

**PREPARED REMARKS FOR  
ATTORNEY GENERAL MICHAEL B. MUKASEY  
AT THE  
OPENING OF OAS REMJA VII  
Washington, DC  
Tuesday, April 29, 2008**

**Venue: OAS**

**Audience: Ministers of Justice and Attorney Generals of the  
OAS Member States**

**Length: 10 minutes**

**Press: Open**

**AO: Matt Friedrich**

**Thank you, Mr. Secretary General, for your opening remarks. And thank you as well for hosting us here in this magnificent building – which physically manifests the firm foundation upon which the Organization of American States rests, and the substantial framework that makes possible our discussions today.**

**And to you, dear colleagues, my thanks for having taken the time to journey here for REMJA VII, in order to join in this ongoing, and essential, dialogue of Ministers of Justice and Attorney Generals.**

**I am proud to have this opportunity to meet with you. We come from 34 different countries, with 34 different legal systems. But we also come united by a single goal: to seek to secure, through the Rule of Law, the security of our citizens. And it is part of the genius of the OAS that it recognizes that this goal can be accomplished only when we work together.**

**We build today and tomorrow on the excellent work done by, and under, the Past Presidencies of the REMJA – most recently those of the Dominican Republic and of Mexico. It is thus appropriate to begin by noting just a few examples of the**

**work that has been, or is being, done to fulfill the Conclusions and Recommendations of REMJA VI.**

- **The Hemispheric Plan of Action Against Transnational Crime has been completed, and adopted by the Permanent Council of the OAS.**
- **Working with the leadership of the REMJA Group of Governmental Experts on Cybercrime, and host country experts, the Computer Crimes Section of the US Department of Justice has participated in three regional workshops – in Brazil, Costa Rica, and Barbados -- on computer investigations and forensics; these workshops have been attended by investigators and prosecutors from 31 member states. Additional regional workshops are planned this year for Trinidad and Tobago, and Colombia.**
- **Through the work of the REMJA Working Group on Mutual Assistance and Extradition, and of the Central Authorities and Other Experts in these areas, we have continued to explore how we can improve our cooperation, including through the Hemispheric Information Exchange Network for Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters and Extradition.**

- **Looking to the future, Our Prison and Penitentiary Experts will be meeting in Chile, while our Forensic Specialists will be meeting in the Dominican Republic.**

**These are important accomplishments of REMJA, which we will discuss at greater length when we address tomorrow our own Conclusions and Recommendations for REMJA VII. I highly commend the critical work of our experts.**

**But equally important to REMJA is the opportunity that it provides us for dialogue – for the chance to hear from each other what criminal justice issues we each face, and how we might work together to assist each other in meeting those issues. Our topic today is Hemispheric Trends and Legal and Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters – including mutual legal assistance, extradition, and asset seizure.**

**For the purposes of structuring our Dialogue today, we respectfully have suggested six questions as starting points for discussion:**

1. **What are the significant trends in transnational criminal activity that you have observed in the region?**

- 2. 2. Are you seeing increased criminal activity by organized groups?**
- 3. What particular challenges in the areas of money laundering, and narcotics and arms trafficking, do you face, and what initiatives have you taken to address them?**
- 4. What has been your experience with existing mechanisms of extradition and mutual legal assistance in combating transnational organized crime?**
- 5. Do you find, in practice, that your domestic laws are sufficient to effectuate the extradition of fugitives to and from other countries?**
- 6. Have you taken steps to modernize your domestic laws regarding money laundering, asset forfeiture, and bank secrecy in order to combat transnational criminal activity?**

**With your indulgence, let me conclude my Opening Remarks, by answering the first of these questions from the US perspective – what are the significant criminal trends we are**

**seeing? One of the most significant trends we have seen in the United States is the rise of international organized crime. International organized crime poses a greater challenge to law enforcement than did the traditional mafia, in many respects. And the geographical source of the threat is not the only difference. The degree of sophistication is also markedly different.**

**Some of the most significant international organized criminals are infiltrating our own strategic industries, and those of other countries in this Hemisphere and around the world. They are capable of creating havoc in our economic infrastructure. These international criminals pose real national security threats to all our countries.**

**In the past we understood the basics of international organized crime, but we lacked an overall perspective on how the pieces fit together. Therefore, the U.S. Department of Justice and other federal agencies recently conducted a comprehensive assessment of international organized crime.**

**First, we learned that organized crime, in addition to being as varied and dangerous as ever, has a remarkable ability to**

**adapt to changing conditions. As a result, the challenge we face with the new breed of organized criminals is quite different from the one we faced a generation or two ago. They are more sophisticated, they are richer, they have greater influence over government and political institutions worldwide, and they are savvier about using the latest technology, first to perpetrate and then to cover up their crimes.**

**These new groups of organized criminals are far more involved in our everyday lives than many people appreciate. They touch all sectors of our economy, dealing in everything from cigarettes to oil; clothing to pharmaceuticals. These criminals invest some of the millions they make from illegal activities in the same publicly traded companies as we hold in our pension plans. They exploit the internet and peddle their scams on eBay, and they are responsible for a significant chunk of the spam email we get. Indeed, the internet is tailor-made for organized crime--it's anonymous, largely untraceable, and can provide instant communication for a far-flung network of crooks.**

**These groups are run like global corporations; they use sophisticated financial operations. They may exploit legitimate**

**banking systems in our countries to launder money, or engage in other financial crimes like insurance fraud. The criminals operating these schemes are willing to move money for anyone who needs to hide the source, ownership, or destination of the funds--no questions asked. They corrupt banking officials and exploit lax anti-money-laundering protections around the world to inject illicit funds into the global money stream. By all estimates, such schemes move billions of dollars every year through U.S. financial institutions.**

**Other threats identified in our assessment include manipulation of securities markets; corrupting public officials, globally; and using violence as a basis for power. These are the hallmarks of international organized crime in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That is what we are up against.**

**So what are we doing about it? Last week, I announced a comprehensive law enforcement strategy to address international organized crime. This strategy – which complements our related strategies for attacking narcotics cartels and gangs – sets out four priority areas of action against international organized crime.**



**First, we have to target the biggest organized crime threats, just as we've done successfully in targeting the worst of the worst transnational drug cartels. We will develop a high-priority list of people and organizations that pose the greatest threat, and then focus our resources on them.**

**Second, we have to marshal information from all available sources--law enforcement, the intelligence community, the private sector, and most importantly you, our international partners—so we can identify and draw connections among the groups.**

**Third, we have to use every tool at our disposal. This means we will step up what we are already doing with our international partners to get these criminals wherever they hide. International borders pose no hindrance to criminals, so we're making sure those borders do not pose an obstacle to effective enforcement.**

**Finally, we have to develop aggressive strategies for dismantling entire criminal organizations and removing their leadership.**

**But we can do this only in partnership with you. We want to help design a new program, and forge even closer working relationships with you. For the sake of future generations, this is both a noble and a vital goal, and I am proud to be able to pursue it with all of you, the leaders on justice issues in this Hemisphere.**

**That, then, is a short overview of what we see as an important crime trend. But now it is time for you, my colleagues, to give your own views on the critical crime trends we face together. Accordingly, allow me to conclude my Opening Remarks by thanking you again for coming here today, and by formally opening the Dialogue of Ministers and Attorneys General.**