

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES



INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE CONTROL COMMISSION

cicad

FORTY-FOURTH REGULAR SESSION
November 19 - 21, 2008
Santiago, Chile

OEA/Ser.L/XIV.2.44
CICAD/doc.1700/08
20 November 2008
Original: Spanish

ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
MICHELLE BACHELET,
AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE
CONTROL COMMISSION OF THE OAS



Press Division

UNEDITED VERSION

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ABUSE CONTROL COMMISSION OF THE OAS

Santiago, November 19, 2008

Dear friends,

First of all, obviously, I would like to warmly welcome you on behalf of the government and people of Chile, hoping that this session is not only very successful but also that you have the opportunity to enjoy the hospitality of our country.

As the Secretary General said, less than a week ago, in this same room perhaps, we were with all female Ministers, I do not know whether there was also a male Minister, of the OAS countries, dealing with the issue of women, and today the Inder-20 Women Soccer World Cup starts in our country. So we are very happy and hope to offer all our friends a great hospitality.

I would like to thank the OAS, the CICAD, and all of you, for having accepted our country's proposal to host your forty-fourth regular session.

I also would like to reaffirm our ongoing commitment to the CICAD on this occasion when a new chair is elected, and to express our willingness to assume greater responsibilities in it.

We hope that the discussion in these days is fruitful and may translate into concrete events to the benefit of millions of people in this hemisphere, whose safety, health and life projects are severely threatened by to the drug problem, as it has been said here by those who have preceded me.

And the experience in our continent shows that public policies that bear lasting fruits are those that focus on individuals.

And what truly matters is to govern for making life better for everyone, but especially for those who have historically been at a disadvantage.

It is clear that there are no models in this regard. Here there are no formulas that can be mechanically transferred from one country to another. We have to learn from our own history and, of course, from those nations that have attained greater achievements, especially in the social sphere.

Political and economic institutions of our region should promote decisive action against inequality, and favor inclusion and integration. Because the Chilean approach to this subject follows the same line as that indicated by the Secretary for Political Affairs, Dante Caputto, in the sense that a very close relationship exists between the fight against narcotrafficking, poverty, freedoms and democracy.

During campaigns, candidates usually say “firm hand, firm hand against crime, firm hand against drugs”. We ourselves said “firm hand, but a fair and intelligent hand”. A firm hand at all events, but also a hand that assumes causality or the network of factors that may lead to this situation.

We need, no doubt, more united societies and this is only possible if we carry out a global effort to eradicate poverty and generate conditions for a more decent life, where basic rights are guaranteed to all population.

And the truth is that the battle against backwardness has to face very dramatic realities in neighborhoods and villages of our Americas, most particularly drug consumption.

And this scourge, as you know very well, destroys persons, families and communities.

It hinders the efforts of families to provide a better education to their children.

It causes mistrust and fear in relations among individuals.

It affects public safety, degrading public spaces which by law belong to communities.

But this is not all, dear friends, and in this sense, I strongly believe that, as Dante Caputto told us, narcotrafficking weakens democracy, not only as regards the role it may play in seeking to have a direct influence on local power, or even at a higher level, but also because in daily life, it affects the development of public institutions, erodes legality and along with it, the institutional framework of citizens' rights and freedoms.

We have eradicated from the continent the dictatorships endured by our countries for decades, but we cannot accept the installation of a new kind of dictatorship, a new authoritarianism that may arise from violence, the abuse of organized crime and narcotrafficking, thus bringing fear to our population.

If we were able to defend human rights in a difficult scenario, if we were able to get rid of dictatorships and open the way to a regime of freedoms, creating conditions for inclusion and solidarity, we also must be able to join together against mafias and criminal gangs. And we cannot step back when faced to narcotrafficking. We must defend our democratic coexistence, which is now being threatened by organized crime.

We, in Chile, have always sought to build a modern state that encourages wellbeing, that is, a democratic state that enforces rights, guaranteeing social rights. However, social rights cannot be exercised -effectively exercised- if basic safety conditions are not in place or if narcotrafficking jeopardizes all that. This is why I agree so much with what Dante Caputto has pointed out.

I believe in recent years we have advanced a great deal towards sharing experiences and defining common concepts, which are undoubtedly useful for the duty we undertake in all countries.

And thanks to the regional coordination that we have achieved at the CICAD, each one of the American governments has designed a National Strategy against Drugs, which is the way to assert this integral and well-balanced view by each country when dealing with this issue, in accordance with its reality and also consistent with international commitments and democratic principles.

And we agree in that every plan for effectively fighting drugs should be comprehensive and include strategies and measures to tackle the aspects of trafficking, consumption and treatment.

We promote co-responsibility of the different players to join efforts between the state powers and civil society.

We seek the involvement of individuals and we invite our citizenry to commit themselves to the goals and to actively participate in programs and actions.

Also, we seek a balance between the diverse elements of a comprehensive policy, targeting consumption prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of problematic consumers, as well as prosecution of trafficking and related offenses.

Based on the foregoing, we reaffirm the criterion that public policies should focus on people.

Because I believe that, using your terminology -and I am not afraid of being accused of anything, since I have always said, even vis-à-vis the international crisis- we need a better and an improved state (isn't that true?), and along with a better and an improved state, efficient states, which are effectively empowered, as Dante Caputto has indicated. In order for public policies to be effective, it is also essential that they are based on the reality and on actual needs of people.

With respect to prosecution of trafficking and related offenses, in my government we have focused our attention on victims of organized

crime, because we believe that we also must effectively ensure them with the protection and shelter that the legitimacy of our democracy may provide.

