



Organization of American States

Launch of Guyana Household Drug Survey Report
Thursday, February 9, 2017
Cara Lodge Hotel, Georgetown

Remarks
Jean Ricot Dormeus
OAS Representative

Thank you Master of ceremonies.

Honorable Khemraj Ramjattan, Vice President and Minister of Public Security,
Colleagues of the Diplomatic Corps,
Colleagues Pernel Clarke of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD)
and Beverly Reynolds of CARICOM,
Distinguished partners and participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is always refreshing to experience unity and commitment in addressing grave issues afflicting our society and our region. Unity it is as this morning the stakeholders and driving forces in Guyana, even representatives of the Government, international partners, civil society organizations and churches, come together with a sense of purpose to launch the report and present the findings from the 2016 national drug prevalence study. And we know that with unity, no solution can be out of reach and no challenge can withstand without improvement for too long.

The Organization of American States, (OAS) through the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) was pleased to support Guyana in the implementation in 2016 of a household survey on drugs. The results of this survey will surely contribute to better equip the relevant authorities in Guyana with the information that they will need to estimate the national level of drug use, to define the characteristics of the persons who are users and to fine-tune policies in this regard.

I would like to thank the Government of Guyana for partnering with the OAS on this important project. Also, I wish to salute the drive of Minister of Public Security Khemraj Ramjattan and his staff. Further, I thank US Ambassador Perry Holloway for the financial support of his government.

Conscious of the dire consequences of drug abuse and trafficking, the OAS has been spearheading regional efforts to stem the plague and help the victims. We are aware that these consequences impact all walks of life and all quarters of society. Early November last year, the Director of Public Prosecutions signaled the urgency to curb drug woes in society at a sensitization workshop. She referred to the gruesome story of a Guyanese woman who was lured to a hotel in Georgetown only to wake up the next morning in an empty room with her genitals mutilated. That terrible crime was facilitated by date rape drugs.

Facing successfully the drug drama is a complex task. Repression alone does not measure up, as we well know. Therefore, we need a sophisticated toolkit, including sensitization, prevention, and treatment; in short a holistic approach to the issue.

Illustrative of the OAS and CICAD engagement with Guyana in this fight is the fact that eighteen months ago, I had an opportunity to launch with you, Minister Ramjattan, the School Drug Survey report which provides critical information on the patterns of narcotics use in schools.

On your part, couple of months ago, last December, you launched the National Drug Strategy Master Plan aimed at combating illicit drug use and trafficking. The main objectives of the plan include the reduction of demand and supply of illicit drugs, providing treatment options, institutional strengthening and policy coordination to respond to drug use and strengthening international cooperation.

Further, Guyana has created the National Anti-Narcotics Agency (NANA) which will further enhance the work that the Ministry of Public Security has been doing over the years in gathering data on drug supply and demand through its Drug Information Network (GUYDIN). This data continues to guide the development of evidence based drug policy. Finally, Guyana is one of a few Caribbean countries that have produced an annual DIN report on drug supply and demand and one of 11 Caribbean countries gathering annual data on the characteristics of persons seeking treatment for problematic substance use, utilizing a standardized protocol developed by CICAD.

Those steps and events show that Guyana's fight for a better society free from the scourge of drugs is relentless. Today, as we launch the report of the national household survey, we are adding a new rung to the ladder that takes us closer to our goal. Our gathering today means that the Ministry of Public Security will start sharing the results from this study to key stakeholders. More importantly, it serves as forum for discussion and the generation of policy ideas based on the evidence presented. So you have come here not only to gain some new information and knowledge, but also to get a better embrace of the reality and formulate policies that further enhance the work being carried out by each of you as you confront the consequences of drugs.

With the culmination of the household survey, Guyana joins only three other Caribbean countries that have been able to implement this kind of complex exercise in the last 3 years. It takes a great deal of resources to implement a study of this type, and there are

a great number of moving parts to coordinate. This includes: sensitization; drawing statistical samples; training interviewers; developing schedules; collaboration with stakeholders; respondents; preparing equipment; and media engagement. These are just a fraction of the things that had to be coordinated in order to ensure that this project was successful.

Fortunately we have at our disposal a protocol developed by CICAD that was used to guide the process and we also have persons who brought their skills and experience to the table. The OAS, through CICAD provided the methodology, technical support, funding, training, and overall coordination. The in-country activities were coordinated and implemented by our local consultant Mr. Clement Henry with the support of the Ministry of Public Security in conjunction with local stakeholders. We would like to congratulate the local coordinating team for delivering success one more time.

I believe you will be delighted to know that the 60th Regular Session of CICAD held in November last in Nassau, the Bahamas approved the Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs for 2016 to 2020. This plan allows member states, including Guyana, to reiterate their commitment to continue addressing the drug problem by placing individuals at the core of drug policies and taking into account gender, age and cultural issues, as well as, inputs from civil society and other social actors.

The plan addresses also the new challenges faced by countries, within the framework of the three international drug control conventions and other relevant international instruments. The first paragraph of the plan mentions the need to take an evidence – based approach to dealing with the drug problem. The completion of the household survey helps Guyana to meet this requirement.

The OAS aims to be in the forefront of providing countries with the best available information to make important decisions and design national drug policies. In this

regard, I am pleased to share with you that the household drug survey examined among other things, the opinions and perceptions of the general public on the issue of marijuana regulation. As you know, the regulation of marijuana has been making history. CARICOM has set up a commission to explore regional legislation on marijuana. On its part, Jamaica became the first Caribbean country to decriminalize the possession of a small quantity of cannabis and has made other amendments to their Dangerous Drugs Act as it relates to the use of marijuana for various reasons such as religious, medicinal or recreational use.

In closing, I wish to congratulate the Government of Guyana for the fine work displayed through the Ministry of Public Security. Also, I thank you the stakeholders for standing in unity in the face of the drug challenge. In unity, there is strength. With wisdom and strength, everything becomes possible, even success in the fight against the scourge of drugs.

Thank you and God bless you.