DRAFT REPORT
GROUP OF EXPERTS ON MARITIME NARCOTRAFFICKING
I. BACKGROUND

The Group of Experts on Maritime Narcotrafficking constitutes a forum for the Western Hemisphere to exchange information and expertise in countering drug trafficking in the maritime domain, fostering regional cooperation and publishing manuals, best practices guidelines, and protocols on the topic. During the sixty-eighth regular session of CICAD, held in Bogotá, D.C., December 9-11, 2020, the Commission elected the Dominican Republic and Peru to serve as Chair and Vice-chair, respectively, of the Expert Group on Maritime Narcotrafficking for 2021.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD, by its Spanish language acronym), through the Supply Reduction Unit (CICAD/SRU), hosted the Group of Experts Meeting on Maritime Narcotrafficking on September 13-14, 2021, online via the Kudo platform.

The meeting featured the participation of 119 experts, coming from 26 Member States: Argentina, The Bahamas, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, United States and Uruguay; one (1) OAS Permanent Observer: Netherlands; as well as three (3) international and regional organizations: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Regional Security System (RSS) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL).

As established in the schedule of activities (MAR/AGE.1/21), presentations and discussions focused on the following topics:

- Riverine drug trafficking in the Americas;
- National experiences to counter riverine drug trafficking;
- Multilateral Maritime Counterdrug Interdiction Operation “Orion”: best practices and lessons learned;
- The Importance of the Agreement Concerning Cooperation in Suppressing Illicit Maritime and Air Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in the Caribbean (San Jose Treaty, 2003);
- Maritime security and control of drug trafficking routes in the Caribbean basin.

III. MINUTES

Monday, September 13

Opening Remarks:

- **Ambassador Adam Namm**, Executive Secretary, Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD, by its Spanish language acronym), Organization of American States (OAS)
- **Rear Admiral Henry Antonio Guzmán Taveras**, Deputy Director of the Navy of the Dominican Republic, and Chair of CICAD’s Group of Experts on Maritime Narcotrafficking
Presentation: Riverine Drug Trafficking in the Americas
- Ignacio García Sigman, Supply Reduction Unit, OAS/CICAD

Mr. Ignacio García Sigman made a presentation on the main features of riverine drug trafficking in the Americas, highlighting the importance of rivers in the different links of the supply chain (that is, cultivation, production, trafficking and illicit commercialization of drugs). Next, the speaker mentioned the main type of vessels and other aspects of the modus operandi used by organized crime, especially in terms of two pre-existing trends that were enhanced during the COVID-19 pandemic: on the one hand, the illicit trafficking of cocaine through the Paraguay-Paraná Waterway corridor and, on the other hand, the use of narco-submarines, especially on the route that connects South America and Europe. Mr. Sigman concluded his presentation by offering suggestions that would allow OAS member states competent agencies to counter riverine drug trafficking and promote cooperation at the national and cross-border levels.

Presentations/Discussion: National Experiences to Counter Riverine Drug Trafficking in the Americas
- Captain Luiz Roberto Gabriele, Navy, Brazil
- Alex Javier Rodríguez, Chief, Strategic Intelligence Department, National Counterdrug Secretariat (SENAD, by its Spanish language acronym), Paraguay
- Lieutenant Commander José Luis Pérez Carranza, Chief, Department of Development in the Maritime Domain, Secretariat of the Navy (SEMAR by its Spanish language acronym)

Moderator: Commander Amilcar Velázquez Vargas, Navy, Perú, Vice-Chair of CICAD’s Group of Experts on Maritime Narcotrafficking

Captain Luiz Roberto Gabriele made a presentation on drug trafficking by river in Brazil, where this phenomenon is has increased by the high levels of cocaine production registered in recent years in the region, and by the expansion of demand, especially in Europe. Related to this, the presenter indicated that the main destinations of drug shipments that depart from Brazil are the Netherlands and Belgium and, to a lesser extent, Spain and Germany. Likewise, he highlighted the importance of containers as the most frequently used method of transportation. Additionally, Mr. Gabriele pointed out that the Amazon basin and the Paraguay-Paraná Waterway are the main riverways exploited by drug traffickers. He ended his presentation by presenting best practices used by the Brazilian Navy to counter this threat. Among them, he emphasized the importance of inter-agency operations, the strengthening of security in the main ports of the country, the use of technology and the exchange of counterdrug intelligence.

