

Speech

Organization of American States



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ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
OPENING THE THIRD DRAFTING SESSION OF THE
GOVERNMENTAL EXPERT GROUP OF THE MULTILATERAL
EVALUATION MECHANISM (MEM)
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Good morning:

It is a great pleasure for me to open this session of the Governmental Expert Group (GEG) of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM), which is to complete the Third Evaluation Round.

2005 is a significant year for the MEM because the two bodies that gave it life are to meet. The Summit of the Americas, which in 1998 took the decision to create the MEM, will hold its fourth meeting in November in Argentina. And the Intergovernmental Working Group that developed the MEM process will meet to prepare the Fourth Evaluation Round.

The focus of the Mar del Plata Summit will be on poverty, economic growth and the need for employment generation. The production, trafficking and use of illegal drugs has negative consequences for all three: its illusion of wealth is limited to a shameful few, and fleeting to boot; it undermines the rule of law without which good governance and productive investment cannot work; and its job creation is inherently unsustainable.

The MEM was mandated by the 1998 Summit of the Americas and has been one of the most successful and important of all Summit decisions. Through the MEM, CICAD has been able to develop common standards to evaluate factors such as the impact of drug abuse, transnational organized crime, corruption and money laundering, all of which significantly affect the economic well-being of society and the security of its citizens. Responding to the last Summit's Plan of Action, CICAD established a system to estimate the human, social and economic cost of the drug problem. The cost project will conclude its pilot phase this year and its findings will be presented to the Heads of State and Government of the Americas in Mar del Plata.

But the big news is the MEM itself. Thirty four countries committed to do something that had never been done before: to conduct a multilateral peer review of each other's drug control efforts. In a remarkably short period after the Summit decision, 34 countries that are members of the OAS had agreed on a first set of indicators, and on the process, timetables and guidelines that together comprise the multilateral evaluation mechanism or MEM.

The MEM today commands the support of all OAS member states. Nearly three evaluation rounds have been completed, 138 evaluation reports published and over 800 actions recommended to countries. These recommended actions range from the establishment of drug prevention programs to the control of chemical diversion in the Hemisphere. The Second round agreed on 325 recommendations of which at latest report 25% had been completed, 57% were being implemented, and only 18% had yet to receive the attention they deserved.

The recommendations are at the heart of the MEM. At this Session, you will be completing the recommendations of the Third Round.

The more relevant and clearly stated the recommendations, the more useful they will be for those who must translate them into work plans and strategies to confront the many challenges our countries face. And when they are implemented, they will have a positive economic, social and political impact

throughout the Hemisphere.

For these very reasons, I urge you to choose your recommendations carefully. Too many recommendations can disperse our energies; too few and we will miss the opportunity to stretch the multilateral envelope.

Since the last evaluation round, there have been 13 ratifications of Inter-American Conventions related to drug trafficking, including firearms, corruption and mutual legal assistance and 22 ratifications of similar UN conventions. This strengthening legal framework has facilitated the establishment of financial intelligence units, improved money laundering controls, and improved data collection.

I want to emphasize at this point that the successes depend on the participation of all member states.

We should all be encouraged that even countries which have faced natural disasters of enormous proportions are demonstrating their continuing commitment to the MEM. I refer particularly to Grenada which suffered unprecedented hurricane devastation last year, and also to Guyana which recently experienced a flood disaster that affected 400,000 persons in the first three weeks. I am pleased to welcome national experts from both countries to this meeting, and to recognize the first time participation from a Guyanese expert in the MEM process.

This said, there is still a need for better promotion of the MEM in all member states. The hemisphere needs to become more aware of the utility of this multilateral annual evaluation report and of its value as a policy tool for drug control efforts.

The MEM is a catalyst for multilateral cooperation and assistance. Its methodology creates a learning and sharing experience among experts that puts countries in a win/win situation and strengthens the hemisphere.

When I spoke to the opening session of the thirty-sixth CICAD regular session, I highlighted the serious budgetary and financial constraints facing not only the OAS and CICAD as a Commission, but also many member states. The reality of a declining budget obliges all of us to use available resources as efficiently as possible.

One result of the recently completed restructuring of the OAS General Secretariat is that CICAD now forms part of a new Department of Multidimensional Security. The Special Conference on Security held in Mexico City in 2003 defined the security challenge we face as multidimensional and specifically identified transnational organized crime, global drug trafficking, corruption, asset laundering, illicit trafficking in weapons, and the connections among them; as well as trafficking in persons, among others, as threats to regional and national security.

I am confident that in the years ahead, as the quality and relevance of OAS work becomes increasingly evident, we will receive the increases in financial and political support we need to execute mandates to the standards we all desire and which the peoples of the Americas deserve.

Each GEG meeting represents a significant investment in manpower and services. The volume of work before you is great and the time to accomplish it is limited. In addition to the final national evaluation reports, the hemispheric evaluation report is in itself a unique contribution.

Once you make this final phase of the Round a success, the Inter-Governmental Working Group will review the MEM in its entirety to ensure the best possible Fourth Evaluation Round. Even so, the MEM will remain dependent on the political will of countries to provide accurate data and relevant information, and the experts will need to carry out their responsibilities with regard to individual Working Groups.

I wish you a very fruitful meeting and look forward to learning of the outcome of your sessions.

Thank you very much.

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