



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Permanent Mission of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

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Statement

By

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on

**International Drug Control [105]
*considering the results of the high-level segment of the fifty-second session
of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs: report of the Commission on
Narcotic Drugs***

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New York

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

From the perspective of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, it is impossible to overstate the importance of the issues of narcotic drugs and our international cooperation in addressing the problem. We therefore welcome this opportunity to address these topics, and welcome the numerous reports and studies that have been generated, particularly the *Outcome of the high-level segment of the fifty-second session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (A/64/92)* and documents A/64/120 and A/64/123. To these documents, we also commend for the consideration of this Assembly the UNODC's *World Drug Report and Annual Report for 2009*. We also stress the continuing relevance of the UNODC's 2007 Report entitled *Crime, Violence, and Development: Trends, Costs, and Policy Options in the Caribbean*, and its 2008 document, *The Threat of Narco-Trafficking in the Americas*. Additionally, we continue to align ourselves with the statement made by CARICOM on this topic before the Third Committee on 8th October 2009.

Mr. President,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, up until very recently, was an economy that relied primarily on banana exports to the United Kingdom. However, in the face of challenges made to the World Trade Organisation by other large banana interests and the United States – which does not grow a single bunch of bananas – our preferential access to the UK market is fast disappearing. Today, we are producing less than half of the bananas we grew only 10 years ago. In 1992, Windward Island banana exports to the UK market represented 274,000 tonnes, or a 45% share of that market. Today, we ship less than a quarter of that amount to the UK, and our market share is in single digits.

The resulting unemployment, rural poverty and sudden social dislocation have presented a number of difficult challenges to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. One of these is an increase in marijuana cultivation in the remote hills of our country's interior, where producers destroy ancient old-growth rain forests to cultivate hundreds of acres of cannabis herb. A single recent raid by regional security forces uncovered over 700,000 marijuana plants and three million seedlings in one area. Unfortunately, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has now become one of the Caribbean's major marijuana producers.

However, those responsible for this rise in production are not noble rural farmers eking out a living in hostile conditions. Marijuana production has rapidly morphed into an elaborate criminal enterprise, orchestrated by heavily armed drug barons and gangs, often from other countries. Law enforcement officers in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are seizing ever-increasing numbers of ever-more sophisticated firearms, which are directly linked to narcotics trade and trafficking in our country and region.

Mr. President,

The UNODC's *Crime, Violence, and Development* report for the Caribbean states that “[m]urder rates in the Caribbean – at 30 per 100,000 population annually – are higher than for any other region of the world and have risen in recent years for many of the region's countries.” According to its report entitled *Threat of Narco-Trafficking in the Americas*, the UNODC posits that “[t]he Caribbean is such a diverse region that it is difficult to explain the widespread recent escalation in violence in terms other than those relating to the drug trade.”

This drug trade is the most pressing immediate threat to the security of our region. UNODC reports suggest that about 20% of cocaine destined for North America currently travels through the Caribbean, with increasing amounts of synthetic drugs also passing through our region en route to markets in developed countries. The southern Caribbean is increasingly being utilized as a transshipment point, and is particularly favored by drug producers from certain South American states. The UNODC also suggests that the Caribbean will continue to play an important – and possibly increasing – role in future drug

transit.

Mr. President,

According to the UNODC's *Crime, Violence, and Development* report for the Caribbean:

The Caribbean is especially vulnerable to crime for several reasons. It suffers from the disadvantage of being situated between the world's source of cocaine (the Andean region of South America) and its primary consumer markets (the United States and Europe). As small islands, Caribbean countries and territories have large coastlines and territorial waters to control relative to their ability to fund law enforcement coverage. Small criminal justice systems are easily overwhelmed in terms of police, courts, and prisons. Police must deal with seasonal tourist inflows, and, in some countries, the number of annual visitors actually exceeds the size of the local population. The Caribbean has some of the highest prisoner to population ratios in the world, and overcrowding interferes with the rehabilitation process

This description is particularly apt for Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The 32 islands of our archipelago – with their rugged coastlines and vast seascape – are patrolled by a mere handful of coast guard vessels. Our justice system is crowded with drug-related crimes and criminals. Further, one cannot overstate the ease with which a single, relatively minor drug baron can threaten the very foundations of our region's small societies. In countries like ours, with only a few hundred, largely unarmed, law enforcement officers, one heavily armed drug gang – no matter how insignificant in the global scheme – can seriously threaten to undermine the state's legitimate monopoly on coercive force.

