



**INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE
CONTROL COMMISSION**

CICAD

SEVENTY-FOURTH REGULAR SESSSION
December 11-14, 2023
Washington D.C.

OEA/Ser.L/ XIV.1.74
CICAD/doc.2832/23
December 13, 2023
Original: Spanish

REPORT OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON MARITIME NARCOTRAFFICKING 2023

I. BACKGROUND

The Group of Experts on Maritime Narcotrafficking provides a forum for the Western Hemisphere to exchange information and experience in combating maritime narcotrafficking, promoting regional cooperation and publishing manuals, best practice guides and protocols on the subject.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), through the Supply Reduction Unit (CICAD/SRU), in coordination with the Executive Secretariat of the Commission against Addictions and Illicit Drug Trafficking (SECCATID, by its Spanish acronym) and the Ministry of National Defense of Guatemala, organized the meeting of the Group of Experts on Maritime Narcotrafficking in Guatemala City, Guatemala, on November 27-29, 2023.

The meeting was attended by 35 experts from 14 member states (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago and the United States); one permanent observer of the OAS (Morocco); as well as representatives from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

As established in the schedule of activities, the meeting consisted of two roundtables focused on exchanging information on the emerging threats and challenges posed by illicit drug trafficking in the maritime, riverine, and port domains, as well as lessons learnt and best practices on legal-operational counterdrug maritime interdiction. Also, the meeting included presentations and debates on the following topics:

- Regional overview of Illicit Drug Trafficking in the Maritime, Riverine and Port Domains in the Americas;
- Chemical Camouflage for Maritime Drug and Precursors Trafficking;
- Regional and Subregional Cooperation to Counter Maritime, Riverine and Port Narcotrafficking;
- The Agreement Concerning Co-operation in Suppressing Illicit Maritime and Air Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in the Caribbean (San Jose Treaty, 2003); and
- Strategies to strengthen maritime security in the Caribbean.

The final report of the meeting will be approved by CICAD during the seventy-fourth regular session, which will be held in Washington, D.C., on a hybrid basis, from December 11-14, 2023.

III. MINUTES

Monday, November 27

Welcome remarks:

- **Diego Paz Bustamante**, Representative, Organization of American States (OAS) National Office in Guatemala
- **Angela Crowdy**, Assistant Executive Secretary, Executive Secretariat of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (OAS/CICAD)
- **Ambassador Roberto Palma**, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Guatemala
- **Fredy Anzueto Villatoro**, Executive Secretary, Commission against Addictions and Illicit Drug Trafficking (SECCATID, by its Spanish acronym), Guatemala
- **Guillermo Castillo Reyes**, Vice President of Guatemala

Presentation: Regional Overview of Illicit Drug Trafficking in the Maritime, Riverine and Port Domains in the Americas

- **Luisa Fernandez**, Program Coordinator, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Ms. Fernandez presented a general overview of illicit drug trafficking in the maritime, riverine and port domains in the Americas, focusing on the dynamics, modus operandi and routes used by criminal organizations. She highlighted the use of concealment methods to evade detection, as well as mislabeling and document forgery. She addressed the global cocaine market, evidenced by record seizures in recent years, as well as the increased presence of methamphetamine and types of fentanyl in some countries in the region. She also mentioned the consolidation of emerging markets in Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa, as well as Africa's growing role in global supply. The presentation also explored the multimodal transportation of cocaine in the Americas, emphasizing on riverine routes through the Amazon basin and the increasing use of semi-submersibles and water drones. Additionally, Ms. Fernandez outlined the use of aquatic means for the transportation of chemical precursors that are subsequently used in the illicit manufacture of drugs and stressed the importance of strengthening control measures in ports to regulate, identify and handle these chemical substances safely and in accordance with international standards.

Roundtable 1: Evolving and Emerging Maritime, Riverine, and Port Drug Trafficking Threats and Challenges

During the first roundtable, participants had the opportunity to introduce themselves to the group and briefly comment on the main challenges that their countries/agencies are facing to counter maritime, riverine and port drug trafficking. In this regard, challenges linked to the identification of emerging threats were mentioned, especially in terms of innovative drug transportation methods and new routes used by criminal groups in the maritime and port domains. Likewise, the budgetary, technological, and human resources limitations for appropriate surveillance and control were referenced. Legislative/regulatory challenges to adapt to new threats, as well as the importance of

maintaining open channels of collaboration and information exchange with other countries and international organizations to face common challenges in illicit drug trafficking in maritime, river and port domains, were also addressed.