Mr. Alex Javier Rodríguez highlighted that the Paraguay-Paraná Waterway is the main river corridor used by drug traffickers operating in Paraguay and explained what are the main factors that promote drug trafficking by river in the country. For example, he mentioned the proximity to countries where cocaine is manufactured, weak controls in border areas, the impossibility of providing full coverage in ports, and the lack of technology to intercept illicit cargo. Additionally, Mr. Rodríguez referenced some recent achievements that were accomplished thanks to various measures that are being adopted at the national level to counter this problem, such as increased container control, the incorporation of new personnel, the use of technological tools, cooperation and exchange of information with counterdrug agencies in other countries, the signing of SENAD
agreements with other governmental agencies - such as the National Police - and collaboration with the private sector.

**Lieutenant Commander José Luis Pérez Carranza** began his presentation by specifying the maritime drug trafficking routes that have been detected from South America to Mexico and to Central America through the Southeast Pacific and Caribbean routes. He also presented the routes that link the Southern Cone, Central America and the Caribbean with Europe, either directly or with a previous stopover in West Africa. In addition, he emphasized the “contamination” of containers as one of the main modalities used for the illicit traffic of large quantities of drugs by sea and river to his country, as well as the use of go-fast boats, semi-submersibles and recreation and fishing boats. In concluding, the speaker highlighted the main challenges that control authorities face, for example, due to the increasing use of satellite phones by organized crime.

**Presentation/Discussion:** Multilateral Maritime Counterdrug Interdiction Operation “Orion”: best practices and lessons learned

- **Captain Juan Carlos Jimenez Howard,** Director, Counterdrug Division, Navy, Colombia

Before the presentation, Rear Admiral Camilo Ernesto Segovia Forero welcomed participants and highlighted the importance of CICAD’s Group of Experts on Maritime Narcotrafficking, not only for Colombia but for all countries in the hemisphere. Furthermore, he encouraged countries to participate in multilateral campaigns, such as Orion, to counter maritime drug trafficking.

**Captain Juan Carlos Jimenez Howard** presented the Orion Naval Campaign, which constitutes the largest multilateral operation against drug trafficking in the world, mentioning the countries that participated in the seventh campaign, the resources used, and the agencies involved. The objectives of the Orion Naval Campaign revolve around the disruption of drug trafficking supply chains, raising awareness of agencies and institutions on the shared responsibility in the fight against drug trafficking, and strengthening international cooperation. Captain Jimenez shared the results of the Campaign, highlighting that during 285 days of operation more than 400 tons of cocaine and 158 tons of marihuana were seized, more than 1,700 individuals were arrested and more than 14 million dollars were seized. Finally, the presenter concluded his presentation by sharing best practices and lessons learned in the field of maritime counterdrug interdiction.

**Tuesday, September 14**

**Presentations/Discussion:** The Importance of the Agreement Concerning Cooperation in Suppressing Illicit Maritime and Air Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in the Caribbean (San Jose Treaty, 2003)

- **Carlos Alvarado Valverde,** Legal Advisor, National Coastguard Service, Costa Rica
- **Lieutenant Commander Freek Marchal,** Staff Officer Legal Affairs, Commander Netherlands Forces in the Caribbean (COMNLCARIB), Ministry of Defense, Royal Netherlands Navy, The Netherlands
- **Ian Ralby,** Consultant, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

**Moderator:** **Giovanni Snidle,** Senior Coordinator, U.S. Mission to the Organization of American States, United States
Mr. Carlos Alvarado Valverde began his intervention by making a historical overview of the San Jose Treaty and emphasized the constant capacity of criminal organizations to adapt and change their modus operandi to traffic narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. As indicated by the presenter, the main objective of the treaty is to increase collaboration between the States parties to ensure that suspicious vessels and aircraft are detected, identified, continuously monitored and, if evidence of involvement in illicit trafficking is found, they can be detained, and competent authorities are able to enforce the law. Finally, he encouraged the ratification of the treaty as a regional tool to counter illicit drug trafficking by sea and air in the Caribbean, in accordance with the International Law of the Sea and other applicable conventions.

Lieutenant Commander Freek Marchal presented on the practical implications of the Cooperation Agreement for the Suppression of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in the Caribbean, indicating that it has been signed by thirteen countries and that nine of these have also ratified it. Next, the presenter made reference to certain myths in relation to the treaty, indicating, for example, that it does not limit the sovereignty of countries, but rather facilitates mutual assistance based on explicit consent, generic consent or consent with time limits (that is, based on conditions). Additionally, Mr. Marchal explained some practical uses of this legal tool and shared a hypothetical case in which several countries managed to detect and intercept a vessel carrying illegal drugs in the Caribbean Basin, after using several prerogatives allowed by the San Jose Treaty.

