



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Speech by IPU Secretary General Martin Chungong

The future of multilateral drug policy: reform or status quo?

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Excellencies, good morning or good afternoon to you,

I would like to thank the Global Commission on Drug Policy for inviting me to take part in this side event on such an important topic for us at the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and one on which we have been focusing our efforts over the last two decades. I would like to take this opportunity to renew our sincere thanks to our partner, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which provides substantial support to the IPU's initiatives in this area.

We are in the presence of a scourge which has the potential to disrupt the sociopolitical and economic stability of our societies and jeopardize our public health efforts.

1. Weakened public health

Problems related to drug abuse are still strongly associated with several diseases of pandemic proportions, such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, among others. The 2015 edition of the UNODC report indicates that in 2013 there were an estimated 1.65 million people living with HIV who inject drugs.

While the use of traditional drugs, such as heroin and cocaine, seems to be declining in some parts of the world, prescription drug abuse and new psychoactive substance abuse are gradually growing. Despite the progress made in some areas, the overall magnitude of drug demand has not substantially changed. In general, illicit use of drugs such as cocaine and heroin continues to increase in developing countries, notably in drug-producing and transit countries.

The impact of drugs on public health is an ongoing challenge for governments, especially in countries whose economies are already fragile.

2. Deconstructive and destabilizing effect of drugs

Young people are particularly vulnerable to drug use and, especially in economically depressed areas with a general lack of education and working opportunities, are the first and easiest targets of criminal organizations in the recruitment process into illicit drug-related activities. The growing power and influence of these criminal organizations, with their illegal and damaging activities, combined with sometimes

widespread distrust of local authorities, undermine political institutions and the rule of law.

Considering these phenomena which erode the foundations and pillars of our societies, urgent, large-scale action – inspired and driven by political will – should be taken as part of a multilateral approach involving all stakeholders concerned, including the groups and communities that are constantly exposed to the harmful effects of drugs.

As part of this over-arching strategy, in which dialogue should remain a privileged tool, the role of parliament is decisive, considering its constitutional prerogatives.

- At the legislative level, we need courageous reform of legal provisions that sets out to target traffickers while also creating a conducive environment for the care and reintegration of both direct and collateral victims of drug trafficking. As agenda-setting actors, parliamentarians can trigger national deliberation processes inspired by the multilateral review process, and can actively explore ways of bringing national legislation and policy into line with the international framework, including the Action Plan on International Cooperation on the Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development as well as the Guiding Principles on Drug Demand Reduction.
- Another area to which parliamentarians can contribute has to do with legislative innovation in drug policy, which would undoubtedly benefit from specialized research and recommendations by international experts.
- And, of course, parliaments have the task of holding governments to account, making sure that adequate resources are allocated to implement drug policy, as well as ensuring that there is support from the public and civil society.
- Efforts should also be focused on combating the poverty, inequality and unemployment that drive many into working for criminal organizations. A paradigm shift in the approach to development is essentially required.
- Critical efforts should be made in promoting health and in achieving peace, justice and strong institutions, which correspond to Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 16 respectively, and where the IPU concentrates its efforts. In 2019, the IPU adopted a resolution on universal health coverage, setting out parliaments' commitment to its achievement. Similarly, parliaments should work towards building strong institutions that are resilient to organized crime.

As an example of the multilateral cooperation approach to drug control that we want and need, I congratulate the Global Commission on Drug Policy for its commitment and its decisive efforts, particularly in West Africa. I am very pleased with the emerging partnership between our two institutions, especially in supporting inter-regional and multi-sectoral cooperation – the key to holistic action with a lasting impact. I would like to stress that the Model Drug Law remains a critical tool in the creation of an environment that is hostile to traffickers, and in the implementation of concerted action.

The IPU is committed to backing the efforts of the Global Commission on Drug Policy in support of the West Africa Commission on Drugs – an initiative set up with the involvement of the ECOWAS Parliament, with which the IPU enjoys long-standing cooperation. The findings and recommendations of such regional initiatives, drawing on independent expertise to inform policy- and law-making, can be invaluable in finding innovative solutions to drug control.

I thank you for your attention.