



Organization of
American States



INTER-AMERICAN COMMITTEE AGAINST TERRORISM (CICTE)

TENTH REGULAR SESSION
March 17-19, 2010
Washington, D. C.

OEA/Ser.L/X.2.10
CICTE/INF.11/10
5 April 2010
Original: English

REMARKS BY THE CHAIR OF THE UNITED NATIONS COUNTER-TERRORISM IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE, MR. JEAN-PAUL LABORDE

(Delivered at the Closing Session, held on March 19, 2010)

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

Allow me to begin by thanking the OAS Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE) for inviting me to its Tenth Regular Period of Sessions. I would also like to thank Member States who are represented here – not only are you strong supporters of the Organization of American States but also of the United Nations and our collective counter-terrorism efforts and we certainly appreciate that.

The topics you have addressed over the past three days – Public- Private-Cooperation in the Protection of Critical Infrastructure, the Security of Major Events, and Maritime Security – are relevant and important ones. Nobody present in this gathering needs to be reminded of the threat posed by terrorism to our lives, to economic prosperity or to global stability. Many OAS Member States have had to deal with terrorism repeatedly and in its most horrendous form. Not only the unprecedented and heinous attacks of 11 September 2001 against the United States, but also attacks that have shaken countries across the hemisphere: from Colombia to Peru and from Mexico to Argentina. The attacks suffered by OAS Member countries show that terrorists are willing to inflict as great damage to your societies as the means at their disposal allow them to.

The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

The responsibility, therefore, rests with us to respond to the terrorists. Our response should be global, collective, holistic, preventative and rooted in our universal respect for human rights and the rule of law. And we know that such a response is exactly what the United Nations General Assembly has provided through the adoption of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2006.

Before I speak about the topics which have been considered by the Committee in this distinguished forum, I would like to briefly inform you about the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, since an understanding of the Strategy would help us all understand the importance of engaging both the private sector and civil society organizations in the long-term struggle against terrorism.

As you may be aware, the Strategy consists of four interconnected pillars or measures to be taken by States in cooperation with each other and non-State actors against terrorism. These are: measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; measures to combat terrorism; measures to improve State capacity to combat terrorism; and, measures to protect human rights while combating terrorism.

In one way, the Strategy encapsulates and reaffirms all efforts undertaken against terrorism at the multilateral level over a course of four decades. These include, for example, the sixteen universal counter-terrorism instruments that criminalize specific terrorist acts, such as hijackings, bombings and the financing of terrorism.

In another way, the Strategy addresses the various issues and obstacles that States encounter in their fight against terrorism. These include the preaching of violence, weak law enforcement and the balance between security and the protection of human rights.

But more importantly, it is essential to look at the Strategy as an integrated whole, an arrangement of various seemingly disparate elements brought together to serve as an indispensable foundation of a global counter-terrorism approach that identifies systemic weaknesses, punishes terrorists, addresses shortfalls and yet never loses sight of the commitment to safeguard human rights and the rule of law, which is ultimately what the terrorists want to destroy.

The Strategy's holistic nature, therefore, is its biggest strength. And it is this strength that the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) seeks to capitalize on in mobilizing and supporting the United Nations agencies, international organizations and Member States in their collective fight against terrorism.

In order to make use of the holistic approach of the Strategy and to implement it fully with equal emphasis on all four pillars, Member States and the CTITF would clearly need a holistic approach of their own. Such an approach inevitably requires that States engage more closely with a diverse range of partners, not least with private enterprises and business and with civil society organizations.

Engagement with the Private Sector

This leads directly to the themes which have been addressed by this distinguished group over the past three days: Better cooperation between Governments and the private sector.

Let me state up front that engagement with the private sector in our collective fight against terrorism is not just convenient, it is critically important. The Strategy clearly recognizes the indispensability of the private sector and civil society organizations in countering terrorism. Under paragraph 1 of the pillar on building State capacity, the Strategy calls upon States to "reach out to the private sector for contributions to capacity-building programmes, in particular in the areas of port, maritime and civil aviation security," and again in paragraph 13, calls upon the United Nations "to develop public-private partnerships" while working with States, international, regional and subregional organizations in protecting vulnerable targets from terrorist attacks.

These approaches should not be unfamiliar to us. After all, public-private partnerships have been praised for years by policymakers in their ability to find innovative ideas, increase resource availability, expand capacity and impact societies. The United Nations and its funds and agencies have collaborated with private enterprises and civil society organizations for decades. The General Assembly even adopted a resolution entitled “Towards Global Partnerships” in 2007, which emphasized the need for the United Nations to renew its collaboration with the private sector, particularly in the area of development. The collaboration has resulted in mutually beneficial outcomes: the United Nations has gained from resource generation, cause promotion and technology dissemination, while the private sector has utilized new opportunities in advertising, image enhancement, market growth and profit-making.

