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# **INTER-AMERICAN OBSERVATORY ON DRUGS**

**(Item 10 of the Agenda)**

# INTER-AMERICAN OBSERVATORY ON DRUGS

## *Proposal to the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission at its twenty-sixth regular session*

Recent statistical evidence indicates that drug use is up in many OAS member states; that new drugs and combinations of drugs are being consumed, and that the production and trafficking of both plant-based and synthetic drugs is rising and changing. Programs to reduce the demand for and supply of illicit drugs must address these changes and respond rapidly and with flexibility. In order to do so, policy-makers and program managers alike require good and timely information.

CICAD is uniquely placed to mobilize statistics and information resources throughout the hemisphere in the context of the *Antidrug Strategy in the Hemisphere*. The present proposal draws together many threads of research and information under a collaborative INTERNET-based umbrella called the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs.

The present proposal is made in accordance with the Commission's request at its twenty-fifth regular session, and also in light of its decision, at the same session, to reorient CICAD's current information and statistical services towards member states' needs in connexion with the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM).

## I. PURPOSE

The Inter-American Observatory on Drugs will help OAS member states examine, over the long term, the nature and extent of the drug problem in their countries and in the Western Hemisphere as a whole, through the analysis of trends in drug use and drug trafficking patterns. The Observatory's purpose is to enhance countries' research capacities, conduct cross-disciplinary analysis of supply and demand data, and foster the application of research findings to policy and practice.

The Inter-American Observatory is an umbrella for national and inter-American research efforts. It will be managed by the Executive Secretariat of CICAD, in partnership with national statistics and information focal points.

At the national level, the Inter-American Observatory will help governments collect and analyze trends in drug statistics, and promote and sponsor interdisciplinary research by providing seed funding and technical assistance.

At the inter-American level, the Observatory will support hemispheric policy and cooperation by examining the crucial nexus of supply and demand in the region as a whole. It is thus intended to serve as an early warning system on the appearance of new drugs, new methods of using and manufacturing drugs, and changing trafficking patterns. The deliberately collaborative nature of the Observatory will, it is hoped, build an inter-American community of knowledge and science on the drug problem, and provide a forum in which researchers can learn from each other.

The Observatory will build on and expand the extensive work already done by member states and the Executive Secretariat for the past ten years in drug-related statistics and information. The Inter-American Data Bank on Drugs and the Inter-American Drug Information System (IADIS) will be subsumed under the umbrella of the Observatory. CICAD's information vehicle for the National Drug Commissions (known as RETCOD) will also be incorporated into the Observatory.

## **II. THE INTER-AMERICAN OBSERVATORY AND THE MULTILATERAL EVALUATION MECHANISM (MEM)**

CICAD has adopted the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM), the first round of which will begin in 2000. Member states will complete a questionnaire on 61 indicators of progress, over twenty-five of which require a quantitative answer and presuppose the existence of a data tracking system. In the first year of the MEM, countries may not have had time to conduct new surveys of drug use, or to collect data that respond precisely to all of the indicators; however, for the future, they may wish to use the CICAD survey instruments on drug use and on law enforcement statistics for this purpose (SIDUC and CICDAT, see below, pp. 4-5). The Observatory will support member states in this endeavor and in the other ways specified below, to enable all member states to participate fully and equitably in the MEM process.

## **III. ACTIVITIES**

The Inter-American Observatory on Drugs will be the sum of national and inter-American programs to gather and analyze drug-related statistics and information, and will thus depend on the cooperation of many partners.

At the inter-American level, the Observatory will:

- a. analyze drug-related statistics generated in and by the member states; Observatory publications will show trends over time in drug control and drug use, by country and in the hemisphere as a whole;
- b. refine and improve common inter-American data collection methods, seeking the use, where possible, of standardized questionnaires;

- c. promote and sponsor, financially and technically, research in the member states on drug use (particularly collaborative research involving several countries or subregions), and on other aspects of the drug problem;
- d. host an annual conference of researchers throughout the hemisphere working on the epidemiologic trends of drug use;
- e. provide training in statistical methods, and in the use of the CICAD data-collection questionnaires;
- f. publish, to the Inter-American Observatory's Web page, short news bulletins in English and Spanish on items of immediate interest, including latest research findings, and provide electronic links with other Web sites, and
- g. make use of new technologies to facilitate research, and run meetings and training events on line.

