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CONTROL COMMISSION

**CICAD**

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**DRUG CONTROL INITIATIVES IN THE BAHAMAS**  
**HON. TOMMY TURNQUEST, M.P.**  
**MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY**



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Remarks by

**Hon. Tommy Turnquest, M.P.**  
**Minister of National Security**

at

*50<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Inter-American  
Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD)*

**On**

**Drug Control Initiatives in The Bahamas**

**Buenos Aires, Argentina**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2011**

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At the outset, please permit me on behalf of the Government of the Bahamas, to express thanks and appreciation to the Government of Argentina for the splendid hospitality that has been extended to my delegation. It is indeed a pleasure to be here and to experience the natural beauty of your country and the warmth of your people.

I am participating in this historic 50<sup>th</sup> Session to reaffirm The Bahamas' support, at the political level, for the work of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), which for the past 25 years has been at the forefront of hemispheric initiatives in drug control. My participation is also in recognition of The Bahamas' and CICAD's mutually supportive and cooperative efforts to confront hemispheric drug problems.

As we assemble here to collectively celebrate this memorable milestone in the existence of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), I take this opportunity to congratulate all of the member states of the Organization of American States, for the establishment of such an important agency to our hemisphere.

We recall that CICAD was created some 25 years ago in November of 1986 as the Technical Anti-Drug Agency of the OAS. Indeed it had its origin in a specialized OAS Conference on Traffic in Narcotic Drugs, convoked for Ministers of Justice of the hemisphere, and held in Rio de Janeiro Brazil in April of 1986. The Bahamas was at the 1986 Specialized Conference in Rio that recommended the establishment of CICAD, and has been a Member of the Commission since its inception.

If we were to ask people from countries in the Americas to draw up a priority list of the serious challenges we face, the illicit drug trade, production, trafficking and demand, would be on every list. There is good reason for this. The drug problem is a long-standing, persistent, and destructive one, impacting countries throughout the hemisphere.

Our geography, just off the coast of the United States and on the route to illicit markets in North America and Europe, and our geographical configuration, some seven (700) hundred islands spread over more than 100,000 nautical miles of water, makes The Bahamas especially vulnerable to illicit transit trafficking.

CICAD membership is, therefore, part of our frontline initiatives to counter drug abuse and illicit trafficking, and to meet our international obligations in this area. We have been on the frontline for more than four (4) decades, taking a strong position to defend our country against illicit transit traffic and to contribute to regional, hemispheric, and global drug control initiatives. We do so as a Party State to all of the international drug control treaties, and through ratification or adherence to relevant instruments of the Organization of American States.

The challenges stemming from drug abuse and illicit trafficking are wide-ranging and varied. The Bahamas is not a supply or demand State but because of our geographical location is a transit State. Much of the crime on our streets is drug related, or associated with the platform that illicit drugs have created. Guns from small arms trafficking, for example, are being used to commit robberies, burglaries, and indeed, homicides in our country. Both

drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking are encouraging anti-social behaviour, particularly among our young people. Our judicial and our prison systems are challenged by a spiral of crime and criminality. We must be ever vigilant against corruption and money laundering. Our sister CARICOM countries face some, or all, of the same challenges.

What this says about drug control strategies, national, regional, and hemispheric, is that they must also be wide-ranging, and they must be balanced. This is the approach that The Bahamas continues to take in its decisive action against drug abuse and illicit trafficking.

#### The National Anti-Drug Plan:

We are nearing completion of our second National Anti-Drug Plan which will cover the period 2012-2016. The Plan seeks to take into account, the marked changes which have taken place regarding the global drug problem as they impact The Bahamas. These include changing trafficking routes, modes of shipment, centers of production, the continued use and abuse of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, and the emergence of relatively new synthetic drugs within the Caribbean sub-region. The 2012-2016 Plan is as a result of the collaborative efforts of a wide range of stakeholders whose emphasis has been on building partnerships to curb demand, reduce supply, disrupt trafficking networks and promote healthy drug-free lifestyles especially among the youth population.

#### New Legislation

A report entitled *Global Study on Homicide* that was released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in October 2011

revealed that the murder rates in the Caribbean and Central America are the highest in the world. They highlighted that the strongest explanation for the high rates of crime and violence in our region is narcotics trafficking. They further point out that the drug trade drives crime in a number of ways - by provoking property crimes that are related to addiction, by contributing to the widespread availability of firearms and by violence that is tied to trafficking, among other things.

Our statistics in The Bahamas bear this out. Of the 109 murders that have been in 2011 committed to date, 72% of them have been perpetrated by the use of firearms and sixty-six percent (66%) of the 109 murders are directly related to criminal enterprises with the motives of drugs, conflict and retaliation.

