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MULTILATERAL EVALUATION MECHANISM

REPORT OF THE GOVERNMENTAL EXPERT GROUP (GEG)
Distinguished Commissioners, delegates, and government officials of this seventieth regular session of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), I greet you on behalf of the members of the Governmental Expert Group (GEG) of the eighth round of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM), in my capacity as General Coordinator.

As you know, the MEM process was modified in its eighth round to focus on the evaluation of specific thematic areas during its first three years and a comprehensive evaluation in its fourth and final year. In this first year of evaluation, the evaluation of the area called "Measures of Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Support" was carried out, focusing on the issues related to drug demand reduction.

For this year's evaluation, each member state designated its experts, thus forming the GEG. Of these designations, a little more than half corresponded to experts new to the process. Unlike past rounds, and due to the thematic nature of the evaluation, this time the countries were asked to designate professionals specialized in drug demand reduction. As a result, 33 countries participated, as one country did not participate fully in the evaluation. Moreover, 32 member states designated experts, as one country did not designate a representative to the GEG but did send its information to be evaluated.

The work of the GEG began with a preparatory meeting, which, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was held virtually, from May 26-27, 2021, in which all the designated governmental experts participated. At this meeting, the main characteristics of the MEM process and the particularities of the eighth round were presented, and experiences and good practices were shared by experts who had participated in previous rounds. The achievements of this meeting included: organizing the group's drafting work, reviewing their roles and responsibilities, distributing the respective assignments to each expert, and defining the calendar of activities for 2021.

Additionally, during this meeting, Ms. Betty Hunte, designated expert from Barbados, and myself, Jenny Fagua, from Colombia, were elected Deputy General Coordinator and General Coordinator, respectively, marking a milestone in the history of the GEG, being the first time that two women lead this group.

In early June, the narrative documents based on the responses to the evaluation questionnaires, previously analyzed by the MEM's independent technical consultants, were distributed to the
GEG experts. The consultants presented their observations and suggestions through “technical notes to the GEG” to be considered by the experts. It should be noted that this is the first time that the mechanism has had this type of support for the technical review, thanks to the changes made to the eighth round process.

With these inputs, the governmental experts drafted preliminary country reports, which were duly translated and distributed to all the experts in preparation for the first GEG plenary meeting.

The First Plenary Drafting Session of the GEG was held from July 13-15, 2020, virtually. During those days, the designated experts met to review in detail the content of the 33 preliminary draft reports. For their evaluation, the experts took into account the reality of the drug problem in each country and the responses to the evaluation questionnaire, which requested that the statements be supported by valid means of verification to ensure compliance with the respective priority actions. The experts also discussed the substantive content of the draft reports and exchanged ideas based on their experience in drug demand reduction.

At this meeting, the GEG experts made key decisions on the data and information to be included, as well as raised questions on the content through the inclusion of "Notes to country " in the draft reports, thus meeting the objectives set.

Once the experts had made the changes requested by the Plenary, the "first draft reports" were formally obtained and sent to the countries at the end of July, through their National Coordinating Entities, for review.

Subsequently, member states provided comments and responses to the "Notes to country". This information was reviewed by the independent technical consultants, who provided valuable comments to the GEG for consideration during the evaluation. With this input, the experts updated the country reports in September, which were submitted to the MEM Unit for translation and distribution in preparation for the Second Plenary Drafting Session of the GEG.

This session was held virtually from October 12 to 13, 2021, with the participation of all the designated national experts, and in which a final review of the 33 national reports was carried out, emphasizing those sections of the reports where changes were made based on the new information provided by the member states, therefore concluding with the fulfillment of all the objectives expected for this meeting.

Once the experts had made the changes requested by the Plenary, a thorough editing process was carried out by the MEM Unit, resulting in the final draft reports, which were transmitted to the member states’ Commissioners during the first week of November, in preparation for this regular session of the Commission.

I would like to take this opportunity to recall that this eighth round seeks to measure the implementation of a new Hemispheric Drug Strategy and its Plan of Action, consequently the
evaluation process has been rigorous and compliance with each priority action was subject to the submission of adequate means of verification, which supported the answers provided.

I would also like to remind you all that one of the main purposes of MEM evaluation reports is to serve as a useful diagnostic tool to identify opportunities for improvement in drug policies and strategies, both at the national and hemispheric levels.

Lastly, I would like to thank the GEG experts for their unwavering commitment to the evaluation process. Moreover, on behalf of the GEG, I would like to acknowledge the support provided by the independent technical consultants to the experts, as well as the valuable guidance provided by the staff of the MEM Unit, headed by Luis Adrian Noble, without whose support, it would not have been possible to complete this work.

Distinguished Commissioners, I wish to thank all your member states for your continued support for this important multilateral process, based on a mandate from the 1998 Summit of the Americas.

Thank you so much.

Jenny Fagua
General Coordinador
MEM Governmental Expert Group