Nationally, it is recommended that each member state take the following steps:

- a. Designate one national information and statistics focal point <sup>1</sup> to be the participating member of the Inter-American Observatory. This focal point would, in effect, become that country's Observatory on Drugs, and would coordinate the collection, analysis and publication of national statistics on the drug problem produced by various Ministries such as Health, Education, Justice, and law enforcement authorities. The focal point could also set up a training plan, and mobilize existing information resources in the country (universities, Census Bureaux, National Statistics Offices, and established libraries or drug information centers) to cooperate in drug-related research;
- b. Conduct periodic surveys of drug use, and collect drug law enforcement statistics according to the definitions in the CICAD questionnaires; the Observatory would provide support as funds permit;
- c. Appoint a Human Subjects Review Committee, to ensure that epidemiological research involving drug use by individuals meets internationally accepted standards of treatment of research subjects; and
- d. Establish its own Web page, and place there relevant statistics, research findings, and documents such as directories of national competent authorities in the control of drug trafficking, money laundering, arms, chemicals, and alternative development, and in the regulation of treatment providers.

#### IV. AREAS OF CONCENTRATION

The Observatory will have three areas of work:

- Ø Statistics and Analysis, with two modules: drug epidemiology, and supply reduction statistics.
- Ø Information and Publications, and

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<sup>1</sup> See letter SGE/CAD-563/99 from Mr. David Beall, Executive Secretary of CICAD, dated July 13, 1999, requesting each member state to designate a focal point for information and statistics.

## Ø Research, Training and Promotion

### A. STATISTICS AND ANALYSIS<sup>2</sup>

#### Drug Epidemiology Module

The drug epidemiology module of the Inter-American Observatory will focus on expanding CICAD's Inter-American Drug Use Data System (SIDUC), to enable more member states to conduct surveys of drug use among different populations.

#### SIDUC

The Inter-American Drug Use Data System (SIDUC) was developed by CICAD as a means of gathering and analyzing statistics on drug use, and thus estimate trends among specific population groups, rates of new drug use, and the average age of first use of drugs. SIDUC is a relatively low-cost system capable of providing member states with timely data that are comparable over time.

- ⇒ Admissions to hospital emergency rooms
- ⇒ Patients in drug treatment centers
- ⇒ Arrestees in detention centers
- ⇒ Students in school
- ⇒ A sample of the general population (household surveys)

The Executive Secretariat recommends the use of the SIDUC questionnaires and definitions to collect statistics on drug use. To ensure ease of use and avoid duplication of costs, the SIDUC questionnaires and software will be adjusted to the requirements of the MEM, and particularly to ensure adequate distinctions in the reporting of use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Another important area of work will be to help member states establish sampling frames, particularly for school surveys.

#### Module on Supply Reduction Statistics

The Inter-American Observatory on Drugs will concentrate on reinforcing CICAD's supply reduction data system (CICDAT), developed in 1991. The CICDAT questionnaires will also be revised and adjusted to meet the requirements of the MEM. One important adjustment will be in the definitions of "seizures", "forfeitures", "confiscations", and "freezing" of assets.

#### CICDAT

CICAD's Supply Reduction Data System (CICDAT) provides member states with a uniform standardized methodology, questionnaires and definitions for gathering and analyzing national statistics on:

- ◇ seizures of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, chemicals, and other specified substances;
- ◇ illegal growing areas eradicated, fumigated, or abandoned;
- ◇ seizures of equipment, money, arms, and real estate
- ◇ laboratories discovered and destroyed
- ◇ persons arrested for trafficking or possession.

## Analysis

The Inter-American Observatory's most challenging and innovative work will be the analysis of the statistics and other information in order better to understand trends over time, and the intersectoral connections among different areas of illicit drug control. On the drug epidemiology side, use will thus also be made of various types of qualitative research, including the findings of community-based studies, key informants, ethnographic research, attitude survey studies and so on, to expand on and better explain the statistics. Examples of this analysis might include groundbreaking methods of determining the street price of drugs, and looking at its correlation with drug use; factors that may contribute or predispose to drug use, or the relationship between violent behavior and drug use.

