

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES



INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE CONTROL COMMISSION

cicad

FORTY-THIRD REGULAR SESSION
April 30 - May 2, 2008
Washington, DC

OEA/Ser.L/XIV.2.43
CICAD/doc.1659/08
1 May 2008
Original: English

**REMARKS BY SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS)**

DR. JOSE MIGUEL INSULZA

Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission

José Miguel Insulza, May 1, Washington, D.C.

Public security problems have become one of the main obstacles to stability, democratic strengthening, and the potential for development in our region. More than ever before, opinion polls report concerns about security as one of the greatest problems facing the citizens of the Americas.

That concern is clearly grounded. Although our continent has long been free of wars, other forms of violence are getting worse. According to the World Health Organization's World Report on Violence, Latin America and the Caribbean is the second most violent region of the planet – surpassed only by sub-Saharan Africa – with a murder rate of 22.9 per 100,000 inhabitants, double the global average. Latin America accounts for more than two-thirds of the kidnappings that take place in the world. Several of the world's largest drug producers and two of the largest drug consumers are countries of the Americas.

Violence and insecurity in general affect our societies as a whole and severely undermine our citizens' quality of life. This is an evil that recognizes no national borders or class distinctions. Violence and crime affect the whole of society, although the absence of protection means they most directly attack its most vulnerable groups: the poor, victims of social exclusion, and the socially disadvantaged. Between 25 and 50 percent of the women in our region suffer domestic violence, and young people from the poorest social strata, in particular young men, are the main protagonists of gang and *mara* activities. In addition, they are also the principal victims of violence. The death rate from injuries in our region – which, at 27.7 per 100,000, is already high – is much higher among young people aged from 15 to 29 where, at 83.2 per 100,000, it is the leading cause of death, and the figure is even greater among low- and middle-income segments of the population, surpassing 100 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants.

This situation directly affects the foundations for economic development and state integrity in many of our countries. Furthermore, our region's democratic institutions face severe threats from the dimensions, power, and influence of the phenomenon since, as we cannot and should not deny, the *de facto* power of criminal groups is replacing state institutions in certain cities, and even in complete regions, in some nations of Latin America and the Caribbean.

This phenomenon, which has ceased to be a mere threat to become a patent reality, is one we must combat without further delay. This is a problem that affects all the Hemisphere's states without exception and that, as a result, we must tackle with the solidarity and coordination of all the members of the OAS, with strengthened instruments and expanded cooperation.

Our decision to place a high priority on security issues within our Organization has produced a series of decisions and actions over the past two years. The very important activities already carried out by CICAD and CICTE have been complemented by the newly created Department of Public Security, through which we pursue a series of

activities in areas such as cooperation with law enforcement, following up on our Convention on illicit trafficking in conventional weapons, and combating human trafficking. The Secretariat for Multidimensional Security coordinates all these important initiatives, which aim to support our member states' actions in their efforts against crime in our region.

Today, at our Washington headquarters, the Seventh Meeting of Ministers of Justice and Attorney Generals of the Americas (REMJA) is coming to a close. The main topics it addressed included, for example, mechanisms for improving judicial cooperation among the countries of the Americas on exchanges of information and procedures for extraditing criminals; combating cybercrime, a form of illegal activity used primarily by organized criminals for trafficking and money laundering; the strengthening and modernization of our judicial systems through our Justice Center of the Americas; and the coordination of our efforts against transnational organized crime.

Last week saw a meeting of our Inter-American Coalition Against Violence, which brings together all the relevant international agencies of the inter-American system, the United Nations, and the financial organizations, with the common aim of coordinating our anti-crime actions.

Almost one year ago I proposed holding a first Hemispheric Conference of Security Ministers, or their counterparts, to address crime and violence in the Americas. We have already carried out numerous preparatory activities, and the meeting will be held in Mexico next October. With it, we hope to make progress with a process of coordination that will enable us to consolidate common approaches and effective responses to these grave problems.

We have only just begun the expansion of this task and there is still much to do. But I would like to share with you something that I have heard repeatedly at meetings with experts; it may be obvious to you, but it is worth noting once again. In our Hemisphere, crime nowadays assumes many different forms: common crime, youth gangs and *maras*, human trafficking, cybercrime, corruption, urban violence, and a long etcetera. Different ways exist to combat each of these. But there is one premise we all share: the production, trafficking, and consumption of drugs lies at the center of it all.

It is drug trafficking, in all its dimensions, that fuels and amplifies the crime wave afflicting so many of the region's countries. It is one of a number of serious crimes threatening the region. Its effects, however, warrant particular attention not only because of the inherent damage they inflict on our citizens' health, but also because of the complications they generate: social marginalization, corruption, violence, political instability – all problems which ultimately translate into human insecurity.

