

International cooperation in the fight against drugs

Rafael Estrada Sámano*

It is my pleasure to share with you some thoughts on this highly complex subject, which will doubtless be the biggest challenge societies will face during the end of this century, as well as the century to come.

Today, as never before in our country's recent history, there is an increasingly broad and intense effort to understand this phenomenon of drug trafficking, in all its scope, and to confront it with greater efficiency.

The drug trade issue now makes up part of daily political and academic discourse. The fact that it is a concern shared by important sectors of society may be observed in the mass media, institutional work programs and, of course, in the important albeit insufficient campaigns generated by society, primarily with the aim of preventing and treating drug consumption.

The President of the Republic has made the nation's concern his own, with regard to this issue, noting in a range

* Assistant Attorney General.

Speech at the seventh panel discussion on "International Cooperation in the Fight Against Drug Trafficking and Money-Laundering," organized by the Chamber of Deputies' Justice Commission, August 28, 1995.



The drug trade presents Mexico with an enormous challenge, as it does to the world as a whole.

of different forums that drug trafficking, and all forms of organized crime in general, represent the most serious threat to the physical and moral integrity of youth, society's health, public tranquility and order, the rule of law and national security.

It is no secret that the effects of illicit activities involving drugs are convulsing not only Mexico but large regions of the world. Our times demand that we frankly recognize that our entire society is profoundly affected by the growth of criminal activities related to the drug trade. Above and beyond the responsibility I have been given, as a human being I share my grave concern with you.

It is intolerable that our country's children and youth should be exposed to the maelstrom of drug trafficking. We know well that the problem has to do with the capacity of this criminal business to generate huge and rapidly distributed profits; and much more seriously, the sale of drugs is threatening the health of those who represent Mexico's future.

Just as we must frankly and openly recognize the problem, it is crucial that we learn how better to confront it. Despite the bleak outlook, I am happy to share with you the following reflections, and to see the continual opening of forums for discussing this problem, because only by bringing together the creativity of the Mexican people we will be able to develop better ways of combating this problem.

What is drug trafficking? To answer this question we must begin by recognizing that it is a multi-dimensional problem. The illicit trade in drugs may be seen primarily as an economic phenomenon or as a health problem with important social consequences.

With regard to the human health perspective, we must recall that the use of substances that alter persons' normal physical and psychological state has occurred throughout the history of humanity. From primitive man down to our times, social groups have permitted or prohibited the consumption of toxic substances. In general terms we have gone from greater to lesser permissiveness. In this respect,

a predominant role has been played by the Western paradigm derived from the values of Western, Christian culture which uphold virtue over vice as well as the perfection of the individual and the community as opposed to their debasement. Thus, in any case, the problem is of a moral nature and its solution becomes extremely difficult since former moral problems involve will rather than knowledge as such. Ovid expressed this best: "*Video meliora, proboque, sed deteriora sequor*" (I see what is best, and as such I approve of it, but I do what is worst).

The great majority of societies at the end of the 20th century consider drug addiction to be not only a health problem but one of morals and ethics as well. The juridical system of our times, based largely on the fundamental values of the society which created it, has determined — precisely due to those values, beliefs and principles — to prohibit some drugs and allow others.

Like all other societies, Mexican society has made its own norms; alcohol and tobacco are consumed in large quantities, as are some drugs produced in pharmaceutical laboratories, while at the same time, there is an unfortunate increase in such illicit drugs as marijuana, cocaine and heroin. While it is true that consumption levels in Mexico are still not high in comparison with those of some developed countries, it is evident that a priority of prevention strategy must be to prevent consumption from continuing to grow. We cannot get around the fact that the latest addiction surveys show an increase in the consumption of such destructive drugs as inhalants [e.g., glue and solvents].

It is very important to stress that the drug problem has causes, manifestations and consequences that go far beyond a merely juridical viewpoint. It is not enough to transform, update and modernize a juridical system; that is only part of a strategy for combating this problem. Defeating the drug trade requires not only better laws but greater institutional and social will, greater creativity in the fulfillment of public service and, most importantly, the courage and ethics needed to confront the problem.

We must call attention to the fact that in order to improve our government's and society's ability to provide an all-sided response to the drug phenomenon, we must open a deep-going discussion and reflection on the effects of thinking only about juridical-penal prohibition as the best normative option.

Prohibitionism, as the central postulate of many countries' juridical systems, has not had the desired results. Penally prohibiting drug consumption is also a complex problem; people have very diverse reasons for consuming drugs. Neither drug trafficking, in all its stages and manifestations, nor the ingestion of illicit or licit drugs are phenomena which can be answered in one way alone. Other countries have had experience with strategies

combining prohibition with regulation involving a certain level of tolerance. I will simply note this, without going into this thorny problem.

