



17th St. & Constitution Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006
United States of America

Organization of American States

P. 202.458.3000
www.oas.org

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WELCOMING REMARKS
MICHAEL BOTTICELLI
DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ONDCP Director Michael Botticelli Remarks
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a great pleasure to join you, Secretary Insulza, and Ambassador Simons to help kick-off CICAD 57. Since I spoke to the CICAD Commission one year ago, the global drug debate has continued to shift.

There is growing consensus on the importance of a public health approach to drug policy, on the need to carefully scrutinize past policies for effectiveness, to reduce our over-reliance on incarceration, to protect human rights and to move forward on reforming our drug policies under the framework of the existing U.N. Conventions.

This emerging consensus is in no small part due to the work of the OAS and the people in this room. This new reality became clear to me in March, after a few intense days of listening and talking with colleagues from around the world at the Commission on Narcotics Drugs meeting in Vienna Austria.

Although countries and regions move at different speeds, and in different ways, the global community is now grappling with drug policy in a more open, honest, and objective manner.

We must move away from policies that sound good, but are not evidence based and do not help us achieve our goal of reducing drug use and its consequences.

Acknowledging a need for change is an important accomplishment in and of itself. CICAD has had a vital role in setting this positive course.

So we know what we are moving away from. We are moving away from an approach that relies solely on law enforcement.

We are moving away from stigmatizing and victimizing those with substance use disorders.

Now, I would like to take a few moments to discuss what we are moving toward.

Implementation of a Public Health Approach

First, as I have highlighted in the past, we know that providing public health solutions is central to any effective drug policy.

Evidence-based drug treatment and recovery support for those with substance use disorders saves lives, reduces drug use and crime, and is less costly and more humane than locking up a person with a medical condition.

This concept – the centrality of public health – is now widely accepted. Our challenge is implementation.

Preventing drug use, screening for substance use disorders, early intervention, behavioral and medication assisted treatment, overdose prevention, and recovery support are all important aspects of a public health approach.

And I understand that investing in the public health architecture to provide these services is challenging.

But the first critical step, understanding where we need to go, has – remarkably – been accomplished. The centrality of public health to the drug debate has, in a few short years moved from a new idea, to the new conventional wisdom. Now we must begin the hard work of bringing this vision to a reality.

Law Enforcement Role in Criminal Justice Reform

One of our first steps must be identifying alternatives to incarceration.

Let me congratulate Colombia for its leadership in developing the *Technical Report on Alternatives to Incarceration for Drug-Related Offenses*.

This guide will be useful to all of us because it will help us reduce prison overcrowding and promote public health.

But there remain additional challenges for the police. New tools and approaches are needed to enable law enforcement to protect the community and reduce crime, without resorting to arrests.

Law enforcement officers interact with the community on a daily basis. They are highly visible representatives of the government.

They are at the front end of the system and their decisions set in motion each individual's engagement with the criminal justice system.

We are undergoing an intense debate in the United States on the subject of policing and how to improve community / police interactions while reducing crime and ensuring public safety.

Here are some policing strategies currently being deployed in the United States.

- Referral of those with mental health or substance use disorders for health assessments, instead of arresting and incarcerating these individuals.
- Promoting structured dialogue between the police and the community to ensure that the concerns of citizens can be heard and information sharing can improve.
- Police training to minimize use of force;
- Use of cameras for officers to protect the rights of both the public and the police; and
- Anti-corruption training in police academies and internal affairs processes to root out corrupt officers already on the force.

These list is not exhaustive and there are many other innovative programs being implemented nationwide.

I have been encouraged by how willing many police departments have been to pilot new strategies.

Their goal is to protect the community and reduce crime – without costly incarceration and damaging criminal records.

Focus on Organized Crime

Thirdly, we are moving towards a more effective approach to organized crime, targeting high level drug kingpins whose wealth, violence, and power threaten the safety and security of our hemisphere.

Our counter-drug operations, including seizures of drugs, money, precursor chemicals, and key operatives are not ends in themselves. Rather, these efforts must contribute to a comprehensive effort to understand how the major trafficking groups operate, where their key leaders reside, and how to take down entire trafficking groups.

One of the benefits of moving drug enforcement's focus away from low level offenders is to ensure that available resources are focused on the greatest threats.

Disrupting and dismantling drug trafficking organizations is hard, complex and often dangerous work. Mapping organizations, acquiring evidence, building strong cases, and then arresting, prosecuting and locking up drug leaders requires skill, patience, technical capacity, and often years of effort. This work is a major focus of thousands of U.S. law enforcement agents that operate throughout the United States and around the world in close partnership with international partners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me say that I believe it's important to be clear about what we are trying to accomplish. I come from a public health background, but that doesn't mean I do not value smart drug enforcement. In fact, I count on it.

A critical part of our drug policy reforms must be focusing the talents and capabilities of our security and law enforcement agencies on the right threat and ensuring that they address them in the right way.

As we move towards the UNGASS, I look forward to collaborating with all of you. Our challenges are great, but I am confident that we are on the right path. Thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning.