FRANCIS A MC BARNETTE

Chairman,

I have the honour and pleasure to make some brief remarks at this opening ceremony of this workshop on Drug Information Networks on behalf of the Organization of American States (OAS) and its specialized agency the Inter American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD). This sub-regional workshop comes at a critical juncture when the Hemisphere is reviewing, in a comprehensive manner its approaches to the drug challenge. The Secretary General of the OAS H.E. Jose Miguel Insulza prior to the 53<sup>rd</sup> Regular Session of CICAD delivered a report which represents a massive undertaking and critically evaluates what individual countries and the Hemisphere have been doing in response to the drug challenge. The paint is, as it were, still wet and we will have to see how countries, including the ones you represent react to its suggestions, recommendations and scenarios. The report I believe should trigger a discussion and examination within and among countries as to how we treat with the challenge in the near future and those affected by it.

Chairman,

It remains clear, nevertheless, that as individual countries and as a Hemisphere there are many aspects of the drug challenge in which our knowledge is deficient. The need for objective, reliable, up to date and comparative information, data and analysis continues to be critical under all scenarios. Our countries need to be able in a quantitative and qualitative manner to pronounce on what is happening in our space. We need to be able to discern trends and patterns and to direct the

resources that are available in a manner that is both effective and efficient. The Drug Information Networks are therefore critical to all our efforts and is a pathway to evidence based policy, informed practice and research.

Chairman,

The Drug Information Networks need to raise the level of their game and demonstrate their potential in spite of the challenges of staff and financial resources. I am aware of the commitment of our colleagues in CICAD to support these entities through mentoring, continuous technical support and training. The harsh reality is that DINS will have to adjust to the new “normal” which calls on all of us to do more with less. I should point out here that the approach in the OAS Secretary General’s report places greater emphasis on characterizing dependence on drugs as a chronic illness that requires a public health response. The networks, therefore, will need to orient their work to generate more information on treatment and treatment outcomes. This workshop, as I am informed, will devote some time to this area.

Chairman,

Allow me to take this opportunity to inform that the OAS Barbados Office with the assistance of CICAD is supporting the elaborating of an Anti-Drug Plan for Barbados for the period 2013 to 2017. We are also involved in the attempt to establish a Drug Treatment Court in the country to offer managed treatment and not incarceration for drug dependent offenders. We consider these projects to be important and we will exert our best efforts to ensure that they are realised.

Chairman,

In our Caribbean space, we must intensify the efforts to build a solid and reliable statistical infrastructure, particularly for social statistics. It is an open secret that in too many of our jurisdictions data remains a major challenge. The work that countries are doing, in establishing Drug Information Networks (DINs) will help in establishing such an infrastructure and has the potential to serve as an early warning system on the appearance of new drugs, new methods of using and manufacturing these products and the changing trafficking patterns. I look

forward to the presentations of the participating countries and it is my wish that the deliberations over this two day period are fruitful

I wish to thank you for your attention.

Bridgetown, Barbados.

Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2013