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FORTY-THIRD REGULAR SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

SUMMARY OF THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE SECRETARY GENERAL AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Antigua, Guatemala – June 3, 2013

The conversation between the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza, and civil society was aimed at providing representatives of civil society organizations an opportunity to share their ideas, reflections, and proposals on the central theme of the forty-third regular session of the OAS General Assembly, "For a comprehensive policy against the world drug problem in the Americas," and other issues on the inter-American agenda.

In attendance at the meeting were the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guatemala, Ambassador Luis Fernando Carrera Castro; OAS Assistant Secretary General, Ambassador Albert Ramdin; OAS Secretary for External Relations, Alfonso Quiñónez—who moderated the discussion; and Mr. Jorge Sanín, Director of the OAS Department of International Affairs. More than 270 representatives of 168 civil society organizations from 29 countries took part, in addition to representatives of Member States, Permanent Observers, and the OAS General Secretariat.

The Secretary General welcomed the representatives of civil society and representatives of the Permanent Missions to the OAS present, recalling that this forum with civil society has been held for several years now, and has become one of the most heavily attended meetings held prior to each General Assembly. He expressed interest in hearing the representatives' opinions concerning the central theme of the forty-third regular session of the General Assembly.

Secretary General Insulza acknowledged the presence of a wide array of civil society organizations engaged in issues such as democracy and transparency; people of African descent; persons with disabilities; the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTTTI) community; gender; and children, among others, and said these meetings with civil society had the highest level of participation in the framework of the General Assembly. He noted as well that more than 200 representatives had been invited this time, to discuss the issue of drugs in the Americas, and he invited all to feel free to raise any issue they wished, while respecting the opinions of others.

Following this, Secretary for External Relations Alfonso Quiñónez explained the procedure to be followed during the event, suggesting that the participants begin their statements by referring to the

theme of the forty-third regular session of the General Assembly session so as to leave space for other issues on the inter-American agenda.

Ms. Ana Luisa Jouanne, of *Corporación La Esperanza*, commenting on the 2012 Report on the Drug Problem in the Americas, noted that drugs do more damage than stated in the report, and that the measures taken often lead to increased use, the latter being the lesser evil. She said that use and addiction are a severe problem, more than a lesser evil, given that the potential harm by drugs is on the rise, as is the situation with marijuana which now carries a greater concentration of THC, the substance that causes addiction. She urged OAS Member States to implement prevention policies in primary and secondary schools.

Mr. Pablo Cymerman, of *Intercambios, A.C.*, said the discussion on the drug problem was an outstanding debt the States owe the citizens of the Americas and that the report published by the OAS can provide new perspectives for addressing the issue of drugs in the region, bearing in mind that many of the policies implemented so far have had undesired effects. In view of the foregoing, he stressed that need to separate criminal drug use from safety-related use—respecting human rights most of all—and to commensurately punish drug-related crimes in view of the large number of people imprisoned for minor offenses and slapped with stiffer penalties. He added that it was important to start thinking about regulating the market, the trend toward decriminalization and personal use of marijuana, and promoting policies geared toward peace and respect for human rights.

Mr. Ricardo Soberón, of *Centro de Investigación Drogas y Derechos Humanos*, argued that policies implemented over the last 30 years in the fight against drugs have not been effective, nor have they targeted the markets, thus causing a spiral of violence. He noted as well that they have given rise to two particular phenomena: preventive detention and a prison crisis. In this context, he shared his concern that thousands of inmates in treatment centers and prisons and police stations are arbitrarily accused and, with no defined legal status, contribute to the current prison crisis.

Ms. Mirta Moraga, of *Aireana Grupo por los Derechos de las Lesbianas*, recalling that women were prosecuted as the weakest link in the fight against drug trafficking, emphasized the importance of eradicating impunity for sexual offenses committed inside detoxification centers. She said the discussion on the fight against drugs cannot be detached from full respect for human rights and, in that sense, she insisted that sexual and reproductive rights were human rights as well. She called for guarantees of reproductive and sexual rights for transgender women, lesbians, heterosexuals, and sex workers in situations of socio-economic vulnerability. Referring to what happened to the former President of the Republic of Paraguay, Fernando Lugo, she described it as a disruption in the democratic and constitutional order, and lamented the attitude of the Secretary General, José Miguel Insulza, who, while on a mission in that country, did not meet with human rights organizations wanting to discuss the matter.

