

Report on the First Meeting of the CICTE National Points of Contact

Washington, D.C., July 14th and 15th, 2003

National Points of Contact (NPC) and representatives of 30 OAS Member States met in Washington D.C., on July 14th and 15th, 2003, to discuss CICTE working procedures and upcoming program plans. The meeting was the first of its kind for CICTE and established a basis for communication and the exchange of information between professional level counter-terrorism officials of the Member States in accordance with the Inter-American Convention against Terrorism. Agenda topics included the role of the NPC in the OAS counter-terrorism strategy; training initiatives under the auspices of the CICTE Secretariat; communications and information tools available to the NPCs; a review of the CICTE work plan; and the status of the Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism.

The meeting was preceded by a formal ceremony in recognition of the entry into force of the Convention. Remarks were delivered by the Chair of CICTE Her Excellency Maria Eugenia Brizuela de Avila, Minister of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador; His Excellency Dr. Cesar Gaviria, Secretary General of the Organization of American States; and Ambassador Raymond Valcin, Permanent Representative of Haiti to the OAS and Chair of the Permanent Council.¹

A statement on the status of the Convention was also presented by the Assistant Secretary for Legal Affairs of the OAS, Dr. Enrique Lagos. In his statement he reiterated the articles of the Convention stating that it gives a central role to CICTE to coordinate dialogue and assistance between the Member States. He also expressed the Convention's central goal which is a regional cooperation on strengthening counter-terrorism measures, such as border controls and mutual legal assistance.

Participants reviewed the Terms of Reference governing relations between NPCs and the CICTE Secretariat. They proposed amended language to points 2, 6, and 7, and that the amended Terms of Reference be included in the amended CICTE regulations to be considered by CICTE at its fourth regular meeting, scheduled for January 2004. The amended language and proposed regulations will be circulated prior to that regular CICTE meeting.

Representative of the International Organization on Migration gave a presentation on the self-assessment evaluation on border control that the participants were asked to complete for the meeting. Participants had mixed views about the use of questionnaires as a best practices self-assessment mechanism. Some expressed concern that the information requested in the first questionnaire, prepared by the IOM, was duplicated in other questionnaires. Others did not see the relevance of some of the information requested to the purposes of the exercise. On the other hand, a number of delegations expressed no difficulty with the questionnaire and had completed it for the meeting. The Secretariat staff agreed to work with the IOM, UN-CTC, and other organizations to make these exercises more "user-friendly," and to report back to NPCs on the results. The CICTE Secretariat also agreed to work with IOM to clarify the questionnaire's purpose and objectives of the evaluation.

There was a consensus among the participants that NPCs should be members of their national delegations to the regular CICTE meetings, and that time should be made at these meetings for technical discussions

¹ Copies of these statements may be found on the CICTE web site www.cicte.org.

among the NPCs, either as side meetings or prior to the regular meeting. The Secretariat staff agreed to report on this consensus during the preparations for the next regular session.

Ambassador Margarita Escobar, Permanent Representative of El Salvador, presented a progress report on the CICTE work plan. The report details the efforts CICTE has made this year towards creating cooperation with other organizations on training initiatives, and technical assistance.² The Peruvian Minister of Foreign Relations, Jose Luis Perez, provided a written critique of the CICTE work plan. In it he suggested that CICTE must stress multi-lateral rather than individual action. He also pointed out the need to assist countries in financing the implementation of counter-terrorism measures, and provide a secure way to share intelligence information. NPCs pointed out that, as CICTE moves more deeply into specific projects, funding for these projects will become an increasingly important issue. The Secretariat agreed to report to CICTE on this matter and to recommend that the issue of project funding and relations with international lending institutions be considered at the next regular meeting. The Secretariat staff suggested that NPCs could propose additional items for inclusion in the CICTE work plan and suggested that greater emphasis could be placed on cybersecurity and airport security in the CICTE work plan for the next year.

Given that one of the objectives of CICTE is to create open dialogue between the National NPCs, new software, *Groove*, was introduced to the member States. Representatives of *Groove* gave a presentation on the software and its functions. This software enables the NPCs to communicate and share information in a secure and encrypted cyberspace. The NPCs agreed that this software will enhance their communication and ability to create a cooperative regional counter-terrorism strategy.

It was recognized that each country has its specific counter-terrorism capabilities and their particular interests in certain aspects of counter-terrorism. With that in mind, the NPCs reaffirmed their willingness to strengthen mutual cooperation, broaden the exchange of data and information, and implement counter-terrorist strategies according to their respective legal and institutional frameworks. The meeting noted the importance of providing information on domestic legislation for the database (OLAT) maintained by the CICTE Secretariat, which is helpful to countries that are preparing counter-terrorism legislation as well as for assessing the status of counter-terrorism measures throughout the world.

In order to facilitate cooperation between various organizations and institutions within each country and so address organized crime that is linked to terrorism, the CICTE Secretariat was asked to compile a list of Points of Contact from the member States of these kinds of institutions. This project will be proposed for the next work plan in collaboration with CICAD.

The Member States have expressed interest in the training opportunities that the CICTE Secretariat presented and requested that the Secretariat liaise with other international institutions to avoid duplication. The CICTE Secretariat informed the meeting about the seven training programs that it plans to offer to the Member States, beginning in September 2003. The Secretariat and representatives of Snell Enterprises, Inc. gave an overview of the e-learning course on terrorism scheduled for September. The course provides an introduction to terrorism issues, and will be open for enrollment by three selected participants from each country's government. It was agreed that the Secretariat would provide additional written

² Copies of these statements may be found on the CICTE web site www.cicte.org.

information to Member States on this course and that the NPCs would provide the Secretariat with information on other training opportunities that are open for participation by the Member States.

The closing statement was made by Cesar Gaviria, Secretary General of the OAS. He stressed the importance of a regional effort to counterterrorism. He asked that each state make every possible effort to ratify the Inter-American Convention against Terrorism, and implement counter-terrorism policies. Secretary General Gaviria also made reference to CICTE's importance and efforts to create communication between the member countries and other organizations.³

The First National Points of Contact meeting established goals for the NPCs. The meeting asked the country representatives to install the *Groove* software as soon as they could to begin communication. It set enrollment for the online course for August. Finally, it requested that all Member States submit any their counter-terrorism legislation to the Secretariat for inclusion in OLAT. In turn, CICTE will take action on the requests and actions made by that the NPCs that were listed above in this report.

The next National Points of Contact meeting is expected to concur with CICTE's annual meeting. The second meeting will focus on counter-terrorism topics rather than NPC organization. Subsequent meeting will vary in topic in accordance with the necessities and concerns of the Member States in their counter-terrorism efforts.

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