In our on-going efforts to address the scourge caused by illicit drug trafficking and firearms, the Parliament of The Bahamas has just passed a compendium of legislation to stiffen penalties associated with drug and firearms cases and to generally improve the efficiency of the judicial system. These Laws will come into force on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2011. The new legislation that will have an impact on our Drug Control problem includes:

1. Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code:

- To increase the sentencing power of a magistrate
- To facilitate the evidence of firearms licensing officer such that the officer is able to give evidence in writing rather than having to appear in person in every instance, thereby facilitating efficiency

## 2. Amendments to the Bail Act:

- To require a judge to take certain critical factors into consideration prior to the grant of bail to a defendant in cases involving, among other things, possession of automatic weapons, firearms or ammunition. The Judge will be required to take into primary consideration the need to protect the safety of the public or public order, the need to protect the safety of the victim or victims of the alleged offence; and the nature and seriousness of the offence and the strength of the evidence against the defendant.
- Provides for magistrates to have no jurisdiction to grant bail in these cases.

## 3. Enactment of Criminal Evidence (Witness Anonymity) Bill

- Provides for use, in certain exceptional circumstances, of evidence of a witness whose identity remains anonymous during the course of investigations, trial and thereafter, where serious offences cannot be successfully prosecuted because of the real risk of harm to witnesses.

## 4. Evidence (Amendment) Bill

- Allows for the use of live television link to receive evidence of persons who are unable to be physically present at court proceedings.

## 5. Firearms Act (Amendment) Bill

- Increases the term of imprisonment.

- Introduces provisions that provide that a person in control of a privately operated vehicle, aircraft or vessel in which a firearm is found is deemed to be in possession.
- Introduces the new offences of importation of firearms and the possession of body armour without the approval in writing of the licensing authority (i.e. the Police).

#### 5. Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Bill

- Increases the term of imprisonment to ranges of 4 years to 7 years and 5 years to 7 years for offences relating to possession of dangerous drugs with intent to supply and engaging in continuing criminal enterprise
- Imposes penalties for possessing and supplying drugs to a minor or within one mile of a school.

Concurrent with our stiffening punitive measures to address illegal drugs and firearms, we will continue to adopt strategies and programmes to address drug prevention and treatment.

#### School Survey:

In 2008, we conducted a Secondary School Survey which revealed that marijuana is the drug of choice among students. It also revealed that a number of them were experimenting or had experimented with inhaling of new substances such as glue and other chemicals. This was in addition to evidence of some usage of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances which falls under international control.



Preparation for a second Secondary School Survey is currently underway, the results of which will allow the Government to determine to what extent its policies are effective and where they need to be revised or adjusted.

### Drug Treatment Courts

Just two weeks ago a large delegation from The Bahamas attended a workshop for the establishment of Drug Treatment Courts in Trinidad and Tobago. The workshop was sponsored by CICAD along with the Governments of Canada and Trinidad and Tobago. We will review the reports from that workshop with view to ascertaining the feasibility of establishing a similar court in The Bahamas. I wish to express on behalf of The Bahamian government, sincerest thanks to the Governments of Trinidad and Tobago and Canada, and to CICAD. I would also wish to thank Jamaica for sharing their experiences on this issue.

### National Campaign Against Drugs and Crime

In seeking to develop new and innovative initiatives and strategies to address the problem of drugs and crime we have initiated a National Campaign Against Drugs and Crime. The Campaign which is designed to be holistic in its approach seeks the establishment of an effective public/private sector partnership. This partnership is intended to be a nation-wide, comprehensive and sustained campaign focused on addressing the negative effects of drugs and crime on the Bahamian Society.

Some specific objectives of the campaign are:

- the reduction in the demand for drugs;
- the reduction in the number of drug-related crime;
- the support and wide promotion of properly planned anti-drugs and crime activities within all sectors of the Bahamian Society;
- the engagement of the broadest cross-section of Bahamian professionals and ordinary citizens in a dialogue regarding drugs and crime; and
- the provision of a platform where youth, particularly within the inner cities, can voice their opinions and offer solutions to problems related to drugs and crime;

This National Campaign Against Drugs and Crime provides a template that will significantly impact the drugs and crime situation in The Bahamas. Under the “Inner City Transformation” component of the Campaign, the Government seeks to have the involvement of leaders within every community and their commitment to the suppression of illicit drugs and crime.

Stakeholders include religious institutions, business houses, civic groups, law enforcement and social agencies, and perhaps most importantly, those young men and women who might have ran afoul of the law, but who have indicated a sincere desire to reform. Many of them command the respect of countless other young people within their various communities. It is on this latter group in particular that the campaign has its focus.

The Government is seeking to effect positive changes within these communities through the facilitation of skills training, self-improvement and character- building courses, and economic opportunities. We are confident that once the inner city transformation project takes hold and is expanded, the current spike in drugs and serious criminal activities will drastically decline.

A key factor to the overall success of the Campaign has been the initiation of several listening meetings held with reformed gang leaders who have expressed through their words and action thus far, a desire to positively contribute to the “building up of their respective communities;

Mr. Chairman, we feel strongly in The Bahamas that as this Campaign develops, particularly the Inner City Transformation Component, it can serve as a template that can be duplicated within our sub-region and indeed our hemisphere.

Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, as a hemisphere, we have committed ourselves, both singularly as sovereign nations and collectively as members of CICAD, to a continuation of our struggle against the illicit drug trade and all of the social ills that are attendant to that trade. It is imperative that we continue to work together under the principles of shared responsibility and the acceptance of and respect for the realities in each member state.

I thank you.