Roundtable 2: Lessons Learnt and Best Practices Related to Legal-Operational Practices in Maritime Drug Interdiction

During the second roundtable, participants shared the key legal-operational measures implemented by their institutions to address illicit drug trafficking in the maritime, riverine, and port domains. Best practices and lessons learnt, such as the creation and strengthening of legal frameworks to respond to complex threats like the increasing use of submersible and semi-submersible vehicles, were highlighted. The creation of specialized prosecution offices for maritime narcotrafficking and related crimes, as well as incorporating figures such as legal-operational advisors, were underscored as measures to provide an increased legal protection to navies and coast guards, while respecting international law principles in high seas operations. The delegations recognized the value of multilateral initiatives and the ratification and implementation of regional agreements and regulatory instruments. Furthermore, they emphasized the importance of specialized and continuous training and education, as well as building trust and empathy between operational and legal bodies, to jointly dismantle criminal drug trafficking networks.

Panel: Chemical Camouflage for Maritime Drug and Precursors Trafficking

- **Hector Hernando Bernal Contreras**, Technical Regional Coordinator, UNODC
- **Daniel Hernandez Ramirez**, Deputy Director of Analysis and Maritime Domain, Directorate of Analysis and Maritime Domain, Navy, Mexico

Mr. Bernal provided a detailed perspective on physical and chemical concealment techniques used in illicit maritime drug trafficking. Physical camouflage, which is among the more prominent methods, includes the use of suitcases with double bottoms and impregnated clothing. “Ingested” methods (through which the drug is ingested and transported inside the body) and “adhered” methods (where the drug is hidden in bundles or packages attached to the body) are also included in this category. Chemical camouflage refers to techniques that involve mixing drugs with other substances to alter their appearance, smell and color. This method is commonly applied to cocaine paste to avoid its detection by authorities using conventional field tests. An example of this is cocaine dissolved in viscous substances such as shampoos, creams, or gels, or mixed with polymers such as polystyrene or methacrylate. In the case of chemical camouflage, the drug must subsequently be extracted and purified in the destination country, a task generally carried out by the same chemist who concealed it.

Mr. Hernandez presented some of the strategies implemented by the Mexican government to deter the use of chemical camouflage and counter illicit drug trafficking. He detailed the role of the Naval Port Protection Units and Risk Analysis Groups in the surveillance and detection of potentially illicit shipments. In addition, he presented specific cases of chemical camouflage, such as coal contaminated with cocaine and tequila bottles contaminated with liquid methamphetamine,

evidencing the ingenious strategies used by criminals. His analysis highlighted the importance of international cooperation and information exchange to counter the activities of transnational organized crime.

Tuesday, November 28

Panel: Regional and Subregional Cooperation to Counter Maritime, Riverine and Port Narcotrafficking

- **Dana Eloisa Barillas Cubulco**, Fifth Deputy Minister of Counternarcotics, Ministry of Governance, Guatemala
- **Elkin Dario Pacheco Luengas**, Anti-Drug Director, National Navy, Colombia
- **Marta Ines Barrios Gonzalez**, Senior Prosecutor, First Prosecutor's Office Specialized in Drug-Related Crimes, Attorney General's Office, Panama
- **Juan Carlos Ramirez**, Head of Criminal Intelligence, Naval Prefecture, Argentina

Ms. Barillas highlighted how organized crime uses a portion of the territory of Guatemala in international drug trafficking, and recognized the importance of inter-agency coordination among all of the country's institutions that investigate, identify and seize drugs that are trafficked illicitly in the maritime and port domains. She then shared some recent successful cases in which joint efforts allowed the seizure of significant quantities of cocaine in Puerto Quetzal, and about 100 nautical miles from the Pacific Coast of Guatemala. As best practices, Ms. Barillas stressed the need to continue strengthening regional alliances and inter-institutional coordination, and to provide adequate technology to the teams in charge of cargo inspection in seaports to effectively carry out their control tasks.

Mr. Pacheco shared the Colombian Navy's perspective on the complexity of drug trafficking at sea, and its impact in regional stability. He noted the importance of addressing this phenomenon through a multidisciplinary approach, involving the collaboration between governments, navy, law enforcement agencies, and the private sector. He mentioned the main areas in which illicit crops and clandestine laboratories have been detected, as well as some changes identified in cocaine trafficking and related crimes, such as illicit fishing. He also presented the Colombian Navy's strategy to face this phenomenon, which includes deterrence, sea control, environmental protection measures, as well as multinational operations such as the ORION Naval Campaign. Likewise, he stressed the need for greater international cooperation among countries and organizations such as the OAS and UNODC, in addition to specific initiatives such as combined naval patrols, satellite surveillance and capacity-building programs.

Ms. Barrios mentioned the importance of cooperation agreements aimed at strengthening the prevention and repression of maritime and air illicit drug trafficking between countries. As an example, she referred to the Salas-Becker agreement between the United States and Panama, which enables joint patrolling of the coasts of Panama in order to detect and prevent illicit activities, such as drug trafficking. She also addressed the "Operation Capitano", executed in July 2019, which allowed the seizure of a significant amount of cocaine. The speaker also highlighted Panama's

participation in "Operation Orion", as well as the need for the operational bodies of the countries to continue working together with the judicial system to counter crimes that take place in maritime, riverine or port domains, to ensure the efficiency of this joint work and achieve the dismantlement of organized crime.