It is also essential to talk about the economic aspect of drug trafficking. On August 14, during the opening session of this National Consultation on the Struggle Against Drug Trafficking, the nation's Attorney General noted that the drug trade generates a black market where hundreds of billions of dollars circulate, making it one of the world's five biggest industries.

Drug trafficking is the most important part of the criminal economy; its logic is based on the enormous profits arising from cultivation, harvesting, processing, transport and distribution in the consumer market.

Retail sale in consuming cities means a profit of more than 140 times what is initially invested in the first transaction. This economic chain generates criminal phenomena in the production, distribution and consumption processes.

It also causes associated economic phenomena which distort economies by introducing illicit money which must be invested, leading to the takeover of businesses by organized crime and the corruption of social sectors that want a share in the profits and are indifferent to the damage caused to health, institutions and society as a whole. Since we are dealing with an illicit market, statistics on the drug trade are difficult to define clearly; thus the quantities of drugs produced and the amounts of money involved are not precisely known.

At the international level, the drug trade's economic power provides us with the picture of a truly extraordinary business expansion. The process of economic globalization, which can without a doubt lead to more dynamic markets better able to satisfy the needs of human beings, is now, unfortunately, providing enormous advantages for the circulation of illicit drugs. The fall of boundaries and borders, while still relative, involves the relaxation of norms regulating the circulation of goods and services between nations. The great challenge is that one cannot and should not halt the natural evolution of international politics and economics, but at the same time there must be no lessening of strict control mechanisms making it possible to detect and stop the traffic in illicit drugs.

Internationally, we see a phenomenon regarding drug trafficking that can be illustrated by the case of cocaine. Criminal actions in the cocaine trade involve at least three South American and seven Central American countries, as well as Mexico and several Caribbean nations, and the final destination in the northern part of the Americas. An equally large number of countries are involved in trafficking cocaine to Europe, or heroin from Asia to Europe and North America.

Our country shares an almost 2,000-mile border with the world's largest goods market, a country which also has

one of the planet's highest indices of drug consumption. Thus it is no accident that Mexico is used for access to that market, as Spain is in the case of the European market. Among other elements, this involves cultural, ethnic and linguistic identity with the producer countries. One wishes that identity were used for other purposes of a higher nature. Bolívar's ideal of integrating the Latin American nations was certainly not conceived to serve such a degrading activity as the drug trade.

As can be appreciated, the capacities of the criminal organizations devoted to the drug trade go beyond any border and therefore threaten the order and security not of one nation alone, but of all the nations in which they carry out their activities. Above and beyond studies and discussions of which countries produce drugs, through which countries they are transported and where they are consumed, the nations affected by this problem must clearly understand that we share an equal responsibility to confront it decisively and effectively.

During the opening session of this conference, Attorney General Antonio Lozano Gracia illustrated this point as follows: "Let us put aside the geography of blame. Let us not waste time and energy trying to find out who is more and less guilty. On the contrary, let us continue to strengthen the mechanisms for international cooperation which today are beginning to bear better fruit." In the final analysis, the results of collaborative actions will be reflected both within each participating nation as well as abroad. It is then that we will be able to speak of genuine shared efforts and achievements.

We have repeatedly stressed that drug trafficking is a threat to national security, because it attacks the state's most important values, weakens institutions and damages the rule of law, and because the extraordinary resources which traffickers control undermine the authorities' ability to deal with the problem. But it is also indispensable that the procedures and mechanisms of international collaboration respect the sovereignty of nations.

In several different forums the nation's Attorney General has pointed out that only through the formulation of all-sided policies, strategies and actions, accepted at the international level, will greater efficiency and effectiveness be achieved in the struggle against drug trafficking.

Now I will speak about the Mexican government's anti-drug policy; the actions undertaken, their results, as well as bilateral and multilateral cooperation with other nations.

The Mexican government believes that the struggle against the drug trade represents the main challenge to national justice and security. Thus, Mexico's policy against illicit drugs is based on three fundamental premises:

1. The drug trade is a problem of national security, since it threatens institutions, leads to corruption and promotes other illicit activities such as arms-trafficking and money-laundering.

2. Drug trafficking is a public health problem.

3. International cooperation is indispensable.

While the drug trafficking problem does not originate within our country's territory, in light of the characteristics and international dimensions this criminal activity has acquired, and its penetration into various regions of Mexico, the government considers it to be a problem affecting the security of the nation and the health of its citizens. Thus, Mexico must fight this problem on the basis of an all-round policy which takes into account all the aspects of the issue — production, transport, sale, distribution and consumption — and includes the resources necessary for its implementation.

