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INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE
CONTROL COMMISSION

CICAD

Secretariat for Multidimensional Security

FIFTY-SIXTH REGULAR SESSION
November 19 - 21, 2014
Guatemala

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WELCOMING ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY OTTO PÉREZ MOLINA
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUATEMALA

DRAFT INAUGURAL SPEECH OF THE 56TH REGULAR SESSION OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE CONTROL COMMISSION (CICAD) OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

MR. MAURICIO LÓPEZ BONILLA, MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR OF GUATEMALA,
MR. CARLOS MORALES, VICE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF COLOMBIA,
MR. ADAM BLACKWELL, OAS SECRETARY FOR MULTIDIMENSIONAL SECURITY,
DISTINGUISHED COMMISSIONERS,
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,
FRIENDS:

THE YEAR 2016 WILL BE THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CREATION OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE CONTROL COMMISSION. THAT ANNIVERSARY WILL NOT GO UNNOTICED IN GUATEMALA, SINCE IT WAS HERE, IN 1986, DURING THE SIXTEENTH REGULAR SESSION OF THE OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, THAT THE MEMBER STATES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES AGREED ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CICAD AND ADOPTED ITS REGULATIONS.

THE HAPPY COINCIDENCE OF HAVING THAT IMPORTANT ANNIVERSARY JUST NOW, WHEN WE ARE HOLDING THE FIRST MEETING OF CICAD IN GUATEMALA, LEADS ME TO REFLECT ON GUATEMALA'S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM.

CLEARLY, THE CICAD OF 29 YEARS AGO IS NOT THE SAME AS THE ONE WE HAVE TODAY. ON THAT OCCASION, THERE WERE ONLY ELEVEN MEMBERS WHO COULD PARTICIPATE AND WHO WERE ELECTED, BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS. HOWEVER, THE COCAINE EPIDEMIC OF THE 1980S AND THE DIMENSIONS OF THE DRUGS PROBLEM WERE SUCH THAT ALL THE ORGANIZATION'S MEMBER STATES DECIDED TO JOIN THE COMMISSION, AS A DEMONSTRATION OF THE HEMISPHERIC COMMITMENT TO STOPPING THE SCOURGE OF DRUGS IN THE AMERICAS.

WE ALL KNOW THAT THE DRUGS PROBLEM HAS EVOLVED AND HAS CREATED NEW CHALLENGES, REQUIRING STATES TO COME TOGETHER ANEW TO ADDRESS IT AND TO BEGIN TO CREATE DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO PRODUCE MORE EFFECTIVE RESULTS.

FOR GUATEMALA, THE DRUGS PROBLEM HAS LED TO AN INCREASE OF THE NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS ON THE SECURITY AND JUSTICE APPARATUS, CAUSING NOT ONLY INSTABILITY WITHIN THE STATE, BUT ALSO A SPIRAL OF VIOLENCE, CORRUPTION, AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE SOCIAL FABRIC BY INTRODUCING THE NATION'S YOUTH TO DRUGS.

GUATEMALA'S STRATEGIC GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION HAS MADE IT A KEY TRANSIT POINT FOR ILLEGAL DRUGS, ENABLING THE PROLIFERATION OF VARIOUS CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS DEDICATED TO DRUG MOVEMENTS. THE UNCONTAINABLE VIOLENCE GENERATED BY TURF WARS BETWEEN CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS HAS SENT THE COUNTRY'S MURDER RATE AND CRIME RATES SKYWARD. AT THE SAME TIME, THOSE ORGANIZATIONS' CAPACITY TO CORRUPT HAS UNDERMINED THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STATE AND BROKEN THE RULE OF LAW.

