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Training Workshop for National Coordinators of Drug Information Networks

Kingstown, October 6, 2008

Hon. Douglas Slater, Minister of Health and the Environment

Dr. St. Clair Thomas, Chief Medical Officer

Mr. Pernel Clarke, my colleague from the OAS General Secretariat

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Facilitators

Participants

Members of the Media

Good morning.

I am pleased to bring you greetings from the Organization of American States and particularly from CICAD – the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission – which is funding this exercise, in collaboration with the CARICOM Secretariat.

Welcome.

Introduction

We are all familiar with the destructive impact of illegal drugs on the peoples and countries of this hemisphere.

Drug trafficking and drug abuse pose an immediate threat to political stability, democratic institutions, sound economic growth and the well-being of all people, everywhere. Drug traffickers are constantly expanding and varying their routes and their strategies to gain and maintain access to markets and, in the process, have involved countless countries in the illicit drug trade.

There is not a single State in the hemisphere today that is immune to the impact and repercussions of these activities.

OAS member states are, quite correctly, concerned about the direct threat that the drug trade poses to the health & security of their people, their economic and social development, the effective functioning of national institutions and the harmonious relations among and between countries.

It is a problem that transcends all boundaries of politics, race, religion and culture and which requires a similarly all-encompassing, hemispheric response.

To ensure that the battle against the drug culture is sustained and effective, it is imperative that all stakeholders be on board and be prepared to work dedicatedly, persistently and collaboratively to impact the problem in a direct and forceful way.

CICAD and the MEM

Since 1998, the OAS, through CICAD, has been working with the countries of this hemisphere to achieve just such an impact, through:

- i. developing and executing programs to prevent and treat substance abuse;
- ii. strengthening national drug-control institutions;
- iii. improving practices to control firearms and money laundering;
- iv. developing alternate sources of income for growers of coca, poppy and marijuana; and
- v. helping member governments to improve their data gathering and analysis.¹

Through these interventions, CICAD has helped OAS member states to achieve significant successes in their battle against drugs.

A key tool in these efforts has been the CICAD-administered Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism – commonly known as the MEM – which provides a collaborative, sanction-free mechanism through which OAS member states review their individual and collective counter-drug efforts, identify areas for strengthening and develop recommendations on how their efforts can be improved.

The MEM is an effective forum for strengthening mutual confidence, dialogue and hemispheric cooperation in order to more effectively deal with the drug problem in OAS Member States².

I urge all of you here this morning to lobby your respective authorities to join with CICAD and your colleague member states in this important mechanism, if you

¹ OAS, “Evaluating Progress Against Drugs”, found in ‘Key OAS Issues’, http://www.oas.org/key_issues/eng/KeyIssue_Detail.asp?kis_sec=8

² OAS, “Plan of Action of the Second Summit of the Americas”, Chile, 1998, <http://www.summit-americas.org/chileplan.htm>

are not already involved. Active participation in the MEM is a key component in the efforts of all OAS member states to combat the impact of illegal drugs.

The Drug Information Network Project

Another important element of the hemispheric effort against illegal drugs is the activity we launch this morning.

Just as the sharing of information and experiences is critical at the hemispheric level, it is equally so at the national level, where the impact of the drug trade is seen and felt in the most immediate fashion.

The Drug Information Network Project, which we initiate today, will assist the authorities in participating countries in building and maintaining the national networks that will enable them to collect timely information on illegal drugs, help them to enhance their impact on the drug trade and guide them in establishing the policies that will allow them to do so effectively.

We are encouraged by the commitment that you, the participating countries, have demonstrated by your support for this project and we look forward to the successful implementation of the next phases – particularly the commencement of the actual information-gathering phase early next year.

Close

I will close by saying that the challenge that we face is significant. The illegal drug trade is well entrenched in the countries of the hemisphere and those who perpetuate it are often far better provisioned than the authorities who seek to eliminate it.

Eliminate it though, we must. There is simply no question of doing otherwise. The alternative is to condemn our communities, our countries and our people to social and economic ruin.

By collecting and sharing information – within the national Drug Information Networks and at the hemispheric level, within the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism – we have an opportunity to impact the problem positively.

Let us continue to work together, in our various spheres, to ensure that we do so.

Thank you.