Mr. Sergio Widder, of the *Centro Simón Wiesenthal*, thanked the Secretary General for the forum the OAS institutionalized for civil society organizations to be able to share their views with Member States, at the highest level. Referring to the theme of the forty-third regular session of the General Assembly, "For a Comprehensive Policy Against the World Drug Problem in the Americas," he expressed concern about the link between drug trafficking and threats to hemispheric security, noting in that regard the involvement of extra-regional terrorist organizations, like Hezbollah, in trafficking and their involvement in bogus medicinal drugs.

Secretary General José Miguel Insulza took the floor to respond to the first round of civil society interventions. With regard to the Report on the Drug Problem, he explained that the aim was to come up with a human health approach. He said that while drugs themselves were not the main cause of death in the society they certainly have a significant impact on people's lives. He said he felt that the two biggest challenges were the negative impact of drugs on health, and crime issues, and that they need not be tackled together. He further noted the need to experiment and to find new ways to confront drug trafficking; and acknowledged that the marijuana used today is a lot more powerful than it was decades ago. In that connection, citing the example of the United States where two States legalized its use, he argued that it perhaps may be better to have different experiences for a while and evaluate how they work.

He said the OAS did not support nor sponsor any of the scenarios, and that experts with different perspectives would only be brought together to point out what scenarios might be expected, in view of the drug problem. He said the first scenario is based on the idea that it is not the strategy implemented that will solve the drug problem but rather that the institutions concerned have not been effective in implementing it; and that the fourth is an adverse scenario suggesting what could happen if the necessary action were not taken. He stressed the need to coordinate policies that also address the elimination of arms trafficking and violence.

The OAS Secretary General said that more prevention work needed to be done with young people, and he expressed concern about statistics showing that among female adolescents consumption had increased considerably in recent years, almost catching up with men. As regards the idea that the war on drugs had failed, he recalled that tons of drugs had been seized and that in 2010, for example, half of the cocaine produced in Latin America was seized in the region, and that a third of the region's prison population was arrested on drug-related charges.

The Secretary General reiterated that two thirds of the proceeds of drug trafficking stays where it is consumed, while transit points experience higher levels of violence. He added that if addicts were really going to be treated as sick, then they cannot be sent to regular prisons without treatment. He stressed the need to strengthen the treatment centers and hospitals. He also acknowledged the vulnerability of women in this situation and cited the case of a prison in Chile where 80% of those arrested for drugs were young women with no criminal background. They were arrested as small-time carriers (mules) with no criminal background, carrying drugs across the border.

Ms. Mercedes Arzú de Wilson, of the *Asociación Guatemalteca para la Familia de las Américas (AFA)*, remarked that in developed countries the family is in crisis, with morals and principles abandoned over the last 50 years; and with many children lost to drugs, alcoholism, and sexual and other perversions that lead to self-destruction. She was critical of population control programs, as they were imposed by rich countries and produce unstable families, population reduction, promiscuity, and venereal disease, and allow artificial birth control methods using steroids that affect women.

Another civil society representative shared her concern that the report on drugs contained no problem-solving approach that included the family. The family, a vital element of society, was disintegrating, she added, as both a cause and consequence of said problem; and citizens, too, had a responsibility to rehabilitate users. Public policies should therefore take the role of the family into consideration.

Ms. Amanda Villatoro, of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA), remarked that discussing democracy should also include talking about rights, and in that context she underscored the

need for respect for labor union rights to be guaranteed, bearing in mind as well that this is the most unequal region in the world, with the worst violations of those very rights. She pointed to the need to review the 30 years of practicing and implementing the neo-liberal model in the Americas, in order to properly understand why there are extremely weak institutions that are unable to make public policies to prevent and conquer the drug problem. She called for a new development model focused on creating decent work that makes societies more inclusive and States better able to tackle drug trafficking. She also commended the Secretary General on the publishing of the report on drugs.

