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**INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE
CONTROL COMMISSION**

CICAD

Secretariat for Multidimensional Security

**SIXTIETH REGULAR SESSION
November 2-4, 2016
Nassau, The Bahamas**

**OEA/Ser.L/XIV.2.60
CICAD/doc.2268/16
November 2, 2016
Original: Spanish**

**Remarks by Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the Organization of
American States (OAS)**

Sixtieth Regular Session of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD 60)

Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS)

Nassau, The Bahamas, November 2, 2016

We have reached a point of no return: an ever-broader consensus that addressing the problem of drug and narcotic use is a matter of public health, of human rights, of gender, and of development, and that it has to be focused on the individual. It is vital that we design new policies and update our regulatory frameworks based on real data. It is vital that we work for the engagement of all stakeholders in devising solutions that are adapted to the conditions in each country. There is no single answer. What we need is a comprehensive approach that we all share but that is also flexible.

- I would like to thank the Government and people of The Bahamas for organizing this sixtieth regular session of CICAD here in Nassau, for their commitment as the host country, and for their candidacy to chair this prestigious Commission.
- The OAS's 2013 Report on Drugs **marked a watershed regarding the terms and contents of the discussion on the global drugs problem for both the region and the world.** With its publication a **process of reflection and paradigm-shifting** began with respect to drug policies, both within our Hemisphere and elsewhere. It has, in effect, provided an essential reference point in the current debate, within the United Nations and internally in all our countries.
- The problem of drug production and consumption is diverse in nature, with multiple causes and a multidimensional impact; as such, it is a matter of concern to us as a multilateral organization, to the governments of our region, and also to the citizens of our member countries.

- We all experience the problem, but in different ways. We therefore continue to maintain that **“the drug problem needs to be dealt with in a flexible, differentiated fashion, wherein countries adopt an approach tailored to the particular ways in which they are affected.”**
- Since the adoption in 2010 of the **OAS Hemispheric Drug Strategy**, which finally acknowledged that **drug dependence is a chronic, relapsing disease**, numerous milestones have defined discussions, commitments, and consensus-building in our Hemisphere.
- I have already quoted the 2013 Report on Drugs, but mention should also be made of the 2013 Declaration of Antigua Guatemala and, in 2014, of the resolution on human rights and drug policies adopted in Asunción and the resolution of Guatemala City, which faithfully reflect the countries’ commitment and **bear witness to the fruits of the negotiations for defining the basic lines of consensus and action that we are to follow.**
- Because of the construction of this new regulatory and institutional framework, the commitment we have maintained over the years, the agreements that have been forged, and the long path traveled by the member states in connection with the global drugs problem, **the OAS—and CICAD in particular**—have been reference points for UNASUR, MERCOSUR, CELAC, and almost all the other regional and subregional organizations in the Americas that have participated in the discussions of the United Nations.
- In spite of the change in approach, the failure of what has been called the **“war on drugs,”** the institutional framework we have assembled at the regional level to deal with the global drugs problem, the efforts invested in building consensus, and the synergies forged between our countries, **the drug problem remains one of the greatest threats to democracy and stability in this Hemisphere.** For that reason, the progress made at the conceptual level must be transferred to the sphere of action. That is one of the main challenges facing the Organization and each of the member states.
- Today I want to call on you to turn **the semantics of our discourse into a tangible, measurable reality that marks a genuine change from the situation that prevailed while policies based on repression were in ascendance.**
- We all know that **some of those repressive policies brought more harm than good.** They created opportunities for illicit markets and fueled the emergence of criminal organizations that then endangered citizen security. The enforcement of those policies **also contributed to massive overcrowding in our prisons, to social isolation and stigmatization, and to frequent human rights abuses.**

- Today, we are forced to **focus our attention on the individual as the target for intervention, and not on the substance.** Today, we cannot speak of the drug problem without underscoring the **approach based on public health, human rights, gender, and development that it requires.** We cannot address this topic without highlighting the need for **evidence-based policies, updated regulatory frameworks, and genuine engagement by civil society** and other key players.
- The change in focus toward which the region has been working—from an **approach based on punishment and prohibition to one that is comprehensive, balanced, and multidimensional**—must be made a practical reality through policies and rules that are designed with the public in mind.
- We must ensure that **the institutions of the state can go hand-in-hand with the representatives of civil society in the broadest sense of the term.** Such a virtuous alliance would lead to greater community participation and the emergence of a development-based perspective in the search for solutions.
- Without a doubt, the drug situation today is even more complex than it was 30 years ago when CICAD was created. The difference between producing countries and consumer countries, which was one of the original pillars of that policy, is becoming increasingly vague. Drugs of natural origin, toward which most of our efforts to date have been directed, are beginning to lose ground to synthetic substances. These changes show that the **universe and dynamics of illegal drugs have evolved and that, as a result, so has the need to strengthen institutional structures and to redesign our policies in order to address these new, more complex, and changing realities and the challenges they imply.**
- Over these years, many policies have helped create better mechanisms for controlling drug production and trafficking and for providing alternatives to criminal justice, among other steps forward. Thanks to the progress we have made, today we are aware that **being able to adapt to a changing context depends on being able to learn from experience, both our own and that of others, and we are aware of the need for a constant search for more efficient ways to address the various manifestations adopted by today's drugs phenomenon.**
- But we still have a long way to go. We must insist on the need to **create a body of knowledge and evidence for the formulation of effective drug policies.**

- And, at the same time, we must continue with our discussions about the criminalization of drug use, and about alternatives to incarceration, with particular emphasis on the debate about the proportionality of punishment. By having accepted that a drug-free world is impossible to achieve, we can center our efforts on more realistic goals, such as **preventing drug abuse and minimizing its harmful individual and social consequences.**
- This year **we celebrate the 30th anniversary of CICAD.** It is vital that we continue to strengthen the Commission's Executive Secretariat with tools and resources for jointly tackling the traditional and emerging threats posed by the drugs phenomenon. We want an Executive Secretariat that is more dynamic and relevant than ever, so that it can offer you all the technical support needed for complying with, implementing, and following up on the commitments you have assumed.
- The best way to celebrate CICAD's 30th anniversary and to underscore its significance is to adopt the **new Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs for the 2016-2020 period,** which addresses the **vitaly important topics and commitments** that have been reached through the consensus built over these years. **This is a plan of action that takes precedence over debate and that sets out specific challenges and actions organized around five strategic axes.** This is a plan that is in line with everything that has been achieved within the UN and that takes into account the vision, principles, commitments, objectives, and targets set forth in the 2030 Development Agenda.
- I would like to use this occasion to congratulate everyone who make this new milestone possible. You can be certain that the OAS General Secretariat will be there to accompany you in implementing and following up on this new regional Plan of Action on Drugs.
- Taking action when we are all in agreement or when we all think alike is easy. **The great strength of this Organization and of CICAD is their ability to find consensus within the diversity that characterizes us as a region.** And in spite of the exhausting ups and downs of negotiations, it remains true that in the long term, **consensus-building through the sharing of opinions is what makes us strong and what unites us as a region and as an Organization.**
- I conclude my remarks with a quotation from the 2013 Report: **"The Drug Problem manifests itself in many different ways and its impact also varies among the countries and subregions in our Hemisphere. For this reason, dealing with the problem calls for a multifaceted approach,**

great flexibility, a sound grasp of often different circumstances, and, above all, the conviction that, in order to be successful, we need to maintain unity in the midst of diversity.”

Thank you very much.