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(MILDT)

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Executive Secretary,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, I would like to express the interest that the French delegation has in participating in the work of your Commission. The main questions we are asking ourselves in Europe in our fight against drugs are addressed on the very exhaustive order of business for this thirty-third regular session, which sets forth original, pertinent suggestions and initiatives.

In this regard, we view the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM), underlying CICAD operations, to be particularly innovative. By regularly making recommendations, that unique, objective multilateral governmental evaluation process makes it possible to track individual and collective efforts made on a hemispheric-scale by the 34 States. Through this system, your Commission can head up coordinated, flexible, and effective actions. Other regions of the world can look to this as a model.

The involvement of Observer States in CICAD sessions provides the opportunity for them to present the prevailing situation in their countries with regard to drug abuse.

If I might, I would like to share a few words on this topic and on the steps we plan to take to deal with the issue.

According to the most recent data compiled by the French Observatory for Drugs and Drug Addiction (OFDT), heroin use and use of opiates in general is no longer the main threat in France. The number of users of these substances is falling: the figure stands at approximately 150,000, and more than half of those users are benefiting from methadone and particularly buprenorphin (Subutex®) replacement therapy. Moreover, effective measures made it possible to suppress the AIDS epidemic and to limit hepatitis virus infections.

Use of other drugs is much more worrisome. Cocaine use is on the rise. In France, like in most European countries, a growing percentage of young people are experimenting with synthetic drugs, and heavy, repeated use of cannabis has jumped substantially in recent years among adolescents. Thus, 49% of young people ages 18-25 have tried cannabis; and 32% have used it in the last 30 days.

To deal with these developments, France is currently drafting a new national plan to fight drugs and prevent addiction for the period 2003-2008. The specific modalities have not yet been fully decided on, but, the main guidelines are beginning to emerge.

Government action in this area will be guided by a dual objective.

The first is to markedly reduce use. We cannot accept the mass development, particularly among young people, of addictive, illegal practices that threaten the health of individuals and public order and social cohesion.

At the same time, efforts should be made to reduce supply, by increasing effectiveness in the fight against trafficking and dismantling local supply networks.

This new five-year plan will be based on a few clear principles.

Based on findings from research in neurobiology, epidemiology, and the social sciences, it appears that the overall approach towards all psychoactive substances, be they illegal or legal (alcohol, tobacco, diverted medicines), adopted in the previous plan, should be maintained. The phenomenon of poly-drug use, which has become widespread, prompts us to do so. In fact, young users seem to be increasingly addicted to several substances at a time: they simultaneously smoke cannabis and tobacco, drink alcohol, and take ecstasy.

With a view to achieving effectiveness, any new measure taken in the context of the plan should be based on tested scientific foundations and should be accompanied by citizen education and accountability efforts.

A systematic assessment of the different actions taken in the context of this plan will be conducted, to continuously fine-tune the instruments and tools.

Several specific measures have already been planned.

Research capable of providing objective bases for enhancing the effectiveness of programs and actions will be developed. The topics likely to be retained include the effects of cannabis use and the health consequences of poly-drug use.

Prevention actions will be reinforced in order to reduce the level of use of all psychoactive substances. Specifically, they will be aimed at improving the level of competence of prevention practitioners and at creating tools around priority topics and targets.

The case-handling mechanism for addicts will be improved. In this regard, innovative responses better tailored to usage, types of use, and the populations will be proposed.

The harm reduction policy will be continued, and use of replacement substances of proven effectiveness will be continued.

Use of any drug, even those substances improperly qualified as “soft,” will remain prohibited and will be punished. Notwithstanding provisions recently adopted in some countries, France is staunchly opposed to “decriminalization” and to “legalizing” drug use. The current law, which provides for a fine and up to one year in prison for drug use

alone, will however be amended, because it is virtually unenforced. Innovative measures should create a scale of more appropriate penalties (for example, revocation of driver's license) that would make it possible to impose real, swift punishment for users of all types of drugs.

With respect to combating trafficking, law enforcement will be strengthened by making available the necessary human, material and legal resources.

Internationally, France adheres to the principles set forth in the three United Nations conventions and will ensure that they are effectively applied. It will support any initiative aimed at supplementing those instruments to better reflect the fight against synthetic drugs. France will also actively help to strengthen all multilateral provisions aimed both at dismantling trafficking and at promoting prevention and all proven forms of treatment.

Latin America and the Caribbean will remain a priority area for France, and we will pursue bilateral programs with countries in the region.

In the context of the EU/Latin America-Caribbean Coordination/Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs, two main lines of cooperation will continue to be favored. Firstly, the project to develop a satellite surveillance system for the main coca-leaf producing countries in Latin America will be maintained. Secondly, the training activities conducted by the Inter-Ministerial Anti-drug Training Center (CIFAD), established in Fort de France, Martinique, will be expanded. In fact, CIFAD's sphere of competence has just been enlarged to cover not only supply reduction and money laundering, but also demand reduction.

More specifically, with regard to CICAD, I recall that one French expert was seconded in September 2002 for three years to the Executive Secretariat's money laundering unit, to promote development of training and awareness-raising operations for the different actors (particularly police officers and customs officials) involved in the fight against drugs in Latin America and the Caribbean.

France will continue to collaborate on CICAD's training policy; French experts will participate in the seminars and training courses organized by CICAD at the Inter-Ministerial Anti-drug Training Center (CIFAD) in Martinique and at the Andean Community's Regional Anti-drug Intelligence School (ERCAIAD) in Lima, Peru.

This cooperation was formalized in late 2002 through the signature of a CICAD/CIFAD agreement aimed at expanding the sphere of shared activities from drugs trafficking and money laundering to include demand reduction. In accordance with that memorandum of understanding, a training course will be held in La Paz, Bolivia from July 7 to 11, 2003, co-financed by CICAD and CIFAD, on the use of private accounting in criminal investigations. The Bolivian investigative services responsible for financial investigations into asset laundering, organized crime, and corruption will benefit from this joint training.

France will endeavor to participate again in financing CICAD programs. We contributed roughly €230,000 (approximately \$250,000) to implementing the Inter-American Drug Control Telecommunications Network (RETCOD). France could also lend its support to other projects to be decided on jointly.

Finally, our country is in favor of the memorandum of understanding proposed by the OAS on expanding the participation of France's departments in the Americas in the activities of your Commission.

In the framework of its new plan to fight drugs and drug addiction, France will remain willing to continuing and developing its cooperation with CICAD.

Thank you very much for your attention.