Mr. Ramirez presented the role of the Argentine Naval Prefecture and commented on the riverine situation in the Paraguay-Parana Waterway, which represents a challenge to the country's control forces due to the high transfer of goods linked to foreign trade and the presence of transnational criminal organizations. Likewise, he shared the Ministry of Security of Argentina's organizational strategy to confront maritime, riverine and port drug trafficking, which includes vessel profiling, the strengthening of the Joint Intelligence and Control Units and of the specialized narcotrafficking prosecution office, increased inter-agency collaboration at the national level, as well as cooperation alliances and information exchange through the United Nations SEACOP project.

Panel: The Agreement Concerning Cooperation in Suppressing Illicit Maritime and Air Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in the Caribbean (Treaty of San José, 2003)

- **Carlos Fernando Alvarado Valverde**, Legal Advisor, National Coastguard Service, Costa Rica

Mr. Alvarado presented the background to the San Jose Treaty and remarked the persistent and emerging threats that transnational organized crime poses to the Caribbean region. Likewise, he explained that the main objective of the treaty is to increase collaboration between State Parties to counter illicit maritime trafficking, ensuring the detection, identification, surveillance and detention of suspicious vessels and aircrafts. The speaker stressed that the use of force must comply with the legislation and procedures of the appropriate party, whether it is the coastal State where the detention takes place, or the party that carries out the arrest, while the rights and obligations of the parties granted in other similar conventions remain unaffected. Finally, he emphasized the importance of the ratification and implementation of the treaty, in accordance with the International Law of the Sea and other applicable conventions.

Presentation: Maritime Drug Trafficking Trends towards Canada and Control Measures

- **Jimmy Desjardins**, Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge of the Coastal Detachments in Quebec (Acting), Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Canada

Mr. Desjardins noted that, over the past 20 years, cocaine has been the predominant smuggled commodity, transported via cargo containers, merchant ships, sailboats, and fishing boats from its country of origin to North America, including Canada (the Port of Montreal, as the largest port in the Eastern part of the country, stands out). The presenter then explained the main routes used by organized crime for the illicit trafficking of cannabis, methamphetamine, and fentanyl. He highlighted collaborative initiatives such as the Shiprider program between Canada and the United States, as well as the work of the Maritime Safety Enforcement Team (MSET), which is a joint initiative between the RCMP and the Coast Guard of Canada created to strengthen national security and respond to maritime threats.

Panel: Strategies to strengthen maritime security in the Caribbean

- **Akhenathon Isaac**, Commander, Coast Guard, Trinidad and Tobago
- **Daniel Darryl Peters**, Intelligence Customs Official, Guyana
- **Francisco Inoa Pichardo**, Senior Risk Analyst, Customs Intelligence Directorate, General Customs Division, Dominican Republic

Mr. Isaac presented the policies and strategies implemented by Trinidad and Tobago to control maritime drug trafficking, highlighting the importance of establishing clear communication channels to enable effective coordination between the stakeholders. Likewise, he emphasized the need to ensure compliance with international standards on this issue. He identified investment in technology and innovation as key points to improve the country's maritime security capabilities and highlighted information sharing as a vital component to foster a united front against maritime threats. The presentation also delved into some recent maritime anti-drug interdiction operations that showed positive results, which were achieved by the joint efforts between the countries in the Caribbean region.

Mr. Peters outlined the main challenges faced by Guyana in relation to maritime drug trafficking. Likewise, he showed the main maritime routes for the entry of vessels and their subsequent transshipment to neighboring territories. To address these challenges, Guyana has established initiatives under SEACOP, enhancing the capacities and skills to face these threats. Likewise, he highlighted the role of operational units, which play crucial roles, despite challenges such as the difficulty in monitoring vessels and the lack of resources beyond Guyana's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Finally, he highlighted the collaboration with other countries and regional entities, which demonstrate Guyana's commitment to countering drug trafficking in the maritime and port domains.

Mr. Pichardo highlighted the importance of maritime security in the Caribbean, a concern shared by countries in the region. He indicated that customs play a key role in strengthening security and promoting legitimate trade, while at the same time countering drug trafficking and other related crimes, such as arms trafficking and piracy. He indicated that the Dominican Republic has seized more than 10 tons of drugs in 2023 and underlined the country's commitment to intensifying cooperation with other OAS member states. The speaker indicated that one of the National Drug Control Directorate's (DNCD, for its Spanish acronym) current strategies consists of improving maritime surveillance through technology and training.

Closing remarks

The meeting was closed by Mr. Rafael Parada, Chief of CICAD's Supply Reduction Unit.

Wednesday, November 29

During the technical visit to the Pacific Naval Command Base in the port of San Jose, Guatemala, the Naval Special Force Command shared good practices and challenges of the country in countering maritime drug trafficking. The strategies applied both in jurisdictional waters and on the high seas were outlined. The visit included a maritime interdiction operation drill, highlighting the crucial importance of air support in tracking suspicious vessels.