

Feature Address by Hon. Dr. W Baldwin Spencer
Prime Minister
Antigua and Barbuda
Inter American Drug Abuse Control Commission
Sub-Regional Meeting-Drug Information Network in
Caribbean

Salutations

All protocols already observed

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all of you to the shores of Antigua and Barbuda to tell you that our beach is just the beginning. Therefore please take time to see more of what we have to offer in this twin island state.

Today is Emancipation Day throughout the Caribbean, a time for sober reflection and commemoration of the freedom we obtained after over 300 years of enslavement. August 1 must not be forgotten or allowed to go unnoticed, for it represents deeply rooted experiences that have shaped and transformed the lives of millions of Africans in the Diaspora and the Caribbean in particular.

For us in Antigua and Barbuda the celebration of Emancipation is seen as part of an ongoing process of reflection and renewal among our people.

Therefore, it is significant that we are gathered here this morning to discuss a most important topic that is affecting, in a very real way, the lives of so many of our young men and women who are charged with the task of continuing the work of developing and transforming this Caribbean region.

I am indeed pleased to be here at the beginning of this important meeting designed to examine, review and discuss data coming out of several surveys and studies regarding the establishment of a regional Drug Information Network and how best this mechanism could serve our efforts in the region to combat the problems associated with illicit drug use.

It is my understanding that this Drug Information Network is a system of standardized data collection procedures specifically geared towards collecting information on drug use, their demand, the supply, and the treatment. And that the analysis of this data will help to inform general policies on Drug Use prevention in schools, and the work place. Also government's policy on legislation, control of pre-cursor chemicals and pharmaceuticals to ensure adequate processes are in place to prevent abuse.

My government as a member of the Organisation of American States(OAS), is committed to the Hemispheric Drug Strategy designed to help countries to reduce the production, trafficking and use of illegal drugs. We recognize the consequences associated with the drug trade and the impact it could have on our human resource capacity, health, social cohesion and ^{the} rule of law.

1

In 2000 the OAS/Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) created a statistical arm called the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs (OID). One of their objectives was to promote the establishment of a standardized data collection system among the member states. This system was called the Drug Information Network.

In 2009 Antigua and Barbuda was approached to begin the implementation of the Drug Information Network on island.

However, the lack of technical assistance did not allow the project to commence as smoothly as planned. Lt. Col. Edward Croft, Commissioner to the Inter American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), recently expressed to Ambassador Paul Simmons, Executive Secretary to CICAD at the CICAD 51st Meeting, the desire to have the Drug Information Network established. This resulted in the OAS providing a technical consultant to assist in conducting the initial assessment to commence the project.

In this regard, I am pleased to announce that Antigua and Barbuda is very hopeful that in the very near future, we will be a fully functioning and contributing member to the regional Drug Information Network.

To facilitate this, we are now working on re-energizing the National Drug Council. It is our goal that once the Council and Secretariat is established and once again fully functional it will house the DIN where the data will be readily available to the stakeholders.

Additionally, we are now in the process of reviewing the Draft "National Drug Strategy", which will be one of the driving forces on our continued commitment in the *War on the Business of Drugs*.

Therefore ladies and gentlemen it is my pleasure to be your host and wish each and everyone of you a productive two days and a successful regional Drug Information Network meeting.

Thank you very much.