

Speech

Organization of American States



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THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
OPENING OF THE AD HOC GROUP MEETING ON
TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME
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I would like to welcome you all, distinguished and knowledgeable representatives of the Ad Hoc Group on Transnational Organized Crime. Like many other introductions, I will begin with a quote:

"Today, nations are struggling against increases in crime . . . fast means of travel available to criminals as well as their utter disregard for boundary lines make active co-operation between law enforcement agencies the world over a prime necessity. Unity and mutual co-operation will serve as law enforcement's greatest aids in defeating crime on all fronts."

These words are from 1947, part of a statement made by J. Edgar Hoover. The challenge of organized crime is clearly not new.

Elements of the criminal world have worked together throughout history. Drug traffickers, money launderers, arms traffickers, promoters of illegal gambling, extortion, fraud, and prostitution, have all too frequently been interlinked. Terrorists most recently joined this roll of dishonor, with results as terrifying as the Twin Towers or the horrific bombings in Madrid just last week. These problems show that links have deepened and become more sophisticated with the acceleration of Globalization. The ease of communications provided by new technologies, including the internet, and the faster and cheaper and exponentially increasing volumes of people and goods in movement further facilitates such misdeeds.

Organized crime uses an extraordinary range of activities to generate illegal income -- from petty crimes, kidnap-for-ransom, trafficking in persons, front companies, money laundering, to drug trafficking. Drug trafficking is by far the most profitable source of revenue -- this is perhaps the reason for the increasing occurrence of drug-for-arms deals, where drug traffickers buy weapons to protect their trade, and arms merchants are only too happy to be paid with deeply discounted illicit drugs, rather than cash. According to the U.S. government's Office of National Drug Control Policy, citizens of the United States alone spend an estimated \$64 billion on illegal drugs annually.

In addition to the direct harmful effects that these criminal activities have on our societies, organized crime also poses a clear threat to governability in the Americas. Drug traffickers, arms traffickers, and persons engaged in organized crime are some of the most important propagators of corruption in their often successful attempts to bribe businesses, police, customs, and other government officials to look the other way

It would be much easier for us if these varied criminal activities could be viewed as if they were all part of a single cohesive problem. Were we moralists, preachers, or single-issue politicians we might thunder with Hoover simplifying and talking about right and wrong and the virtues of automatic unity and solidarity. The fact is that we are not even all citizens of the same country. We must work within vastly different political and legal systems, often with great disparities in the resources at our disposal. To be effective, our strategies for addressing crime must take account of our variety as well as our own differences and that of the criminals we fight. Some criminal operations are tightly interwoven into the fabric of the society in which they operate, and their impact is largely hidden to the casual eye. Other criminal organizations are more visible, and are more likely to rely on violence to facilitate their operations.

Clearly we also know that organized crime groups rarely act within the borders of a single state. Many, in fact, have a decidedly global view of their activities. This means that to combat them effectively we must join a multilateral effort. We must develop common understandings and rules of our own to match theirs. The findings of the CICAD Questionnaire reveal that we do not yet have a common understanding of the definition of organized crime.

Over the course of the next three days, you will be building on the important steps taken at the First Inter-American Meeting on Cooperation Mechanisms against Organized Crime, held in Mexico City last October.

There is an urgent need for research, policy development, law reform and education in the multiple aspects of organized crime. Organized criminals seek out countries known to have less effective regulatory and enforcement systems. You will be hearing from a number of representatives on specific topics, and you will see, I am sure, that a country that does not have adequate defenses is at risk and may cause risk to other countries. As perhaps never before, the policies and enforcement capabilities of any one country have direct consequences on its neighbors, and on the global balance of cooperation against crime.

CICAD has a wealth of experience in developing sound hemispheric plans for cooperation against drug trafficking and related crimes, which I suspect is a large reason for your participation here today. I urge you to think through and begin the process of drafting a plan of action for hemispheric cooperation against organized crime. Such a plan could be presented for consideration and approval to the 35th Regular Session of CICAD.

Possible model regulations for fighting organized crime, special research techniques, cooperation mechanisms, and identifying and designating the effective national points of contact are all among the outcomes that we can hope to look forward to.

A footnote on Haiti: By looking at the table, I notice that there is not representative from Haiti among you. As David Beall said at the beginning, participation is crucial. The Prime Minister of Jamaica, Chair of CARICOM, has been a persistent advocate of the inclusion of Haiti. Haiti's greatest problem is its isolation; and this isolation is now threatening us. You have a better chance of defeating organized crime for the next ten or fifteen years, precisely because of your cooperation and participation in this Ad Hoc Group. I say ten or fifteen years because this sort of fight takes time and it takes time for results to show.

These are important ideas to keep in mind and some first steps to begin to address this serious threat to our societies and our civilization. I wish you success.

Thank you.

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