THIS VICIOUS STRUGGLE FOR THE CONTROL OF DRUG ROUTES AND THE VORACITY WITH WHICH THESE ORGANIZATIONS ACT REQUIRE THE STATE TO ASSIGN VAST AMOUNTS OF HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO ATTEMPT TO COUNTER THEM, OFTEN WITH POOR RESULTS BECAUSE OF THE ASYMMETRICAL NATURE OF THIS STRUGGLE: POOR GOVERNMENTS AGAINST ORGANIZATIONS WITH LIMITLESS RESOURCES.

AS AN EXAMPLE, ALMOST 90 PERCENT OF ILLEGAL DRUGS PASS THROUGH CENTRAL AMERICA BEFORE REACHING THEIR FINAL DESTINATION IN THE WORLD'S LARGEST ILLICIT DRUG MARKET. IN ADDITION, A 2011 STUDY BY THE WORLD BANK ESTIMATED THAT CRIMINAL VIOLENCE COST GUATEMALAN SOCIETY 2.3 BILLION DOLLARS, EQUAL TO 7.7 PERCENT OF ITS GDP AT THE TIME.

AGAINST THAT BACKDROP, IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT THAT WE BEGIN TO DISCUSS THE CHANGES WE MUST UNDERTAKE TO FIND MORE LASTING SOLUTIONS THAT WILL ENABLE US TO CONTAIN THE ADVANCE OF ILLEGAL DRUGS IN OUR SOCIETIES.

WHEN WE BEGAN TO OPENLY DISCUSS THE DRUGS PROBLEM IN THE AMERICAS AT A SUMMIT OF THE CENTRAL AMERICAN INTEGRATION SYSTEM IN 2012 AND, LATER, AT THE SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS HELD THAT SAME YEAR, MANY DOUBTED THAT A CHANGE IN OUR APPROACH TO THE GLOBAL DRUGS PROBLEM WAS POSSIBLE. BUT LET ME TELL YOU THAT TODAY, THOSE WINDS OF CHANGE CAN BE FELT, AND INTENSELY SO: CHANGES HAVE TAKEN PLACE, WITHOUT MUCH NOISE, OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS AND, MORE OPENLY AND MORE INTENSELY, SINCE 2012.

DURING THAT TIME, SOME COUNTRIES IN OUR REGION HAVE EMBARKED ON THE SOLEMN TASK OF REVIEWING THEIR ANTIDRUG POLICIES AND ARE TESTING FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN THEIR APPROACHES AND PRIORITIES. WE MUST STUDY THE RESULTS OF THOSE EXPERIMENTS BECAUSE THEY CAN HELP US IDENTIFY ALTERNATIVE COURSES OF ACTION THAT COULD LEAD US TO A HAPPY DESTINATION. WE NOTE WITH INTEREST THAT THOSE COUNTRIES HAVE BEGUN TO BASE THEIR ACTIONS ON PREVENTION AND HAVE BEEN WORKING ON SUBSTANTIVE ASPECTS OF DRUG POLICY THAT HAVE ENABLED THEM TO TAKE STEPS TO PRIORITIZE PEOPLE'S HEALTH AND TREAT THE AILMENTS CAUSED BY PROBLEM DRUG USE WITH RESOURCES THAT WERE PREVIOUSLY USED FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

NEITHER CAN WE IGNORE SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENTS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS, SUCH AS THE NEW REGULATIONS GOVERNING CANNABIS IN THE U.S. STATES OF WASHINGTON AND COLORADO AND IN THE REPUBLIC OF URUGUAY. THOSE EXPERIENCES REPRESENT A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE AND SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE THAT WILL ALLOW ASSESSMENTS TO BE MADE OF THE IMPACT OF THOSE POLICIES IN THE AREAS OF HEALTH, JUSTICE, SECURITY, SCHOOL DROP-OUT RATES, UNWANTED PREGNANCIES, AND – NO LESS IMPORTANTLY – THEIR IMPACT ON OUR PRISON SYSTEMS WHICH, IN MANY COUNTRIES, HAVE BEEN OVERWHELMED BY THE SEVERITY OF THE SENTENCES HANDED DOWN TO USERS OF ILLICIT NARCOTICS.