Mr. Ian Ralby mentioned the importance of the San Jose Treaty in fostering cooperation, simplifying the interdiction of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, and increasing the capacity of the security forces. According to the presenter, the treaty offers the Parties different tools that allow them to collaborate in the field of maritime counterdrug interdiction without incurring any obligation. Additionally, he indicated that in addition to drug trafficking there are other growing threats in the field of maritime security that could be addressed multilaterally based on the San Jose Treaty, such as human smuggling, illicit trafficking of weapons and fuel, as well as acts of piracy, illegal fishing, and environmental crimes. The UNODC representative concluded his intervention by encouraging countries to sign and ratify this regional agreement and, in addition, he encouraged dialogue on how to strengthen cooperation and implement other commitments that countries acquired, for example, within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

Presentations/Discussion: Maritime Security and Control of Drug Trafficking Routes in the Caribbean Basin
- LT (CG) Rolerick Sobers, Regional Maritime Officer, Regional Security System (RSS)
- Commander Derrick Ferguson, Staff Intelligence Officer, Royal Bahamas Defense Force, The Bahamas
- Lieutenant Commander Akhenaton Isaac, Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, Trinidad and Tobago
- Captain Feliciano Perez Carvajal, Navy of the Dominican Republic

Moderator: Captain Rudy Cruz Montero, Navy of the Dominican Republic

LT (CG) Rolerick Sobers began his intervention by offering participants an overview of the Regional Security System (RSS), including its history, background, mission, purpose, role, and functions. He then gave a presentation on maritime security and the control of drug trafficking routes in the Caribbean Basin,
highlighting the illicit trafficking of cocaine and marihuana in go-fast boats, in containers and on fishing vessels. In addition, he mentioned that most of the drug is destined for the North American and European markets, while smaller quantities are trafficked to Asia through the Panama Canal. The speaker also emphasized the importance of RSS to counter maritime drug trafficking through the coordination of efforts, the strengthening of capacities of counterdrug agencies and the execution of joint activities between countries.

Commander Derrick Ferguson presented on the maritime threats that affect the Bahamas, highlighting drug trafficking, illicit arms and migrant trafficking, illegal fishing, and the possible use of the sea by terrorist groups. Among the factors that enhance these threats, the speaker referred to its geographical location, its extensive sea and river routes and its archipelagic nature (which includes more than 700 islands). Additionally, he explained that criminal organizations use stolen vessels to carry out the smuggling of people and drugs, whose main destination is the United States and, secondly, Europe. Finally, Commander Ferguson mentioned the main initiatives that are being carried out in the country to counter the maritime threats he referred to previously, such as the 2021 Maritime Security Plan of the Royal Bahamas Defense Force, the program of coastal radars and the national program of unmanned aircraft, among others.

Next, Lieutenant Commander Akhenaton Isaac presented the regional narcotics smuggling routes in the Caribbean Basin and made reference to the different types of vessels used by traffickers to smuggle drugs into and out of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Isaac provided participants with figures related to seizures, mentioning, for example, that cocaine seizures doubled (compared to 2019). Along with drug trafficking, Mr. Isaac highlighted that in recent months there has been an increase in cases of human trafficking and smuggling of goods. Finally, the speaker urged participants to consider the formal establishment of Memorandums of Understanding or agreements between counterdrug agencies, as well as to increase the exchange of information and intelligence to maximize available resources and achieve more effective results.

Finally, Captain Feliciano Pérez Carvajal indicated that drug traffickers use the Caribbean region to illicitly receive, store and distribute drug shipments due to its strategic location between the production centers in South America and the large consumer markets in North America. The speaker referred to the main modalities used by drug-criminal groups, among which are the use of merchant ships, fishing boats, artifacts attached to vessels, altered containers and go-fast boats for the traffic of drugs in the region by maritime means. He then highlighted some initiatives implemented in the Caribbean to control maritime drug trafficking, such as the exchange of intelligence and the use of patrol boats, helicopters, and other aircraft. Finally, he made reference to the importance of information exchange, the use of technology and training, as well as the benefits that come from joint operations.

Closing Remarks:
- Rafael Parada, Chief, Supply Reduction Unit, OAS/CICAD

Mr. Rafael Parada made a summary of the main topics discussed during the meeting, emphasizing the emerging trends and challenges posed by drug trafficking by sea and river in the region, as well as good practices that allow strengthening the effectiveness of drug control agencies. In this context, he highlighted the importance of multilateral maritime counterdrug interdiction operations, such as the Orion Campaign,
and of international regulatory instruments such as the San Jose Treaty. In addition, he referred to the lack of information on riverine drug trafficking in the Americas and indicated that CICAD’s Supply Reduction Unit will gather more information from member states on the subject, including pre-existing challenges that escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Mr. Parada indicated the inclusion of riverine drug trafficking control issues in upcoming training and technical assistance activities, to increase counterdrug agencies’ capacity to effectively monitor, detect, and investigate the illicit production and trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.