Mr. Marco Romero, of the *Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (CODHES)*, welcomed the fact that the Report on Drugs has taken into consideration a public health perspective. He commented on the relationship between violence and drug trafficking in Colombia, where internal armed conflict has presented an excellent opportunity to protect illegal economies. He asked the Secretary General and the OAS General Assembly to support the current peace process in Colombia, mindful that an atmosphere of peace is precisely what enables that kind of economy to be better regulated.

Ms. Elizabeth Avila de Avalos, of la *Asociación Ayúdame y Enséñame*, was concerned that the effect, not the cause, of drug problem was being discussed, and that the study left out tobacco and alcohol, which are also very harmful. She said society should work together in the interest of the family and the individual, in order to include vulnerable groups that cannot access education and employment opportunities.

The **Secretary General** addressed the second round of statements by the civil society representatives. He argued that drugs and development were an issue for more in-depth study and that the question of why people use drugs obviously involves the family, and that its causes include the issue of living with alcoholic parents as well as the disintegration of the family. The Secretary General reminded civil society that the report was done based on the idea that the drugs-development connection notwithstanding, resolving issues related to drugs need not wait for all of the development issues to be resolved. He added that violating human rights to pursue drug trafficking causes situations and effects that are even worse than those being tackled, especially in slums where people often defend drug traffickers, whom they see as victims like themselves. There are legal drugs that kill more people than illegal drugs, which is not to say that the latter must all be legalized. He therefore expressed the view that it was important to bear them in mind when preparing reports.

Mr. Benito Baranda Ferrán, of *Fundación Jóvenes por una América Solidaria*, speaking about the Report on the Drug Problem, noted that because of their connection to drug trafficking, tax havens must be eliminated and money laundering countered when making public policies focused on youth and drug abuse prevention. In relation to the family, he stressed the importance of stronger housing policies to prevent social segregation, arguing that without opportunities for education and work, young people find it easier to get involved in drug trafficking. In that regard, he offered the example of Chile, where 600,000 young people were neither studying nor working, and that 10 of the 30 most segregated cities in the world are in that country.

Ms. Debi Amaya Linares, of the *Red Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Mujeres Trans*, said drug-related problems cannot be divorced from human rights-related problems, and that the situation facing transgender women in the region was distressing. She lamented that there was no health protocol specifically for transgender women, given the ravages they suffer because of sexual and reproductive health and because they are raped in prison and are attacked because of their gender.

Another civil society representative agreed with the Secretary General that emphasis should be placed on drug and alcohol abuse prevention policies for school children, and that this problem should be addressed as a public health issue. She also expressed concern about increasing drug use by young women and about its impact on women's mental and reproductive health, and therefore called for stronger prevention measures.

Ms. **Carmen Rosa de León-Escribano, of the *Instituto de Enseñanza para el Desarrollo Sostenible (IEPADES)***, raised the issue of firearms linked to drug trafficking, expressing concern about the death toll it leaves in Central America. She noted that El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras ranked among the countries with the world's top five rates of firearms-related homicides, many of which were in the context of the South-to-North drug trafficking. She stressed the need for OAS Member States to ratify the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials (CIFTA), in order to strengthen gun registration and to trace gun trafficking. She also called on governments to assume shared responsibility, since the drug problem cannot be discussed without linking it to arms trafficking in the region.

Mr. **Luis Fernando Astorga Gatjens, of the *Instituto Interamericano sobre Discapacidad y Desarrollo Inclusivo (IIDII)***, said the OAS Member States had not made enough effort in terms of the commitments undertaken in the Program of Action for the Decade of the Americas for the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities (PAD) (2006-2016). He therefore suggested that the organization promote a second decade to address the needs of people with disabilities, linking it to the efforts being made by the United Nations through the Post-2015 Development Agenda, including persons with disabilities in the global fight against poverty.

Ms. **Graciela Dubrez, of the *Observatorio Internacional de Prisiones de Argentina (OIP)***, praised the Secretary General for his effort, and noted that Argentines owed the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) a debt of honor for its work during the era of military dictatorship as well as with the unfolding of democracy in the Argentine Republic. She shared her concern about current conditions in Argentinean prisons and their problems of overcrowding, torture, and ill-treatment, and about the lack of work and educational opportunities for women and children in situations of vulnerability, who therefore get involved in activities related to drug trafficking. She also called for more treatment centers instead of new prisons being built, in order to bolster the healthcare approach to the drug problem.

