



Statement by His Excellency
Dr. Leonel Fernández
President of the Dominican Republic

At the General Debate of the 65th General
Assembly of the United Nations

New York,
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STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, LEONEL FERNÁNDEZ, TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

United Nations Headquarters
New York, United States

September 23, 2010

Distinguished Mr. Joseph Deiss, President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly
Distinguished Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Distinguished Ministers and other Delegation Chiefs,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Eight years after Switzerland became a full member of the United Nations, we are delighted to see that the presidency of this General Assembly's 65th period of ordinary sessions fell on the 2002 president of the Swiss Confederation, Dr. Joseph Deiss, to whom we wish the greatest success in his tenure.

Mr. President,

In 1998, there was a special session held at the UN General Assembly to "eliminate or substantially reduce the illegal production of drugs and drug abuse by 2008."

Ten years later, at a new meeting for evaluation purposes hosted by this prestigious world body, the conclusion was that little progress had been made regarding the proposed goals and that, therefore, there were plenty of reasons for the international community to be concerned about the growing threat posed by the global drug problem.

At that time, it was determined that a new ten-year plan was needed covering the period until 2019, when, once again, this General Assembly shall convene its member states in order to evaluate the outcomes of policies applied to eliminate the most serious threat to citizen safety at the beginning of the XXI century: transnational organized crime and illegal drug trafficking.

Nowadays, Mr. President, approximately 250 million people of ages between 15 and 64 years old consume drugs worldwide.

Even though such consumption has already extended to diverse regions on the planet, the highest concentration is found in areas with the highest levels of economic and social development, such as the United States, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia.

Drug consumption has harmful effects on people's health, as reflected on personality disorders which often lead to loss of will, apathy, bulimia, and the development of pathological behavior.

Furthermore, Mr. President, dozens of thousands of people die each year as a direct result of drug consumption while others, depending on the way these toxic substances are consumed, are affected by diseases such as HIV-AIDS or Hepatitis C.

Nowadays, illegal drug trafficking constitutes a global black market, a kind of underground economy for growing, manufacturing, distributing, and selling a type of goods in the form of marihuana, opium, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamines, or any other variety.

That market, which is ruled by the laws of supply and demand as any other market, reaches the astronomical amount of approximately 400 billion dollars a year.

Such impressive sum makes the world drug economy larger than the Gross Domestic Product of 122 out of the 184 countries registered on the Economic Index annually produced by the World Bank.

The global drug market annually generates more wealth than countries such as Chile, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, Israel, South Africa, and Portugal.

At the same time, this market is more economically powerful than several of the most important oil-producing nations in the world like Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, or the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

In attempting to achieve its goal of conquering new markets and accumulating wealth, transnational organized crime uses a new and unprecedented type of violence, which is cruel and inhumane.

Drug trafficking utilizes kidnappings, contract killings, torture, and decapitations in their inter-group conflicts as well as in their conflicts with the people and institutions that confront them.

Drug trafficking sows fear and terror. It executes public servants as well as ordinary citizens. It murders journalists, teachers, doctors, students or housewives.

Drug trafficking does not have limits or borders. It only knows of horror, savagery, bloodshed, and crime.

Its power is so great that it is able to influence and interfere with vital government areas such as the armed forces, the police, intelligence services and the justice system, in its attempt to make state institutions serve its macabre and sinister interests.

In this context, some people ask themselves, rightly so, whether it is possible to defeat transnational organized crime and international illegal drug trafficking.

Is it really possible to confront and defeat all that this modality of international crime entails?

Yes, it is.

It is possible to confront it and defeat it. It's possible to reduce it and alleviate its harmful effects.

However, in order to achieve this several factors need to be in place. First, we need a real global commitment and a genuine political will at the level of the various national governments involved.

We also need a change of paradigm or a different strategic vision that focuses our efforts to fight the problem not only on the supply side, as it has fundamentally been the case so far, but also on the demand or consumption side.

It is imperative to curb indiscriminate gun sales and human trafficking and it is necessary to implement exchange and cooperation policies among the countries that produce, serve as transit points for, and consume narcotics.

It is necessary to introduce new technologies, strengthen intelligence systems, train and to make personnel in charge of citizen safety more professional, design prevention mechanisms, generate educational opportunities as well as opportunities to reduce poverty, generate jobs, and get communities involved in building protective networks against crime.

We hope, Mr. President, that in 2019 when this General Assembly convenes its member states again to evaluate the outcomes of its new ten-year plan against international drug trafficking, we are able to say, for the sake of our families, the sake of our youth, our societies, in sum, the sake of humankind: we have prevailed.

We have defeated the most important threat to the safety of our peoples at the beginning of the XXI century! We have defeated drug trafficking!

On the other hand, Mr. President, it is important to note that the human and material losses experienced as a result of natural disasters during this year 2010 constitute a great cause for concern.

To date, we have had 47 floods and landslides, which affected countries as geographically distant from one another as India and Brazil, China and Colombia, Russia and Congo, Kazakhstan and those from East Africa, Mexico and Central America, Pakistan, Yemen and Sudan.

To date, we have had 12 hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons, which affected countries like Mexico, India, the Solomon Islands, and Madagascar.

To date, we have had 8 serious droughts followed by fires in Bolivia, California, the Caribbean, China, Spain, and Russia.

To date, we have had 7 earthquakes from Haiti to China, from Tajikistan to Chile, from Afghanistan to Mexico.

All this without counting the volcanic eruptions that did not distinguish among rich and poor and which, in the case of Iceland, produced the most serious interruption of air traffic seen since World War II.

Additionally, we have to include the numerous cold waves, floods, and storms that have occurred as well as the epidemics that took place as a result, particularly cholera in Africa and dengue in Latin America and the Caribbean.

As we can see, Mr. President, vulnerability to natural disasters is increasing around the world and development levels starkly decline as a result.

Most of these natural disasters are caused by climate change. Therefore, it is imperative that this world body approves, as soon as possible, guidelines to regulate the emission of carbon dioxide and to protect the planet's biodiversity.

There is much work to be done around the world in order to define and implement policies and practices that allow us prevent the negative impact of natural disasters.

Along those lines, it is necessary to combine risk management with development and land use planning. We need to design and implement early warning systems in coastal areas, cities at risk, schools, and hospitals. And we need to urgently renovate critical infrastructure so that it is able to resist future catastrophes and minimize human loss.

Given this situation, the Dominican Republic is going to actively take part of the work towards the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction including its next meeting that will take place in Geneva, Switzerland in May 2011.

Likewise, with the advisory assistance of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Columbia University in New York City, in October we will be meeting with the ministers in charge of sector and social policies as well as the mayors of cities at greater risk in order to review ongoing actions regarding risk management planning vis-à-vis natural disasters.

Finally, Mr. President, I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to suggest to this UN system creating a World Alliance of Countries at Risk in order to exchange experiences, knowledge, and ideas as well as to transfer best practices learned in catastrophic circumstances.

We are convinced that this would be a great contribution towards designing and implementing policies to help save lives and minimize material damages.

Thank you very much!