And human insecurity – that series of medical, economic, political, and social factors affecting our men and women – is this meeting's main topic. That is because preventing drug use and treating drug addicts are responses to that insecurity; and because

alternative development and measures to control drugs and the weapons associated with them are another collective response to that insecurity by society.

A few weeks ago, as you are aware, I was able to visit a area of the border between Ecuador and Colombia in the aftermath of the incident that took place between those two sister nations. It is, on both sides, a natural area that, as I have already said on many occasions, should not be inhabited but should instead serve as a biological preserve for humanity as a whole. Indeed, very few people live in that dense, wet, steamy jungle. Irregular combatants probably took refuge there, but there were not many strategic targets for their subversive actions – until the drugs trade arrived, sowed coca plants, produced cocaine, and sold it from there to every part of the Americas and the world. In that way, the area acquired a previously unsuspected strategic interest. The FARC in this case – and, in other areas, the ELN and the United Self-Defense Forces – were quick to enter the business, which expanded under their economic protection. There are no “revolutionary” activities to be carried out there, other than protecting coca fields. And that enormous natural area, covering the heart of our Americas, is the cradle of a much broader manifestation of criminal activity: one that can be seen in our cities’ courageous struggle against the cartels, one that has recently caused so much alarm in several of our countries, and one that is sold and consumed, possibly with much greater levels of profit, throughout our Hemisphere and, most particularly, in the developed world, where the main drug markets are still located.

The production of drugs and the inordinate profits that trafficking generates are behind many of our problems; that situation is compounded, unfortunately, by the absence of peaceful coexistence among fellow citizens and the continued presence of local armed conflicts that, thanks to the region’s democratic maturity, are now a thing of the past in other parts of our Hemisphere.

I believe the agenda you have agreed on for this meeting addresses many of these problems adequately.

It includes prevention mechanisms for countering the intense onslaught our young people are facing from traffickers of synthetic drugs. We must persevere with our efforts in that arena, in the hope of obtaining results like those of the United States, which between 2001 and 2007 reduced ecstasy and amphetamine consumption rates among young people by 54 and 64 percent, respectively.

In the field of treatment, we must seek out new solutions so that addicts who have broken the law may not only overcome their addictions but, at the same time, break free from the world of crime. In connection with this, we will have an opportunity to study obligatory court-supervised treatment programs, such as those that the CICAD Executive Secretariat has been promoting in its joint program with the European Union.

And as regards control efforts, there are a series of new trends that must be addressed: for example, the relationship between arms trafficking and drug trafficking, or the fact that

synthetic drugs can now be produced in any of our countries, requiring no more space than a hotel room.

I would like to add one discussion item to this list of topics: the need to address the relationship that exists between drug trafficking, the activities of criminal and youth gangs, and increasing crime rates in our Hemisphere in general. I fully understand that CICAD was created to control drug abuse and that is where its focus must remain. Experience shows us, however, that crime in our region is increasingly a combination of factors and that most of the time, those factors are integrated and coordinated. Consequently, tackling it effectively requires the intensive and constantly renewed use of our instruments, of which CICAD is one of the main ones. I urge you to see CICAD as a comprehensive instrument for fighting crime in our Hemisphere and to design programs that will help our member states embrace and coordinate the various tools that can be used in that undertaking.

Finally, I would like you to remember that all the ideas we discuss and all the actions we propose will remain mere good intentions without the dedicated work of each one of you. And, particularly, that they will be less effective if they are restricted to the individual sphere of each country and not implemented collectively. The problem of drugs and crime is unquestionably a transnational matter; multilateralism is therefore the only appropriate way to combat it.

Horizontal cooperation must, of course, be the guide for our activities. We would be falling short if we were able to agree only on a number of joint tasks for responding to the drug problem: we have to transcend that stage and go beyond it, providing each other with training in those areas in which we have been able to develop skills. One example of efforts of this kind was the adoption of the memorandum of understanding between CICAD's Executive Secretariat and Chile's CONACE, which will enable efforts to be brought together in order to benefit several of the Hemisphere's countries.

Distinguished representatives:

It still gives me great pleasure to see you at least once every year and to share with you these few minutes, which go beyond the mere formality of protocol.

Like you, I have been responsible for managing my country's public security policy, and so I feel I am addressing colleagues. I am aware of your concerns, your satisfactions, and your frustrations. Every time that downward trends in consumption or increases in drug seizures are reported, we feel we have taken a step forward. We know, however, that the problem is much more complex than it appears and that there is still much to be done.

For that reason, you can be certain of my utmost sincerity when I say that, in the vital tasks you are currently undertaking and in those you are to carry out in the future, you can unreservedly count on the support of the OAS General Secretariat and of the CICAD Executive Secretariat.

Thank you very much.