

Salutation

Your Excellency Mr. Gerald Latulippe, High Commissioner of Canada to Trinidad and Tobago

Dr. Riyad Insanally, OAS Country Representative to Trinidad and Tobago and staff of OAS / CICAD

Mr. Trevor Percival, Chairman of the National Drug Council, Members of the National Drug Council

Mrs. Wendy Ann Wattie, Coordinator of the National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Programme

Members of staff of the National Drug Council Secretariat and the National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Programme

Overseas participants and facilitators

Other Specially invited Guests

Representatives of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning to you all

I am pleased to echo the welcome sentiments extended by the Chairman of the National Drug Council and other speakers to all our overseas guests.

I join those who preceded me in commending CICAD on this initiative which seeks to have us develop prevention programmes which are based on empirical data.

It is fortuitous that this session is happening at this time, as the Ministry of National Security is seeking the approval of our Cabinet of Ministers for the report from the Regional Working Group in support of the Drafting of the Report on the Drug Problem in the Americas, which was convened in collaboration with CICAD. You should note that the Caribbean region was the only sub-region in the hemisphere to undertake this exercise as a region, and it is from this perspective that we consider the report extremely important to our Member States.

The recommendations in this report are relevant to the ongoing development of our regional drug control programmes and I am aware that the CARICOM Secretariat plans to share the formal document with Directors of National Drug Councils at the next meeting of this group. I stress the content of the report, as the participants at the meeting, were all senior decision makers in drug control and were drawn from a wide cross-section of agencies and organizations, in the critical areas of drug control.

In reviewing the document, the following recommendations fit perfectly with the areas on which this workshop will focus over the next three days.

These are:

- More outreach programmes for at-risk groups
- Improved engagement of young people at a very young age and there needs to be more intervention programmes which target youths
- Engagement of the media to provide the public with drug education and information on accessing treatment

The report went on to identify the role of research in achieving these goals by noting:

- there is need for proper assessment of risks and needs of various countries, so that resources can be properly channelled
- countries must develop ways to empirically demonstrate the effectiveness of preventative approaches, noting that in the absence of such evidence, it is difficult to convince funding agencies of the importance of preventative approaches to drug abuse reduction

The next three days of training therefore brings into focus these areas, but more importantly sets the framework for full implementation of the aforementioned recommendations. That will be a signature achievement as too often research or consultations are conducted, recommendations made, but implementation is lacking. Your participation at this workshop

can contribute to changing that “Norm”, but that is of course providing that YOU, share the information received here with your colleagues on your return to your respective countries, and implement what you learn during your time here.

I am aware that during the course of the Seminar, Member States will provide information on the policies which have been developed to address the area of prevention and also some of the programmes which have been initiated in response. Much of what you may share may be focused on implementation of projects in the area of Demand Reduction.

As you consider the prevention activities which will be designed and undertaken, I urge you to think beyond the area of Demand Reduction and consider what can be embarked upon in the area of **Supply Reduction**. We have managed to successfully utilize the Organized Crime Narcotics and Firearms Unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service in schools and communities to assist in educating the public on matters related to drug trafficking.

This is because our reality in the Caribbean is that our nationals will continue to try to traffick drugs not only among our Member States but also to the more lucrative markets of North America and Europe. This results in the stigmatization of not just our nationals, but also of our airlines and our countries. Consequently our countries are labeled in a negative manner, and with the increasing attention being paid to migration issues around the world, we run the risk of larger countries undertaking policies that will severely limit our entry through their borders.

As a people who often seek to visit these countries either for leisure, academic advancement, business opportunities or professional development, to have our movement restricted by an activity that can be significantly curtailed by effective public education and comprehensive prevention activities will be most unfortunate.

It should be noted that both Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago has successfully implemented one supply reduction programme. The “Eva Goes to Foreign” posters and DVD were both effectively used a few years ago to significantly reduce the number of new arrests of women who were recruited to traffick drugs into the United Kingdom. For Trinidad and Tobago this was in response to the growing number of persons arrested during the period 2003 – 2005. This programme, supported by other campaigns and the enhanced activities of our law enforcement officials at our borders, significantly impacted new arrests in Britain. We continue to implement this programme periodically.

Another area of concern for us as a region is the levels of marijuana use both among our young people and the general public. As countries in the Caribbean, this Hemisphere and internationally amend their policies on Marijuana to incorporate more flexible approaches, persons like yourselves who are charged with educating the public on the risks associated with the use and trafficking of substances, you face an incredible challenge. As you confront the dual issues of “cultural acceptance” and easy availability, you will need to be consistently innovative in your programme development,

since this issue has the potential to truly test our creativity to elicit changes in perception and behavior.

I therefore have no qualms in reiterating the timeliness of this initiative and again thank CICAD for their usual ability to recognize and seek to address the needs of the Caribbean Member States. Gratitude is also extended to the Government of Canada for responding to the proposal made by CICAD for this project, and also to recognize the contribution of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago both in monetary value and also in assisting with the logistics of this Seminar through the involvement of the staff of the National Drug Council Secretariat and the National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Programme.

I am delighted to have had this opportunity to be part of this important event as the work which will be undertaken here will build our collective capacity to develop prevention programmes which will stop persons from using and trafficking drugs, delay those who would have started earlier and hopefully stop those who have already started. Your task is not easy, but through the collection of quality data, combined learning, exchange of practices that have worked and implementation of sound prevention programmes we can continue to empower our societies and reduce the negative impact of drug use and trafficking.

I trust that you will have a meaningful and enlightening three days and I look forward to learning more about the initiatives undertaken and their impact as a result of this project.

Thank you.