The **Secretary General** took the floor to answer the third round of questions from civil society. He noted that unfortunately the levels of violence taking place stemmed from a high level of disregard for the law, with prisons serving as crime schools rather than as rehabilitation institutions for individuals, and with the police often not doing its job, thus creating a breeding ground for drug trafficking. He recalled that in Latin America, one in four young people between 16 and 24 is neither in school nor working and, naturally, would be more likely to be recruited for drug trafficking armies. He recalled as well that vulnerable groups were usually the ones most affected by ill-treatment in prison.

In terms of the relationship between arms trafficking and drug trafficking, he noted that the average homicide rate in Latin America is twice the rate at the global level, and that the rate of gun-related homicides is much higher than in other regions of the world, which shows that the issue of arms trafficking is intrinsically linked to drug trafficking. He said a policy to restrict the indiscriminate flow of firearms stemming from drug money was therefore needed.

With respect to prison conditions, the Secretary General stated that the greatest human rights violations committed in the Americas take place in prisons because more people than they were meant to accommodate are sent there on drug-related charges. He argued that another problem to consider is the overgrowth of our institutions as a factor in the increase in offenses by organized crime.

As regards Colombia, he said the violence there was before drug trafficking, and that it was a phenomenon stemming from the need to fund violence.

On the issue of disability, he said that the decade of disability worked in some countries because of the strength of local institutions, but fell very short of the targets initially proposed and that at the urging of civil society organizations for persons with disabilities the OAS created SEDISCAP in 2006, thanks to a generous contribution from the Government of Panama, to draw up the Convention and plan the decade of disability. He recalled that the only country that has financed SEDISCAP so far was Panama, which he thanked for its efforts on this issue, noting that the OAS was seeking to increase its resources towards strengthening SEDISCAP.

Following the Secretary General's comments, the Secretary for External Relations reminded participants that the floor was open for questions on other issues on the inter-American agenda, besides the central theme of the forty-third regular session of the General Assembly.

Ms. **Gloria Nuñez, of Afroamérica XXI**, underscored how important the sea was for the Garífuna communities of the Atlantic Coast and noted the concern to those communities since this has become a drug trafficking hub with no government controls whatsoever. She added that the same thing happens in border and coastal areas, where people of African descent are often forced to abandon their land because of violence. She therefore called on the relevant authorities in Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras to implement more immigration controls.

Mr. **Eduardo Kohn, of B'nai B'rith International**, thanked the Secretary General for this institutionalized General Assembly forum for dialogue with civil society. He asked the Secretary General what tools and resources could hemispheric organizations provide for tackling the scourge of drugs and terrorism. He also praised the OAS and its General Secretariat for coming to its forty-third regular session of the General Assembly session with due consensus to adopt the Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination, and Related Forms of Intolerance as well as the Inter-American Convention against All Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance.

Mr. **José Henrique Rodrigues Torres, of Associação Juizes para a Democracia**, said drugs were not what was killing and causing harm and loss to society but the policy to wage war on them. It is violent and intolerant, repressive and racist, and violates human rights, weakening democratic institutions. Saying he rejected that policy, he reiterated that implementing it causes inequality, exclusion, and injustice. He also called for the OAS General Assembly to change the security paradigm by adopting a new, human rights-based approach that promotes drug decriminalization and regulation.

Ms. **Patricia Esquivel Font, of the Asociación por el Derecho a Vivir (APROVI)**, mentioned the need to bear in mind the situation faced by women when voluntarily terminating a pregnancy, especially the physical, psychological, and emotional consequences involved. She emphasized that women should be informed of such effects before interrupting their pregnancy. She also requested that a reference study be conducted on violence against mothers.