In this context, the Mexican government has defined a policy of "Mexicanization" of the struggle against drug trafficking. This policy states that, within the framework of national jurisdiction, only the Mexican authorities can take action against the drug trade, and it is therefore solely up to these authorities to define the principles and carry out the programs and actions this struggle requires.

The Mexican government will continue to fight drug trafficking within the framework established by the Constitution and applicable laws. In light of the political risks involved in accepting funds and equipment for the struggle against drugs which are offered or provided with considerable conditions and limitations, it will be necessary to channel additional resources of our own into this struggle.

With the aim of avoiding the political costs and risks implicit in the process of certification by the United States government, the Mexican government has stressed the need to find mechanisms for financial support and equipment transfer which do not involve that process, such as credits or the leasing or sale of equipment at government prices.

Moreover, the activities that foreign agents carry out within our country's territory occur within the framework of the international cooperation activities that Mexico engages in together with other countries. Mexico does not accept that any foreign agent may carry out activities within our territory that, by their nature, correspond solely to the domestic authorities. For this reason, foreign agents' activities are limited to exchanging information, training Mexican personnel, and coordinating simultaneous but never joint activities along the border, with the authorities of each country acting within their own territory.

In this framework, the Mexican government is determined to increase bilateral cooperation with the government of the United States through formulae which avoid the risks of certification and other measures that might undermine the policy of Mexicanization. Among other steps, Mexico will promote cooperation mechanisms that will complement the national effort in such areas as personnel training, the acquisition and purchase of equipment without political conditions or unacceptable supervision schemas, and the exchange of information.

In line with these definitions, Mexico's policy against the drug trade has the following objectives: a) dismantling international criminal organizations, by means of international cooperation; b) establishing strict controls for preventing illicit arms-trafficking; c) establishing effective mechanisms against money-laundering; and d) increasing levels of control and interception of drugs at the nation's borders, in its territorial waters and airspace.

President Zedillo's administration has carried out a series of actions aimed at dismantling organizations devoted to the drug trade, improving interception operations, fighting corruption, reducing illicit demand and promoting the rehabilitation of addicts, eradicating illicit crops, combating money-laundering, preventing and combating the diversion of chemicals used in drug-processing, strengthening bilateral accords and multilateral cooperation, through the Mexico-Guatemala-Belize triangular operation and operation "Short Term," carried out between Mexico and Central American nations within the framework of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD).

The drug trade presents Mexico with an enormous challenge, as it does to the world as a whole. The first stage of the effort—the recognition of the seriousness of the problem, as well as open reflection on the ways in which

we can better confront it—is under way. The drug trafficking problem is not a conjunctural one. It is a historical problem which manifests itself in new ways today and which, if not halted, will have unimaginable consequences in terms of social decomposition and the weakening of institutions.

Social inequality, the fact that millions upon millions of human beings do not have access to the minimum required for social well-being, provides a highly favorable environment for the expansion of criminal businesses with the ability to distribute easy money. We find ourselves in a time of historic definitions regarding this problem.

In some countries organized crime has set itself up as a power parallel to that of the state, influencing the political, economic and social order of entire nations. We still have time to gradually inhibit drug consumption and to fight organized crime head-on. The overwhelming majority of Mexican citizens share the conviction that the illegal activity of powerful groups will not overcome our will to be a peaceful society in which freedoms are exercised in an orderly way.

In addition to being an obligation, the fight against drug trafficking is a prerequisite for fulfilling the greatest commitment of our generation of Mexicans: fashioning a form of political organization which will lead to effective and general well-being for our people. ✎

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Centro de Enseñanza para Extranjeros (UNAM/CEPE)

La cultura y la historia de México a través de su lengua

Cursos intensivos de español para extranjeros (6 semanas)
Cursos intensivos y semestrales de cultura mexicana y latinoamericana:
Historia, Arte y Literatura

Cursos para profesores de español como L2:
Formación (1 año) y Actualización (6 semanas)

Certificación de dominio del español

Visitas guiadas, cine, exposiciones, conferencias, bibliotecas, alberca y canchas deportivas, salas de conciertos, teatros, etc.

Servicio de alojamiento

Solicite mayores informes
en México:

Campus Ciudad de México, FAX: (525) 616-26-72
Campus Taxco, Gro., FAX: (762) 201-24

en Estados Unidos:

Escuela Permanente de Extensión en San Antonio, Texas, FAX: (210) 225-1772