

“TRANSNATIONAL ORGANISE CRIME FROM A CARIBBEAN PERSPECTIVE”

OPENING REMARKS FOR Dr HORACE CHANG, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY HIGH LEVEL SECURITY CONFERENCE OF THE GUIANA SHIELD

21-22 APRIL, 2022

PARAMARIBO, SURINAME

Mr President, His Excellency Chandrikapersad Santokhi,

Excellencies,

Minister Albert R. Ramdin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Business and
International Cooperation,

Ministers,

Lt. Colonel Michael Jones, Executive Director CARICOM IMPACS,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen Good Morning.

Introduction

In 2020, the United Nations marked the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the
UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime. That year, the world

was confronted with a pandemic that changed the way work, business and even leisure activities were conducted. This ongoing global pandemic not only exposed many fragilities and vulnerabilities in our societies and economies, it also impacted the way **criminal networks** conducted their nefarious activities.

Transnational organised crime continues to be a global security threat. Our regions: **CARICOM** and the **Guiana Shield** face similar threats from transnational organised crime, and are adversely impacted by illicit trafficking in firearms, drug trafficking, human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants, terrorism, cyber-attacks, illegal mining, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, piracy, and intentional and unlawful damage to the marine environment.

CARICOM has recognized the linkages between transnational organised crime and crime and violence as **mutually reinforcing**; having a particularly **complex** and **multifaceted nature**, and posing a serious threat to **national development, international peace and security**. The nature of the terrain of the Guianas, the porous borders and difficult to patrol territorial waters of the regions predispose countries in our region to the challenges of transnational organised crime. As a result,

we face increasing vulnerabilities to crime, the influx of criminal organizations and introduction of illicit proceeds of crime into our economies.

Against this backdrop, as Chairman of the Council Of Ministers of National Security and Law Enforcement (CONSLE), I encourage all countries represented here to build on existing mechanisms and take the deliberations from this meeting over the days to come and translate it into concrete actions. Let me take this opportunity to highlight the four priority areas of action for IMPACS for 2022: **Illicit trafficking of firearms, cyber security, Trafficking in Persons and maritime security**, undergirded by two critical areas: **information and intelligence sharing and border security**.

Maritime Security and Organised Crime

The challenges faced in the area of maritime security has underscored the need to leverage technology in the fight against transnational organised crime, including in the maritime domain through the use of satellite imagery, radar and surveillance systems, and other maritime domain awareness infrastructure. In some respects, there is an existing framework. CARICOM supports the Shield through the provision

of maritime data on high risk vessels on a daily basis to Guyana, France and Suriname.

Our regions must commit to enhancing **maritime security**, especially with countries in CARICOM having landmasses one-tenth of their Exclusive Economic Zones. In addition, our respective geographic locations along the transshipment routes in the illegal guns for drug trade necessitate coordinated responses to maritime crime and maritime domain awareness. We must look toward **regional** and **national maritime security strategies** as well as **joint inter and intra-regional task forces** and **operational centres** to optimize the limited resources we have against the multiplicity of threats we face. While we recognize the importance of operational centres and task forces, strategic **south-south** partnerships to share intelligence and trends in transnational organised crime are also critical in disrupting organised criminal networks.

Terrorism and Organised Crime

We know that terrorists benefit from transnational organised crime in various ways, including from illicit trafficking in firearms and ammunition, the narcotics trade, as well as trafficking in persons. In resource rich regions such as the **Guianas**, the

effects of transnational organized crime may be seen in the growing environmental threats caused by the illicit trade in natural resources, including oil, and in oil products, utilization of modular refineries and related material, precious metals, stones and other minerals, charcoal and wildlife. Terrorism activities are also fueled by kidnapping for ransom and other crimes, including extortion, money laundering and bank robbery, which are lucrative avenues exploited by transnational criminal organisations.

The linkages between terrorism and organised crime, in particular to terrorism financing cannot be understated and require strong action as a signal of the commitment of the governments of our regions. There is evidentiary support that terrorists benefit from organised crime, including trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling; trafficking in drugs, firearms, cultural property and other goods; kidnapping for ransom; robbery; and other illicit acts. The linkages between terrorism and organised crime are further highlighted by the drug trafficking-terrorism financing nexus, the illicit exploitation and trafficking of natural resources, firearms, wildlife and other goods require targeted actions by countries in our respective regions. In addition, intelligence suggests that organised criminal groups have been involved in transporting terrorists across borders. This is evidenced by reports of returning foreign terrorist fighters taking part in organised criminal

activities, while in other States. We therefore must leverage the border security systems in our respective regions to fully utilise passenger name record and advanced passenger information to identify persons of interest through risk assessments and pre-screening.

Trafficking in Persons and Organised Crime

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe human and economic displacement, which further enabled organized crime groups to grow their networks and access new markets, making detection of trafficking in persons more difficult in the last two years, and increasing opportunities for migrant smuggling and irregular cross-border movements.