Mr. Daniel Omar Ceballos, of the *Asociación Civil Consorcio Desarrollo y Justicia*, and the Youth Network of the Americas, expressed his desire to alert the international community to the illegitimacy of the government presided over by Nicolás Maduro Moros in Venezuela, resulting from an election marred by a series of doubts regarding the electoral process. He stated that complaints had been filed with public entities so that an audit could be performed, together with a dialogue over the political crisis currently being experienced in said country. He shared his concern regarding a lack of freedoms, respect for human rights, and the separation of powers in Venezuela, requesting that the OAS apply the Inter-American Democratic Charter as part of the Organization's responsibility to safeguard democracy. After his comments, Mr. Ceballos—together with the other representatives of his organization, Lorent Gómez Saleh and Roderick Navarro; Mr. Pedro Cruz of the *Asociación Civil Mujer y Ciudadanía*; and Mr. Pablo Innecken of the *Foro Permanente de Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil (FPOSC)*—delivered a letter to Secretary General Insulza on the matter, with over 10,000 signatures from institutions and organizations in Venezuela, the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Democracy, and the Youth Network of the Americas.

The **Secretary General** took the floor to answer the questions raised by the civil society representatives.

With regard to the issue of drug trafficking in coastal areas, the Secretary General stated that the links between the drug trafficking routes from Asia to South America and the Caribbean are well-known, but that they are still neglected by the security systems. He added that while naval interdiction has worked better in the Gulf of Mexico than in the southern part of the region, it should be taken into account that drugs are mostly transported overland in the latter zone. He emphasized that the lack of employment in border and/or coastal cities with relatively low populations makes it much easier for drug trafficking to penetrate these areas.

With regard to the comments on the war on drugs and its collateral effects, he noted that one of the scenarios elaborated in the 2012 Report on the Drug Problem approaches this issue from the same perspective as that expressed by the representative of the *Associação Juízes para a Democracia*.

In terms of additional tools or resources that may be allocated to organizations in the Hemisphere in their fight against drug trafficking and terrorism, he made it clear that the OAS sometimes lacks sufficient resources to even carry out all of its mandates, but he also reminded those in attendance that in recent years there has been a greater willingness on the part of banks in the Hemisphere to grant funds to the international community for use in strengthening a public health-based approach to the drug problem.

With regard to the right to life, he commented that he had seen the different signs in the streets of Antigua referring to said right and the Inter-American Conventions pending approval on discrimination, racism, and intolerance. He emphasized that he not only found this to be an important issue that should be brought up, but that the OAS was open to debate, and assured those in attendance that the Organization would tackle said discussion at some point.

With respect to the situation in Venezuela, the Secretary General explained that the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IADC) is an instrument which defines democracy at all levels and in all its different aspects. Thus, any issue examined with regards to democracy in the countries of the OAS, or that is believed to be functioning incorrectly, is most likely covered in one of the articles of the Charter. For example, the issue of development is included therein; as such, it could be requested that the Charter

be applied in the face of the poverty existing in the countries of the region. He then indicated that what the Charter allows for in the form of collective action is limited to cases involving a serious rupture in the constitutional order. Said rupture is usually associated with a coup d'état, and not with other cases which he also considers serious, and which he proposed in the document submitted to the Permanent Council in 2007 and 2011, and discussed during the anniversary of the IADC. He gave the examples such as fraudulent elections, a joint intervention in a media outlet, or the closing of a State power. In his opinion, all of these things could have been included, but they have not been, given that the Member States have not finished discussing the issue.

In terms of electoral matters, he stated that the main concern of the OAS is to act as a trustworthy organization so that all parties may rest assured that in similar situations—whether those involved are leftwing, centrist, or rightwing—the General Secretariat of the OAS will apply the same principles. The Secretary General reminded those present that in Venezuela, a proposal to recount the votes was made and agreed to by both candidates (Maduro and Capriles), and that the National Electoral Board of Venezuela then declared Nicolas Maduro as the winner. The Secretary General then recalled how six years ago, during the presidential elections in Mexico—where the OAS was not present as an observer, just like in the case of Venezuela—one of the candidates won by an even slimmer margin. In that instance, just like now, he explained that there was no reason for the OAS—which is not a supranational body, but rather a multilateral one—to determine election results different from those of the respective national institution which has the legal responsibility to declare the results of its elections.

In reference to Paraguay, the Secretary General noted that the Congress was elected, as was the President, and that he did not agree with referring to said event as a coup d'état. He stated that what happened was a lamentable crisis between the legislative and executive branches of a Member State, where unfortunately the victim was a person whom he did not feel deserved it. With the IADC, he noted, it is not possible to resolve all internal problems of a Member State, and that as Secretary General he is unable to apply a separate standard depending on whether or not he likes the government, because such actions would be counterproductive for the Organization and for everyone in general.