The Observatory will publish reports showing trends in the region and examining possible related variables.

## B. TRAINING AND PROMOTION OF RESEARCH

Through the Observatory, CICAD will help train research teams in the member states in subjects such as methods of epidemiological research, sampling and inferential data analysis. The Observatory will seek to promote and support research in a variety of fields, but particularly in demand reduction where much important work remains to be done, and in areas such as biocontrol of pests affecting legitimate crops. The goal is to have the Observatory be a center of excellence in research that is capable of attracting funding from foundations and research institutes.

## C. INFORMATION AND PUBLICATIONS

The Observatory's will have a specialized INTERNET "library", which will consist of the Web pages of all participating focal points or national Observatories and of the Executive Secretariat of CICAD. Member states may wish to post on their Web sites important reference documents such as national drug control plans, legislation in force related to illicit drug control, statistical reports, and so forth. The Inter-American Observatory's Web page, maintained by the Executive Secretariat of CICAD, will post short news bulletins and abstracts of recent research in a limited number of fields such as best practices in drug abuse prevention and treatment, the nature of addiction, and the "risk profiles" of potential users; and advances in alternative development. It will also, as now, provide electronic links to other Web sites of interest. As the Observatory grows and member states' programs to address the drug problem change, other fields could be added.

## V. INTERNET-BASED

The Observatory will be INTERNET-based. It will rely on computer-based forms for the capture and entry of data and information, and by using the INTERNET for the transmission of those forms, will substantially reduce fax and courier costs. The Observatory will also examine the latest technology to try to cut the costs of field surveys, and other applications that will empower researchers.

CICAD's current Web page (<http://www.cicad.oas.org>) will be expanded and improved as a vehicle for information on the drug problem.

## VI. PLAN OF WORK FOR 1999-2000 AND FUTURE EXPANSION

The Executive Secretariat of CICAD has already begun to lay the groundwork for the Observatory, and to make ready its information and statistics capacities for the MEM. In 1999-2000, the following will be completed:

- a. Software that will allow member states to exchange statistics and information on line, in a secure environment, will be installed and tested.<sup>3</sup>
- b. National Drug Commissions, and other specialized government departments will be provided with computers and an INTERNET connection<sup>4</sup>.
- c. CICAD's documents information service will be reoriented towards an INTERNET environment, in the context of the MEM.<sup>5</sup>
- d. CICDAT and SIDUC will be updated, clarified and expanded, and will include additional questions needed for the MEM indicators. For example, CICDAT will be adjusted to cover the money laundering and arms control statistics for the MEM, while the SIDUC questionnaires will expand to include the use of synthetic drugs and amphetamine-type stimulants. The Observatory's initial emphasis in SIDUC drug epidemiology will be on developing a short questionnaire for use in schools, that will enable member states to track changes in the age of first use, and incidence of new drug users among young people in school;
- e. An established senior investigator will be recruited to direct the Observatory, and at least one senior drug epidemiologist will also be hired to assist member states' research activities;
- f. A grant proposal to support the consolidation of the Observatory as a center of excellence in research, now in development by the Executive Secretariat, will be submitted to possible funding sources.

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<sup>3</sup> This initiative is financed in part with a grant from the European Commission.

<sup>4</sup> This initiative is financed by the Governments of Spain, Korea and the United States.

<sup>5</sup> See the decision taken by the Commission at its twenty-fifth regular session (May 1999) in the final report of the meeting, document CICAD/doc.1018/99 rev.1.

In the future, it can be anticipated that work will also need to be done on changes in the mixtures of chemical substances used to make drugs, and on trends in price and purity.

## VII. SCIENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE <sup>6</sup>

A Science Advisory Committee will advise the Inter-American Observatory on new or improved methods for studying drug use and conducting other types of surveys; assure technical standards, and serve as a peer review group for research undertaken under Observatory auspices. It would also review the Observatory's statistical reports prior to publication, and serve as an Inter-American Human Subjects Review Committee for Observatory-sponsored research.

The Committee members would be chosen in their individual capacity as internationally-recognized experts in drug-related statistics and analysis.

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<sup>6</sup> Such a committee was approved by CICAD in 1997, and by the OAS General Assembly in its 1998 budget resolution AG/RES.1531 (XXVII-O/97).