I AM HOPEFUL THAT THESE EXPERIENCES AND DIFFERENT APPROACHES WILL PROVIDE US WITH A PART OF THE KNOWLEDGE WITH WHICH WE WILL BE ABLE TO TRANSFORM OUR HEMISPHERE'S REALITY INTO A MORE DYNAMIC AND PROMISING ENVIRONMENT VIS-A-VIS THE DRUGS PROBLEM THAN THE ONE WE FACED IN THE PAST DECADE.

INDEED, I WOULD LIKE TO QUOTE WHAT THE GLOBAL COMMISSION ON DRUG POLICY SAID IN ITS RECENT REPORT *TAKING CONTROL: PATHWAYS TO DRUG POLICIES THAT WORK*. IT SUGGESTED THAT: "A NEW AND IMPROVED GLOBAL DRUG CONTROL REGIME IS NEEDED THAT BETTER PROTECTS THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF INDIVIDUALS. MEASURES GROUNDED IN REPRESSIVE IDEOLOGIES MUST BE REPLACED BY MORE HUMANE AND EFFECTIVE POLICIES SHAPED BY SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE, PUBLIC HEALTH PRINCIPLES, AND HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS. THIS IS THE ONLY WAY TO REDUCE DRUG-RELATED DEATH, DISEASE, AND SUFFERING, AND THE VIOLENCE, CRIME, CORRUPTION, AND ILLICIT ASSOCIATED WITH INEFFECTIVE PROHIBITIONIST PRACTICES. THE UPCOMING UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL SESSION ON THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM (UNGASS) IN 2016 IS AN UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW AND REDIRECT DRUG POLICIES."

LET US BE MORE EMPHATIC IN ADOPTING COMPREHENSIVE ANSWERS, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE CONVENTIONS THAT MAKE UP THE INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL SYSTEM, BUT NOT FORGETTING OTHER INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS, PARTICULARLY THE OBLIGATIONS ARISING FROM HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS. FOR GUATEMALA, IT IS IMPORTANT TO POINT OUT THAT THE DRUG CONTROL CONVENTIONS ARE SUBSTANTIAL INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS, BUT THEY ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES FOR DEALING WITH THE MULTICAUSAL AND MULTIFACETED DRUGS PROBLEM.

ALTHOUGH IT IS PERHAPS PREMATURE TO TALK ABOUT CHANGING THE GLOBAL DRUG CONTROL REGIME NOW, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE BEGIN TO REFLECT ON HOW OUR STATES CAN REACH AGREEMENTS THAT, WITH THE SOLE AIM OF IDENTIFYING BETTER, MORE EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO THE NEW CHALLENGES CONSTANTLY SET FOR US BY THE DRUGS PROBLEM AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL, WILL ALLOW US TO REFORM THAT REGIME.

WE ARE CERTAIN THAT WE WILL ALWAYS BE FACING NEW CHALLENGES; FOR THAT REASON OUR APPROACH MUST MAIN OPEN AND CONSTRUCTIVE SO THAT, ON THE BASIS OF KNOWLEDGE AND SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE, WE CAN CONSTRUCT NEW APPROACHES, CONSTANTLY STRENGTHEN OUR NATIONAL STRATEGIES, AND DISCOVER EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS FOR ATTAINING EVER-BETTER RESULTS IN THE CHALLENGES THAT WILL CONTINUE TO ARISE.

IN URGING YOU TO CONTINUE WORKING TOGETHER IN ADDRESSING THIS PROBLEM, YOU CAN COUNT ON THE COMMITMENT, EXPRESSED BY THIS FRIEND OF YOURS, THAT GUATEMALA WILL CONTINUE TO WORK SHOULDER TO SHOULDER WITH ALL OF YOU TO BRING ABOUT SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN OUR SHARED STRUGGLE AGAINST THE SCOURGE OF ILLEGAL DRUGS.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.