Upon concluding his responses to this round of interventions, the floor was opened once again to the civil society representatives.

Ms. Haydee Elizabeth Lainez Cabrera, of the *Movimiento de Mujeres Orquídeas del Mar*, stated that sex workers have had their rights ignored because they work with their body, and asked that they be addressed as a separate issue from human trafficking. Furthermore, she requested that the OAS recognize sex work as decent work, and noted the Informal Conversation with the Secretary General as a space where civil society may freely express itself as part of the OAS General Assembly.

Ms. Nelly Cortez, of *Afroamérica XXI*, shared the concern of Afro-descendant organizations over the situation of invisibility suffered by those they represented, and the rupture which drug trafficking has caused inside families. She also advocated for increased attention to said communities by the government authorities of the region and greater protection of these communities' rights.

Ms. Zinita Nicholson, of the *Society against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD)*, shared her concerns, stating that there are currently eleven OAS Member States that criminalize consensual homosexual relationships between adults, and asked the Secretary General to explain what actions have been implemented to promote the rights of the LGBTTTI community. She reiterated the fact that the

participation of people from the Caribbean has been limited by the lack of English translation or interpretation at these activities.

Mr. **Salam Gómez, of *Colombia Fundamental***, announced that his organization is currently promoting the creation of the Latin American network of persons with psychosocial disabilities in order to bring attention to their rights. As such, he emphasized the need to raise awareness of the link existing between drugs and psychosocial disabilities.

Ms. **July Betances, of *Colectiva Mujer y Salud***, manifested her indignation over the prolife signs and banners against the Inter-American Conventions on Discrimination outside the entrance to the venue of the forty-third regular session of the General Assembly, as well as those discourses attacking rights and differences. She noted that very few States respect religious freedoms or offer some degree of secularity, and called for the opening of a space for academic reflection which may allow for a regional analysis with the guarantee of secular States.

The **Permanent Representative of Venezuela to the OAS, Ambassador Roy Chaderton Matos**, requested the floor to respond to the comments made by **Mr. Daniel Omar Ceballos of the *Asociación Civil Consorcio Desarrollo y Justicia***, accompanied by the representatives of the Youth Network of the Americas. In response, civil society representatives made a motion for order, reiterating that the Informal Conversation with the Secretary General was a space for the participation of civil society organizations and asking that the meeting continue to be conducted in the same manner as it had been up to that point.

Ms. **Iris Baptista, of the *Instituto de Género, Derecho y Desarrollo (INSGENAR)***, argued that the OAS Member States should revise their current strategy in the war on drugs, which is not aligned with the comprehensive terms of the Declaration of Antigua, Guatemala, and lacks a broad perspective of the problem taking into account the impact thereof on women's rights. She added that the high rates of violence and human rights violations perpetrated against women, such as femicide and forced disappearances in territories affected by drug trafficking, are on the rise, and that the States are obligated to provide itemized data on this matter. She also manifested her concern over the growing institutional weakness of the States, the impunity, corruption, and high levels of distrust in security institutions, which are factors that must be addressed in order to reverse the tide in the drug problem. She added that her organization supports the unrestricted defense of women's sexual and reproductive rights.

Mr. **Sergio Sánchez, of the *Colegio de Médicos de Chile (CMC)***, congratulated the OAS for the change in emphasis of the drug policy taking place within the Organization, stating that it is necessary to establish a drug policy based on health evidence, and not policing or criminalization. In that light, he noted that the Declaration of Antigua has little to say about the damage reduction model, which is a public health policy model. He maintained that low-consumption drug users should not be treated like psychiatric patients or criminals, and there should be specific spaces to care for persons with drug use problems. Furthermore, he advocated for the decriminalization of drug use, citing an example: of the 80,000 people sent to prison for violating drug laws last year in Chile, 60% were persons found transporting a quantity of cannabis from one point to another. As such, he suggested that there should be a risk reduction policy, rather than demand reduction policies, which are only a euphemism for prohibitionism and the war on drugs.

