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SPEECH

BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR. JOSE CLEMENTE LÓPEZ OROZCO,
MAYOR OF LUGO

ON THE WORK ON DRUG ADDICTIONS CARRIED OUT IN THE CITY OF LUGO

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The city of Lugo, where I serve as mayor, has at present almost 97,000 inhabitants; it is a city with two thousand years of history, Roman roots, and a city wall that was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in the year 2000. The River Miño, on which it stands, has earned us the status of a Biosphere Reserve. There is no doubt, however, that the best thing about the city is its people.

Lugo is located in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, very close to Portugal; it is a station on the Way of St. James, a route of culture and pilgrimage that has connected us to Europe since time immemorial. Because of our past history of migrations, Lugo has close spiritual ties to the Americas.

The city of Lugo, under instructions from the Government Delegate for the National Drugs Plan, is part of the Executive Committee of the program “Strategic alliances between Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean for improving treatment and rehabilitation for drug dependency,” a project managed by the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), the technical drugs agency of the Organization of American States (OAS).

For me, as the mayor of the city and the representative of all its citizens at this meeting, it is a genuine honor to be part of a comprehensive program in which, along with other countries (partners and executors), we are working to combine our efforts and consolidate networks at the international, national, regional, and municipal levels to treat, and, of course, prevent drug addiction.

We have many objectives, including a date set in Lugo, in May 2010, for the holding of the Second International Forum, which we hope you will all attend.

For us, it is a privilege to be playing a leading role in efforts that pursue such ends of human solidarity as people’s health and wellbeing.

We can and do feel privileged, by being able to work together in a shared direction. It showcases the importance of international cooperation, of team work, of alliances between civilizations.

It is more likely that projects will conclude successfully, when the experience of groups who have lived through similar situations and have been able to resolve them satisfactorily is available.

Experience is an element in unity and, in this CICAD working group, it is the nexus of unity. Lugo does not want to teach anyone: we want to relate our experiences, contribute our grain of sand, and learn a lot from the others.

The successes and failures of others can help us in tackling each situation, each social reality. They can help us launch municipal policies in pursuit of objectives in the struggle against drug addiction.

In the drug treatment area, our city can offer the others participating in this network its knowledge and experience, as we have been doing at each of the forums and meetings we have attended to date.

We want to contribute to creating, encouraging, and promoting, in a shared environment, the involvement of those municipal officials responsible for public policies, together with their implementation of best practices and strategies with a view to better responding to the treatment needs of those members of the public with drug addiction problems.

We seek to train, inform, and raise the awareness of the individuals responsible for public policies so they can see prevention and treatment as one of the priorities of their work.

Attaining all those goals depends on us, on each municipality, on each region, on each nation, on the internal coordination of each country, and on the coordination and team work of the other countries involved in the project. At all times with the support of the families, the education system, the beneficiaries of these policies themselves, and all those organizations that aspire to a better society.

Coordination, cooperation, team work: those are the essence of this international effort and the key to its success. And so, Lugo is proud to be a part of this initiative.

Lugo will receive all the cities of Europe and Latin America involved in the CICAD to present its conclusions. Some of those conclusions will be nothing other than the principle of “good practices” in the treatment and prevention of drug addictions, which kill and destroy the lives of our young people, immigrants, women, families, and society in general.

The aim is to contribute, from our perspective, to improving decision-making at the municipal level regarding the quality and coverage of drug treatment, prevention, and rehabilitation for diverse populations from across the European Union, Latin America, and the Caribbean, in order to ensure adequate attention is provided.

We have to contribute, each one of us in accordance with our potential, to implementing policies for transfers of know-how and exchanges of experiences that could be of use in providing better treatment and rehabilitation services for drug users and drug addicts, paying particular attention to problems related to social exclusion and the protection of human rights.

The Municipal Government of Lugo, the General Subdirectorate of Mental Health and Drug Addictions, the Health Board of the Galicia Regional Government, and the Government Delegation for the National Drugs Plan are working together in a constant search for measures that will help reduce the demand for drugs and assist in the treatment, prevention, and social reincorporation of individuals with problems relating to drug use.

The search for values, for a meaning to life, for the role of humans in society brings us closely together in this joint undertaking and effort.

To date, the city of Lugo has signed bilateral agreements with cities including Mexicali (in Mexico), Montevideo (Uruguay), San Ramón (Costa Rica), and Colón (El Salvador), and it will continue to do so in the future with any city interested in discovering our working methods, our resources, and our prevention, treatment, and social reincorporation programs.

In recent years, we have stepped up our efforts to prevent and reduce the demand for drugs among young people, through initiatives involving recreation, the arts, training, incorporation into society and into work, information – offering our young people real alternatives to using drugs during their free time. In Lugo we have around 18,000 young people, accounting for almost one fifth of the municipality’s total population.

We have developed programs that take into account the educational triangle – school, family, and community – three essential mainstays that are coordinated and complement each other. To that we have added treatment programs that have proven to be a success, judging by the fall in drug use, particularly alcohol, in the city.

Coordinating and complementing these preventive programs with other efforts in the areas of social reincorporation and treatment have been the driving force behind our success. With awareness of the enormous role played by families and by schools.

One essential element has been designing programs based on real needs, as indicated by prior local sociological studies. The role of the media, who should also be involved in the positive policies carried out, has also been a key factor.

At the same time, the city of Lugo is comprehensively addressing the drugs problem through its First Municipal Drug Addiction Plan, which gathers together the objectives, methods, and mechanisms for coordination with the rest of Lugo's institutions.

The aim is to ensure that the work being carried out more or less successfully by each municipality does not descend into isolation, exclusiveness, or, most importantly, silence. We want that work to be coordinated, a piece of the puzzle formed by all the cities participating in this ambitious project, pursuing common objectives with shared methods.

Thank you very much and we hope to see you in Lugo next year.