In Chile we have incorporated policies on consumption prevention in the set of general social protection policies: in school, health, labor and poverty matters, as well as in those regarding support to vulnerable sectors. I would like to add sports as well, which is a policy sometimes neglected, but also immensely important.

If we eliminate or reduce the risk factor implied in drug consumption, prospects for people to attain a better quality of life increase, promoted also by the protection and inclusion policies that we are developing.

And, as a matter of fact, Chilean policy recognizes family as the main factor to protect children against drug consumption.

This is why, in conjunction with schools, we have developed new prevention programs that involve both parents and teachers, so as to avoid risky behaviors from the earliest childhood.

We have included treatment for problematic drug consumption into health policies, because this is a treatable chronic disease and, therefore, we must be supportive to those individuals who suffer from it and provide them with appropriate health care.

In fact, with regard to prevention, we have the “Plan Auge” which offers basic health care guarantees to children under 18 years old who consume drugs, which is offered in our public health centers so that we can start prevention at a very early stage, detecting initial problems and subsequently rehabilitating, when applicable.

But a central issue of this CICAD meeting is the connection and impact of drug on public safety. And here in Chile we have defined a Public Safety Strategy that very especially considers trafficking-related crimes. I would say this applies to two particular situations: when we see offenders -young offenders- their initiation in crime is very linked to the consumption of alcohol or drugs, and, on the other hand, of course, the trafficking-related crimes.

And we have mentioned that control and punishment of narco-trafficking criminals should be exemplary and implacable at the same time. As I said earlier, a fair hand but also a firm hand, vested with all the legitimate force of a state in which the rule of law prevails to punish the violence, corruption and bullying arising from narco-trafficking.

On the other hand, we are convinced that nobody is born drug-dependent or is an offender from birth. I am a pediatrician and can say that nobody is born a criminal. Criminals, drug-addicts, narco-traffickers are made, they have developed that condition. This is why we state that a firm hand is not enough, we also need to have a fair and intelligent hand.

And for this reason, we resolutely promote that the diverse specific preventative, rehabilitation, and treatment programs should cooperate in the reduction of this crime incidence and recidivism rates, by cutting off the drug-crime link.

This is the secure and long-term way to follow.

In the same line, we encourage an alternative instance in criminal proceedings, applicable to first-time-offender adults and problematic consumers who have committed a crime under the effects of consumption to procure substances.

This alternative, known as “Drug Courts”, represents an opportunity for individuals who may be therapeutically intervened, thus preventing consumption recidivism and the commission of offenses.

In fact, I would like to mention that we started such alternative as a pilot plan some time ago, based on the New York experience, where there is the possibility of either serving a sentence or reinserting and rehabilitating. And this way they have actually been able to strongly decrease recidivism, I would say particularly in consumption and crimes.

Furthermore, the new youth responsibility system contemplates drug abuse treatment as an additional measure besides punishment. In

this manner, we seek to break the vicious circle between drug and crime, to save thousands of youngsters from a dark fate.

In short, although I do not mean that in this manner we have solved the problem -we still have multiple challenges ahead- in Chile we have several preventative programs for children and youths; we have incorporated drug abuse treatment into regular health care programs of the public health system, along with treatment focused on people facing justice.

We have a program that I really like very much, which reports to the Ministry of the Interior: the so-called preventative soccer schools, where we work with vulnerable youths. Old soccer aces of our country carry out sports activities with them, which generate, I would say, values and proper working principles. I believe these programs will also have strong positive results in the long run.

All this, no doubt, without disregarding control of and restriction to drug availability, through a rigorous control from the police.

Therefore, control activities for illicit drug trafficking and related offenses constitute an essential component of our antidrug strategy. To such effect, actions taken by the Office of the Public Prosecutor and by polices are strongly supported by us.

Dear friends,

The CICAD so far has a valuable political capital, accumulated through a long process of shared experiences, which enable us to have a common view and a referent to assess our progress in the continent.

And I would like to underscore our conviction that the drug problem is rather a shared responsibility that requires a global answer and also that the international community has the greatest cooperation will, emphasizing the capacity to share experiences and knowledge on a series of areas that those who have preceded me have pointed out, and where we must continue to advance. Also, I believe that horizontal and participative cooperation is certainly an innovating and

modern mechanism for transferring knowledge and exchanging information and practice among states.

I would like to reiterate our will to support the widening and strengthening of these horizontal cooperation actions all over the hemisphere. We believe that their multiplying effect not only reinforces regional relations and regional solidarity, but also makes our duty more efficient and allows us to act with lower costs.

Next year, the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs will discuss and approve a political statement on how to face the drug phenomenon in the coming years. And such consensus will endorse the assessment of the objectives and goals specified in the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly of 1998.

And I am certain that our hemisphere has not been unaware of such process. The existence of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism of CICAD constitutes a sample of the interest shown by American countries to assume the challenges of creating a mechanism to follow up the problem and encourage collaboration to address them.

I am sure that this meeting will be an enormous contribution to the world evaluation process that is being undertaken through multilateral organizations.

From then on, we can advance on a Hemispheric common stance, which will enable our voice to be heard with more attention at the international forum of nations, but most of all, which will make it possible to take a more effective and efficient action against the terrible calamity of drugs in the Americas.

Thus, I wish you much success in your deliberations, in the sharing of experiences, and much strength to keep working in this from here, from Chile. You are most welcome.

Thank you.

Santiago, November 19, 2008.