Ms. **Cecilia Ramírez of the *Centro de Desarrollo de la Mujer Negra Peruana (CEDEMUNEP)***, stated that the scourge of drugs is closely linked to the issue of poverty, and referred to the invisibility in which the Afro-descendant communities of the region live. She said that unfortunately, no studies have been conducted on how drugs have torn apart families and how young women are affected by this problem. She shared her concerns with the Secretary General over the lack of monitoring of public policies implemented in the fight against drug trafficking, and the fact that Afro-descendent communities do not have the necessary resources to gain access to rehabilitation programs.

With regard to the matter of psychosocial disabilities, the **Secretary General** stated that it would be productive for the SEDISCAP to take them into consideration. He also talked about the development of the Afro-descendent population, mentioning that discrimination is present throughout the region and that it is absolutely linked as a phenomenon to poverty, which varies greatly by gender and race. He shared his thoughts with the audience, saying that Afro-descendent issues are included in the Inter-American agenda, and that in recent years, progress has been made in promoting the rights of these communities. He also emphasized the presence of civil society organizations representing Afro-descendent groups in events such as this one, noting that their participation helped to increase awareness in the region.

In response to the possibility of the OAS conducting a study on the situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTITI) groups, he mentioned that the Organization would need a mandate allowing it to do so, in order to work on the issue with more in-depth knowledge and background information. He reminded those present that the Unit on the Rights of LGBTI Persons of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is currently monitoring the human rights situation of said groups in the region.

Then, the Secretary General concluded his response by expressing his agreement with the civil society representatives who stated that current drug policies do not always reflect an integral approach including the promotion and protection of women's rights.

Ms. **Johana Esmeralda Ramírez, of the *Red Latinoamericana y el Caribe de Personas Trans (REDLACTRANS)***, thanked the OAS for recognizing transgender persons by their social name, noting that unfortunately in the Americas, people still oftentimes pay with their lives for having a different sexual identity. She celebrated the recognition of gender identity and expression, and the imminent approval of the Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination, and Related Forms of Intolerance, and the Inter-American Convention against All Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance. She said she believed it was necessary for the Member States to ratify these conventions, reminding them that transgender women are not the problem, but rather part of the solution.

Ms. **Mónica Karen Coronado Sotelo, of the *Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán***, said that real democracy cannot exist in the Hemisphere while the violation of women's sexual and reproductive rights, feminicides, hate crimes, deaths due to abortion, pregnancy due to sexual assault, or a lack of access to contraceptive methods continue to occur. She stated that the negative effects of these issues—such as substance dependence, depression, or even death—prevent women from autonomously exercising their sexuality. She added that while some States have taken measures in this regard, there is still a lack of political will to guarantee and promote people's reproductive and sexual rights without distinction.

Mr. **Clement Chartier, of the Metis National Council**, thanked the Secretary General for the support provided over the years in promoting the approval of the Draft American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. He shared the concern of said peoples regarding the lack of progress in the negotiations on the draft Declaration in question and asked the Secretary General to continue lending his support to the negotiation process within the Organization.

Mr. **Pablo Escandarani, of the Congreso Judío Latinoamericano**, thanked the Secretary General for the participation space opened up to civil society as part of the General Assembly. He commented that the honesty and dedication that went into putting together the Report on Drugs was evident, and that many of the issues addressed in the Informal Conversation with the Secretary General were included therein, to a greater or lesser extent. He expressed his concern over the weakening of democratic governments as a result of drug trafficking, as well as the exclusion of religious communities in the scenarios presented in said report, adding that he was optimistic that a better future could be achieved with the contributions of the report.

Mr. **Alberto Ramirez Ordoñez, of COSATE**, informed the Secretary General of his preoccupation regarding what the OAS could do to overcome the lack of freedom of association and collective action mechanisms available to workers in the region. He stressed that this situation is a violation of workers' rights, and that without unions there is no democracy, further stating that there is a lack of political will to ensure compliance with laws that promote such rights.