Comprehensively addressing all forms of trafficking in persons, migrant smuggling and illegal migration are integral in the fight against transnational organised crime. It is imperative for countries within our respective regions to continue to protect victims; prevent the occurrence through raising awareness; and prosecute and convict perpetrators of these crimes. It is also critical that States move with alacrity to strengthen, adopt and implement measures at the national levels in line with

relevant international legal frameworks, including international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee laws.

Corruption and Organised Crime

The economic downturn resulting from the ongoing global pandemic has spurred increased corruption. This is evidence not only in the distribution of well needed emergency rescue packages for affected citizens and businesses, but also the manipulation of the procurement of essential medicines, medical supplies and equipment. With vast amounts of resources, corrupt practices, such as embezzlement, bribes and price gouging for crucial commodities have placed a strain on governments' resources across the regions. In this regard, anti-corruption institutions at the national and international levels should continue to ensure that emergency economic rescue and stimulus packages reach intended beneficiaries.

Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime

The illicit trafficking in drugs through our regions operates in tandem with mechanisms supporting the legal trade. The UNODC reports that the number of new psychoactive substances emerging on illicit drug markets has increased six-fold in the past decade and reached a record high of over 1,000 unique substances in 2020.

Specifically, annual global seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants increased by 64 per cent in 2019, while opioid use disorder deaths have gone up by 71 per cent over the past decade.

This is alarming and underscores the increasing the complexity of the illicit activities requiring targeted resources and responses from law enforcement. Criminal groups have also sought to make profits by trafficking falsified and substandard medical products (for example hand sanitizers and face masks) in demand since the onset of the global pandemic. Falsified medical products can contain harmful substances and endanger public health, and are often linked to money-laundering, corruption and cybercrime (scams) activities. To cauterize the challenges identified facing our regions, there is an urgent need to implement comprehensive coordinated responses to drug demand and illicit drug trafficking.

Cyber Security

Among the emerging security concerns in our respective regions, cybercrime has evolved and is growing in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic through online fraud, extortion and online child sexual abuse targeting vulnerable individuals, as well as through ransomware that primarily compromises systems, including

hospitals. Organised crime groups have also taken advantage of remote working and tele-business resulting from the pandemic, primarily through phishing scams that enable malicious access to critical Systems.

Recommendations

The challenges identified are not insurmountable. Collectively, we need to tackle root causes as well as the development agenda of countries in our regions as part of integrated crime prevention responses. Our regions are in a unique position having extensive resources, expertise and partnerships; which can be leveraged to enhance our capabilities in the fight against transnational organised crime. In this regard, I offer the following recommendations as we deliberate over the next two days:

- We need a renewed commitment to strengthen land, air, and sea border security through data collection tools, control systems and enhanced coordination; and continuing efforts to deepen regional, sub-regional and international cooperation. Inter-regional, inter-agency and international cooperation as well as public-private partnerships, remain catalysts for success across all the areas identified to counter transnational organised crime.
- We need to agree definitive actions on the implementation of the international legal framework promoting maritime security. This includes ratification of the

Treaty of San Jose for countries that have not yet done so. It also includes outlining immediate next steps and concrete actions for the development of the regional maritime security strategy and identification of areas of cooperation for mutual legal assistance. We need to agree collaborative measures to implement global counter-terrorism instruments, international drug control conventions, and the Convention against Corruption. Together we can **detect**, **deter**, and **disrupt** transnational organised criminal networks.

- We need to coordinate the mechanisms in place in our regions to effectively address the areas of mutual concern. By leveraging south-south cooperation and pooling our resources, we can make IMPACS, SICA, Regional Security System more effective in the fight against transnational organised crime. We have the frameworks and institutional arrangements forging a solid foundation for interregional, intra-regional and international cooperation against transnational organised crime.
- Fighting money-laundering, terrorist financing and corruption by strengthening the network of Financial Intelligence Units, complying with relevant United Nations instruments and resolutions and Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations and INTERPOL.

Conclusion

Our regions have an opportunity to address key challenges facing us. We have made progress over the years, and continue to do so. In 2012, Guyana and Suriname were the first two Caribbean countries to join the Container Control Programme to improve port security and prevent the illegal use of sea containers in drug trafficking and transnational organised criminal activities. These countries are again taking steps to implement an anti-Crime Pact. The development of a common security masterplan among the Guianas is another signal of our ability to collaborate and leverage our resources to fight common threats.

We are stronger together. The implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Crime, and its protocols addressing human trafficking, migrant smuggling and illicit firearms remain an important tool in the fight against transnational organized crime. Of equal importance is the support from strategic partners such as the **INTERPOL**, **UNODC**, **UNLIREC**, Small Arms Survey (SAS) and World Customs Organisation (WCO). Leveraging these key partnerships and working collaboratively will be the key to our collective success. States should bolster their responses through continued capacity building, seeking technical assistance from national, regional and

international partners and employing measures to fight transnational organized crime. Let us not forget our collective responsibility to our nations. As governments, we have the responsibility to lead and engage at the national level, the civil society, the private sector, youth, women and all stakeholders who form part of our comprehensive response to combat transnational organised crime in order to foster durable solutions and to ensure our borders' and citizens' security.

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