The developmental repercussions of this drug trade and its associated crime are profound. The UNODC has estimated, for example, that “Haiti and Jamaica could double their annual economic income if they could bring their crime rates down to Costa Rica's level.” This drug trade is therefore a very real threat to our regional growth and development.

Mr. President,

We welcome the outcome of the high-level segment of the 52nd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, particularly its recognition of the multifaceted challenges faced by transit states, and its call for increased technical and financial assistance to states most directly affected by the world drug problem. This is indeed a global problem, and the human and financial costs of combating it cannot be borne by states like ours, which are essentially transit points for drugs on their way to North American and European markets.

The studies that have been written are voluminous and detailed. The onus now is on governments – particularly in those states whose demand fuels the drug trade – to demonstrate the necessary political will to cooperate fully against the drug problem. It is far better for us to hold hands in cooperation than to point fingers; and the cost of ignoring this problem is far greater than the cost of confronting it head-on.

At the same time, the interconnectedness of the world drug problem to other global issues must be acknowledged and addressed. Surely, it is preferable for international trading regimes to carve out exceptions and export preferences for what are essentially *de minimis* producers of legitimate agricultural goods, than it is to force them to choose between unemployment and the production of illicit cash crops.

The global economic and financial crisis has now been added to the list of international maladies that were not created in the Caribbean, but that disproportionately affect our sub-region. The list includes climate change, an iniquitous international trade regime, small arms trafficking, and narcotic transshipment. Make no mistake, without active and aggressive assistance to small, vulnerable and poor countries like ours, the yawning social, political and economic cleavages being caused by this global

economic and financial crisis will only increase the attractiveness of illicit activities and their disastrous global implications.

Further, the link between narcotics and the trafficking of small arms is strong and irrefutable. We cannot afford continued dalliances by arms producing countries that fail to comprehend the need for meaningful controls on the flow of small arms and light weapons. The time is long since past for an enforceable global accord on this matter.

Mr. President,

Finally, our delegation takes this opportunity to again register the alarm and profound dismay of the entire Caribbean Community at the closure of the UNODC's Caribbean field office. We consider it nothing less than an abandonment of the Caribbean region.

In this year's UNODC *Annual Report*, UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa is quoted as saying "States in the **Caribbean**, Central America and West Africa, as well as the border regions of Mexico, are caught in the crossfire between the world's biggest coca producers . . . and the biggest consumers." In the preface to the UNODC's *Threat of Narco-Trafficking in the Americas Report*, the Executive Director states that "Drug-related crime and the violence that it fuels in Central America, parts of the **Caribbean**, and Mexico are a threat to public safety and an impediment to development."

Within this context, it is beyond baffling that the UNODC can close its only office in the Caribbean, a region with the highest murder rate, with one-fifth of the cocaine traffic to North America, with increasing transit of synthetic drugs, and with rising levels of addiction to certain narcotics. Indeed, when we read in the UNODC's 2009 *World Drug Report* that they are "stepping up our engagement in Central America and the **Caribbean** to reduce the vulnerability of these regions to drugs and crime," our delegation wonders how this "stepped up" engagement takes place in the face of a physical retreat from the region.

In that light, Mr. Chairman, while we welcome the *Report of the Secretary General on International Cooperation Against the World Drug Problem*, we want to express our clear understanding that, inasmuch as its recommendation that member states "support the reconfiguration of the network of field offices of the UNODC" may be a euphemism for the closure of the Caribbean office, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines rejects that recommendation.

While we are fully aware of the UNODC's budgetary constraints, it is inconceivable to us that our abandonment, or any other administrative expediency, could form part of the solution to the UNODC's difficulties or the wider battle against the world drug problem. We in the Caribbean deserve and demand a meaningful, measurable and tangible engagement in our region, for which a physical presence is a necessary prerequisite.

The war on drugs cannot be fought on the cheap. International cooperation against the world drug problem must be tangible and meaningful. The very future of scores of small states depends on it.

I thank you.