Mr. **Diego Carrillo, of Cientika**, stated that the impact caused by drugs is not due to the drugs themselves, but rather the legal framework within which black markets are created; and that the governments' strategies have been costly and the weight thereof unfairly distributed, creating a downward spiral of violence. He said that the quantity of drugs seized is a poor metric for evaluating progress made against drug trafficking, since authorities have based this idea on the theory that the more drugs they seize, the lower demand and use will be. He shared the example of Mexico, where for every 100 cultivators, there are 56 people involved in the drug chain. He said that an analysis was needed regarding what would happen with the people immersed in this illegal drug economy if drugs were legalized.

Ms. **Verónica Jeanneth Quintanilla, of the Asociación Cristiana Femenina de El Salvador**, mentioned that schools are becoming a potential site of drug use and sale, making it impossible for youths to fully exercise their sexual rights. She noted that, having seen the intensity of drug use and how it has spread throughout schools, greater attention needs to be paid to drug prevention and the ways in which drug use is related to sexual activity among youths, leading to cases of rape and unwanted pregnancy.

Mr. **Moisés Sanchez, of Fundación Pro Acceso**, mentioned the process for the strengthening of the inter-American human rights system implemented by the OAS, and asked the Secretary General, in relation to the election of candidates to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, about the requisites to be met by the Commissioners in order to implement the reforms agreed upon.

Mr. **Carlos Ponce, of the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Democracy**, expressed his high opinion of the efforts that have been made by the OAS for years to promote this space for dialogue and work together with civil society, something that he noted is inexistent in other regional and international bodies. He recognized that said space would not be possible without the will of the Secretary General, and the Director of International Affairs, Jorge Sanín.

Another civil society representative asked the Secretary General about the actions being taken to protect and promote the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTTTI) groups in the Caribbean.

After the civil society representatives finished their interventions, the **Secretary General** took the floor to answer the final round of questions.

The Secretary General agreed with the representative of the *Colegio de Médicos de Chile (CMC)* with regard to the need to evaluate the benefits of implementing damage reduction mechanisms, for which purpose he suggested contacting the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) in order to analyze the possibility of working jointly on the matter.

In response to the issue of workers' rights, he offered his personal opinion—reminding the audience that this theme had never been discussed as part of the General Assembly, unlike the case of decent work and the importance thereof—emphasizing his view that inequality has diminished as collective bargaining mechanisms have been strengthened.

With regard to the claim by the representative of *Cientika* that the quantity of drugs seized does not help evaluate the progress in the fight against drug trafficking, he stated that he agreed with the argument that it is unhelpful to use the quantity of drugs seized as a metric for the war on drugs. However, he noted that with the increased exchange of intelligence between Member States, a greater quantity of drugs could be seized. He also stated that it was necessary to find ways to reduce demand, given the difficulty of reducing production. The Secretary General shared his view with the civil society representatives that, like many who had addressed the issue of the prevention of and education on drug use and its negative effects, he believed that these were two elements that allowed for progress to be made in the fight against drug trafficking.

In terms of the process for the strengthening of the inter-American human rights system, he noted that the Forum of candidates eligible for the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) which took place as part of the meeting of the Permanent Council of the OAS, held on May 1, 2013, was transmitted live, including the candidates' answers to questions from the States regarding how they envisioned said process.

Regarding indigenous peoples, he said that unfortunately this year there was no round of negotiations to promote the Draft Declaration due to a lack of resources. In reference to the criminalization of homosexuality in some of the countries in the region, he emphasized the importance of approving the two Conventions, stating that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights continuously monitors this problem.

Secretary General Insulza stated that he believes democracy is a process made up of advances and setbacks, and that this process is not linear; a country does not have more democracy today and less tomorrow. He cited the political scientist Norbert Lechner, who maintained that the perfect democracy is a line on the horizon, and as we get closer, the line seems to grow more distant. He also commented that there are currently issues in the Americas that run the risk of converting into a deconstruction of democracy. A society's deep-seated discrimination turns it into a caste system, without possibilities for social mobility. On the other hand, organized crime is a threat to democracy, because such organizations refuse to obey the laws of society and establish their own rules and laws. He added that there must be dialogue in a society, and that mechanisms where social organizations fail to establish chains of trust,

and where those with different opinions and ideas cannot converse, negotiate, engage in discussion, and improve their relationships with one another are not true democracy.

Finally, the Secretary General thanked the civil society representatives for their interventions and brought the meeting to a close.