



ELEVENTH UN CONGRESS ON CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Bangkok, Thailand 18-25 April 2005



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DAILY HIGHLIGHTS

Today, at a press briefing, Eduardo Vetere, Executive Secretary of the Congress, United Nations *Office on Drugs and Crime* (UNODC), drew attention to the special treaty event, and the high-level segment of the Congress, which begin tomorrow. He said that Member States had made many additional comments on the draft Bangkok declaration, and that some Member States had proposed new instruments on money-laundering, cybercrime, protection of cultural property and mutual assistance and extradition. These proposals were still under discussion.

Loide Lungameni, Legal Officer, UNODC, explained the concept of UN standards and norms. She highlighted the UNODC's work in providing technical assistance to requesting Member States. Anna Giudice, Drug Control and Crime Prevention Officer, UNODC, addressed the issue of treatment of prisoners, juvenile justice and victim protection. She stressed that human rights should be at the core of every criminal justice system. A short documentary on standard-setting in crime prevention and criminal justice, produced by the US-based NGO "Two Hands Free" was shown at the end of the press briefing.

Committee I today held a workshop on enhancing criminal justice reform, including restorative justice. Several panellists brought up the issue of restorative justice, which they felt held considerable promise as a cost-effective alternative to traditional responses to criminal offenders. They also identified the challenges they had encountered in reforming criminal justice systems.

Kent Roach, Professor, University of Toronto, Canada said restorative justice deserved particular attention because it was emerging as an important alternative to prosecutions and imprisonment, as a means of holding offenders accountable in a manner that responded to the needs of offenders, victims and the community.

The representative of Finland noted that, unlike in many other countries, the mediation process in Finland had strong ties to social and youth work. According to him, one of the most valued results of the mediation process was that the offender and the victim discussed the conflict and discharged their emotions. The Finnish experience suggested that there should not be strong formal links between mediation and the system of sanctions. The Ghanaian representative felt that alternatives to imprisonment, such as probation and community service were found to be effective. Juvenile offenders must be kept out of prison as much as possible.

The representative of the United Kingdom said that research indicated that, while the restorative justice approach had real benefits from the victim's perspective, there was no universal model that could be applied; she felt it was necessary to look at cultural and other contexts in which systems were put in place.

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Michel Bouchard, Associate Deputy Minister of Justice, Canada, said his country had looked with interest at the possibility of a charter of the rights of prisoners.

On the subject of reforms, Yvon Dandurand, Senior Associate, International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy, felt that justice system reforms must be designed as comprehensive and coherent initiatives even if they could only be implemented incrementally; the Algerian representative felt that justice reforms must take into account the social and political reality of the country.

The representative of Pakistan said that reform efforts had to establish a police system which was politically neutral, non-authoritarian, accountable and responsible to the community.

Vincent Del Buono, Programme Coordinator, Security, Justice and Growth Programme, British Council, Department for International Development, Nigeria, observed that the proper functioning of governments was also about ensuring that other institutions were in place, namely an independent judiciary, an effective impartial police and prison system and a wide range of financial and regulatory systems; Alejandro Salinas Rivera, Lawyer, Unit of International Affairs, Public Defence Office, Chile, noted that a complete legal system must contain three pillars: criminal prosecution, the courts and access to justice and the right to defence.

At an informal event in the afternoon, Mr. Vetere, Executive Secretary of the Congress, UNODC, presented Irene Melup, a former UN official, a publication in her honour titled "Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power". Ms. Melup played a central role in the formulation and adoption of the UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power. Mr. Vetere paid tribute to her work, calling her an example of "what can be achieved by the single-minded determination of a tireless and unselfish individual fighting for a just cause in the name of those who, for too long, were deprived of a voice".

On the same occasion, Mr. Vetere also presented a certificate of merit to Dr. M. Shikita, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Asian Crime Prevention Foundation and Vice-President of the Executive Committee of the International Association of Prosecutors. He praised Dr. Shikita as "the foremost internationally-oriented prosecutor -- and this for half a century".

Workshop 6 in Committee II discussed measures to combat computer-related crime. Among other things, the workshop highlighted recent trends in computer-related crime and discussed the digital divide between developed and developing nations. It also discussed measures such as the creation of comprehensive and effective legal frameworks, international cooperation, technical assistance and law enforcement capacity-building, as well as the promotion of public-private partnerships.

In ancillary meetings, NGO representatives met to discuss three aspects related to prisons: trends in the imprisonment of women worldwide, the impact of prison privatization, and the need for an international code of professional ethics for staff. Other meetings urged for the enactment of counter-terrorism measures, keeping in mind individual rights and international conventions, and of addressing the needs of victims of terrorism. Economic and financial crimes, transnational crime in Asia, and youth violence in developing country metropolises were also discussed.