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CONTROL COMMISSION

CICAD

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Introductory Remarks for CICAD 54
Paul Simons, Executive Secretary

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Deputy Minister Gamboa, Vice Minister Morales, Deputy Director Becerra, honorable drug commissioners of CICAD member states, representatives of civil society, CICAD staff members, colleagues and friends.

It is a distinct honor and pleasure to join all of you this morning in the opening of the fifty-fourth ordinary session of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission. I bring greetings from Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza and Secretary of Multidimensional Security Adam Blackwell, both of whom will be joining us tomorrow and participating actively in our deliberations.

More than 27 years have passed since this Commission was formed to respond in a multilateral fashion to the hemispheric drug problem. After more than a quarter century, the Commission's multilateral work is stronger than ever, reflected in three hemispheric drug strategies, an innovative process of multilateral evaluation, and remarkable progress in forging ahead on policy development, institutional development and capacity building. Your presence here today and the work you and your staff do every day are a testimony to the wisdom of hemispheric cooperation on the drug problem.

The recent "Report on the Drug Problem in the Americas" concluded that the drug phenomenon affects every one of our member states, but in very different ways that suggest the need to a concerted but flexible approach. This was further developed in the "Declaration of Antigua" and will be the focus of a special General Assembly Session of the OAS in 2014. Within this flexibility, we all face common challenges including strengthening our institutions, boosting rule of law, addressing drug issues from a public health perspective, and shifting to a less punitive approach in managing the problem. All of these issues are on the table for discussion over the next three days.

The Report has challenged all our member states to examine carefully their concept of security, with a view toward adopting a more "human" approach that places the individual at the center of our common agenda. Contributions from senior law enforcement to the

Scenario process helped forge this approach, which included a shift in a narrow concept of law enforcement to a broader focus on rule of law. We are also looking carefully at the question of what constitute proper indicators; and what are the costs and benefits rendered by our policies.

The Report also echoes and reinforces the call made in the Hemispheric Drug Strategy and Plan of Action 2011-15 for the adoption of a clear public health approach to the drug problem, one built around the recognition of drug dependence as a chronic, debilitating disease more appropriately addressed through public health as opposed to punitive approaches. All of our member states face multiple challenges of reducing demand for drugs, implementing prevention and treatment programs that are grounded in evidence, strengthening research, expanding access to treatment for those that need it, and certifying and regulating providers. We are delighted that Pan American Health Organization Deputy Director Becerra can join us and participate actively in our meeting, and look forward to forging a strong partnership among CICAD, PAHO, drug commissions, and health ministries in the coming years to structure policies and programs that advance this vision. We are delighted that many of our commissioners will be participating actively in the multiple sessions in this meeting devoted to defining and carrying out this public health approach.

Shifting toward a public health approach of the drug problem is a significant challenge in many of our countries who have worked so diligently for decades combating the supply and access to controlled substances. Many of our national public health infrastructures lack the technical and research capacity needed to accurately assess the full scope of the drug problem. Simply, we need to do better in collecting and analyzing information. Strengthening the role of national drug observatories and bolstering research capacity at universities are integral elements in meeting this challenge. All our member states face the challenge of adequately staffing and funding these essential research activities, and in promoting active collaboration between their universities and public sector institutions. We will have the opportunity to examine the role of evidence tomorrow in a provocative panel session.

Many of our member states are also looking carefully at the issue of developing alternatives to incarceration for drug dependent offenders, and exploring other ways to shift the focus of their drug policies away from the criminal justice system and toward a health based approach. More broadly, countries are taking a second look at the structure of penalties in their criminal justice systems to see if there are options apart from prison for non violent small scale traffickers. In the words of the U.S. attorney general, “We are not going to arrest our way out of these problems and our laws often have unintended consequences.” His recent prosecutorial guidelines that seek alternatives to incarceration and reform the application of sentences for non-violent drug offenders are being given careful scrutiny across the hemisphere. Indeed, many of our member states are looking carefully at rehabilitation, reinsertion and a reduction in recidivism rates. This includes thinking creatively about alternatives to incarceration, including legislative changes that seek to reduce penalties and sanctions that stigmatize the most vulnerable—the primary producers and end users. Reflecting the importance of these issues, alternatives to incarceration and social inclusion – with appropriate attention to human rights – will be the subject of two separate discussion panels in our meeting, drawing on active participation from both our commissioners and civil society representatives.

Another important theme raised by the OAS Report is the decriminalization of use and personal possession of drugs. The Report recognizes that about a dozen member states have decriminalized personal possession, but more importantly it has furthered a deep and robust discussion on this policy issue throughout our member states. Many are now reexamining the pressure on judicial systems and law enforcement of criminalizing drug consumption, and are looking at alternative approaches.

The OAS Report also examines the problem of networks of illicit financing. Proceeds from illicit activities, including drug trafficking, continues to mix with licit sources of income, complicating efforts to detect and seize assets in a comprehensive manner. The Report calls for continued efforts to further initiatives in the joint cooperation in the detection, seizure and administration of these illicit proceeds. States must continue to work together in these efforts, and we are pleased that the money laundering expert group has made important strides in this area which will be reviewed at our meeting.

New psychoactive substances, or NPS, are a growing global problem, one that has started to affect our member states. They present a serious threat to our youth and a challenge to efforts to control them, in particular because of the growing challenge of internet sales. We will hear more about NPS and the important work of the expert group on chemicals and pharmaceuticals to address this issue during our meeting.

Let me take the opportunity to welcome the extensive participation of civil society in our meeting. Over the past several years, we have expanded outreach to civil society, in keeping with the call in the Hemispheric Drug Strategy to draw on the experience and knowledge of civil society in developing and implementing drug policies and programs. Indeed, the Scenarios process of the drug report was successful in no small part because it drew in expertise from such a wide range of stakeholders – from youth to indigenous - private sector --community representatives - police – politicians – policy officials, civil society, and mothers – who together enriched the final product. Civil society is a core participant in many of our programs and activities of the OAS, and we look forward to deepening these partnerships.

Once again, let me thank our hosts for their extraordinary organization, hospitality and warm reception here in Bogota. To return to the city where I launched my professional career, met my wife, and got married is always a very special experience.

Let me also recognize all the members of the CICAD Executive Secretariat staff who helped put this event together. They are a fantastic group of dedicated professionals who work every day to forge stronger drug cooperation ties in this hemisphere. I have never worked with a finer group with such passion to improve people's lives.

Finally let me thank our drug commissioners, their staffs, and their colleagues from across the law enforcement, health, and judicial sectors who manage the drug problem in their respective countries. Your work is extremely important and your willingness to take time out of your busy schedule to forge relationships, partnerships, and joint work programs with your hemispheric counterparts is a real testimony to your dedication. I am very proud to serve as your Executive Secretary, and am certain that in the capable hands of our Colombian hosts, this meeting will be a tremendous success. On behalf of Secretary General

Insulza and the entire staff of the Organization of American States, we stand prepared to provide our full support to your efforts