

Illicit Drugs

Human security concerns are clearly a growing part of the hemispheric agenda. The dimensions of these challenges have an impact on the way we do business, and are encouraging us to look at new partnerships and approaches.

One threat — illicit drugs — poses a major human security challenge for the governments and peoples of the hemisphere. It is a problem that affects us all: from the street children whose lives are destroyed by sniffing glue day after day, to the citizens whose taxes are raised to pay for policing of trafficking routes, and states whose delicate relations are made even more complicated by the international politics of illicit drugs.

In many ways, it is a quintessential human security challenge: multifaceted, transnational, superficially attractive, ingeniously adaptive but brutally destructive. As such, it calls for a human security response: creative, multidimensional, co-operative yet decisive.

Much is already being done in this regard. Many governments have national drug strategies that include efforts to reduce demand through educational and health programs, to reduce supplies through eradication or alternative development, and to control trafficking through interdiction, law enforcement or measures to counter money laundering.

Non-governmental organizations also play a major role through, for example, specialized research to guide public health interventions or through community development projects. The Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) fosters co-operation among states in the Americas. Work is now under way in CICAD to establish a Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism. Various United Nation forums also foster the development of multilateral approaches to this problem.

As we have elsewhere, Canada and Mexico have collaborated extensively in these anti-drug bodies. Yet we believe that more must be done to counter this threat, and to address fully its impact on human security. Failure to advance in our common fight against illicit drugs will undermine other objectives like hemispheric integration and democratic consolidation.

That is why Canada offered, at the Santiago Summit last year, to convene a Foreign Ministers Dialogue on Drugs in the Americas. The idea has been well received by others, including the Government of Mexico. We very much appreciated Mexico's leadership in proposing the UN General Assembly Special Session last summer, and look forward to Mexico's contribution to this initiative.

We are discussing options for a first meeting on the margins of the OAS General Assembly in Guatemala. To that end, I am distributing to my colleagues a paper for reflection suggesting five areas for discussion:

1. **Governance:** Fragile democratic institutions and the absence of full guarantees for human rights can undermine anti-drug efforts. Foreign Ministers could explore options for enhancing the capacity of police and judicial institutions to enforce the law, while guaranteeing justice and human rights. They could also discuss ways of building on efforts to minimize corruption and curtail the political influence of drug-related criminal organization.
2. **Small arms and firearms:** The illicit proliferation of small arms and firearms adds to the arsenals of drug traffickers, undercuts law enforcement and jeopardizes public security. Ministers could work together to promote the ratification of the Inter-American Firearms convention, the development of complementary global instruments and the strengthening of domestic institutions charged with implementing these standards.
3. **Development and trade:** The difficulties of sustaining legal alternatives to the cultivation of plant-based drugs, and of gaining access to markets for those legal goods, complicates supply-reduction efforts. The Dialogue Group could explore ways of working together to generate greater support for alternative development, and to increase market access for legal alternatives to