However, in the field of counter-terrorism, I believe we have only just begun to explore the potential that public-private partnerships and – for that matter – civil society organizations can play. This lack of attention to the benefits of collaboration on counter-terrorism matters is particularly tragic since not only does terrorism strike at the heart of the common values that the United Nations shares with Member States, the private sector and civil society, but also because terrorism challenges the writ of a Government, destroys normal business activities, threatens civil society and is ultimately a setback to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter. More than anything, it is on countering terrorism that we – the United Nations, its Member States, private businesses and civil society – must come together and join forces.

CTITF Working Groups partnering with Private Sector

The CTITF strongly believes in the dividends of such a partnership. It is for this reason that several of the Task Force’s working groups are already cooperating with private sector entities. I would like to make specific mention of two CTITF initiatives here:

First, the working group on strengthening the protection of vulnerable targets has taken an initiative to push into new horizons on the extent to which public-private partnerships can assist in ensuring that some of our most defenseless locations and infrastructure, such as educational centers, tourist spots, hotels, malls, transport hubs and other sites of cultural or religious importance are adequately protected. You have already heard from my UNICRI colleagues yesterday, so I will not go into too much detail on this project, except to say that in cooperation with UNICRI, we have produced a very interesting report that identifies some basic public-private partnership practices (PPP) and principles that should be considered in the development and implementation of PPP policies. The practices and principles covered in the report have been tested through field research in Nairobi, Kenya in 2008 and a second testing programme in Mexico in 2009.

Second, the CTITF Working Group on “Countering the Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes” has brought together numerous stakeholders, including multinational corporations, regulatory authorities, Member States, and civil society experts together to map strategies, analyze existing legal frameworks, and discuss technological tools to prevent the abuse of the internet by terrorists and their supporters. Following a report issued by the group in 2009, the Working Group embarked on a project this year which is looking at legal, technical, and counter-narrative aspects of countering terrorist use of the internet. In all of these aspects, there are close linkages between the public and the private sector, particularly with regards to protection of critical infrastructure, but also when developing policies on identifying, monitoring, and possibly removing terrorist websites, communication and financing channels. CTITF was very pleased that a workshop on technical issues which was held recently was in fact hosted at the Microsoft headquarters and saw several members of the industry participate and we aim to organize a workshop later this year which looks specifically at the issue of public-private-partnership with regards to countering terrorist use of the internet. Throughout this project, the Working Group is also looking at the nexus between safeguarding the internet protecting free speech which poses a challenge we all must find a way to reconcile.

As a Task Force, we look forward on building on these links with the private sector and we also hope to provide an entry-point for the private sector in approaching the numerous UN bodies working on counter-terrorism, not just on these two projects but also more broadly with regard to implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

One other example, where public-private cooperation is critical is the issue of Maritime Security which has been discussed by the Committee in detail through the course of this Session.

We have seen the menace of piracy affect international trade on the high seas around the Horn of Africa. While there are no obvious or credible linkages between piracy and international terrorism, there are concerns whether ransom money allows militant groups to fund arms trafficking networks, which may benefit terrorist groups operating in that region. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is a key partner entity of CTITF that closely follows this matter and informs us periodically on the threat presented from piracy, which according to their latest update is gradually decreasing around Somalia due to better defences and increased vigilance.

Nevertheless, CTITF member entities take the issue of maritime security, and the broader field of border management, seriously. At the last retreat session of the Task Force, member entities discussed the potential of establishing a working group on border management that would explore the operational elements of border security, screening of travelers and enhanced cooperation through joint supervision between countries. The input from key organizations, such as INTERPOL, IOM, IMO, UNHCR, ICAO and others, would assist in the development and dissemination of good practices that would benefit Member States.

Needless to say, a lot remains to be done. The development of trust between Governments and private sector entities is a prerequisite for any meaningful engagement between them on counter-terrorism cooperation. Too often we still encounter attitudes whereby governments don't want to include the private sector in sensitive counter-terrorism matters or, similarly, private sector companies are not willing to share their much needed expertise.

In this context, I strongly welcome the discussion the Committee has had over the past three days as this clearly has been and will continue to be a much needed effort aimed at establishing vital links, sharing expertise, and build the trust required among these different stakeholders. Our shared values, our commitment to the common good and our conviction in reaping tangible benefits through closer collaboration should form the basis for this process.

Thank you again to the OAS-CICTE for inviting me – we very much look forward to even closer cooperation on all of the issues addressed at this meeting between the OAS-CICTE and CTITF. Thank you for your attention.