

Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy

First Meeting

Rio de Janeiro, April 30th 2008

Summary

The Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy is an initiative born of former presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso, from Brazil, César Gaviria, from Colombia and Ernesto Zedillo, from Mexico, to respond to concerns related to the problems of drug consumption and traffic in Latin America. The idea to constitute a commission capable of consolidating a debate concerning this problematic also responds to the necessity of reviewing the world drug policies in the scope of the United Nations, which began in March 2008 and will terminate during the meeting in Vienna, Austria, in March 2009. The Commission counts on the support of the Center Edelstein, Fernando Henrique Cardoso Institute (IFHC), the Open Society Institute (OSI), the Democratic Platform and Viva Rio.

The Commission composed of eighteen eminent members from various countries in Latin America, derived of different fields with diversified experiences and backgrounds related to the problematic drug situation.

César Gaviria – Former President of Colombia, Commission's co-president.

Ernesto Zedillo – Former President of Mexico, Commission's co-president.

Fernando Henrique Cardoso – Former President of Brazil, Commission's co-president.

Alejandro Junco (México) – Journalist. Director of the press group *La Reforma*.

Ana María Romero de Campero (Bolivia) - Journalist. She was named by Congress as the first Ombudsman (*Defensora del Pueblo*) of Bolivia (1998-2003). Since 2004 she has directed the UNIR Bolivia Foundation, working with initiatives of “ Dialog and Peaceful Conflict Negotiation”.

Antanas Mockus Sivickas (Colombia) – Ex-mayor of Bogotá, popularly elected for two terms: 1995-1997/2001-2003.

Diego García Sayán (Peru) – Judge and Vice-president of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Former Peruvian Minister of Justice and Minister of Foreign Relations.

Enrique Krauze (Mexico) –Writer. Published many works, including notably the books *Caudillos culturales en la Revolución mexicana* (1976), *Biografía del Poder* (1987) and *La Construcción de la Democracia* (2000).

Enrique Santos Calderón (Colombia) – Journalist. Director of press group *El Tiempo*.

General Alberto Cardoso (Brazil) – Former Chief Minister of the Brazilian Presidency Cabinet during the Presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

João Roberto Marinho (Brasil) – Journalist. Vice-President of O Globo Organizations, a Brazilian press group.

Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru) - Writer. He has received innumerable literary awards such as the Prince of Asturias Award (1986), the Cervantes Award (1994) and the Jerusalem Award (1995).

Moisés Naím (Venezuela) – Director of “Foreign Policy” magazine, based in Washington DC, which circulates in 175 countries and is published in 12 languages.

Patricia Llerena (Argentina) – Chamber Judge of the Oral Criminal Tribunal in the city of Buenos Aires. She is currently part of a committee of experts revising the drug laws in Argentina.

Paulo Coelho (Brasil) – Writer, has received numerous international awards such as the “World Economic Forum Crystal Award” and the French “Légion d’Honneur”.

Sergio Ramírez (Nicaragua) – Former Vice-President of the country. He is a columnist for several newspapers.

Sonia Picado Sotela (Costa Rica) – Ambassador of Costa Rica in the United States between 1994 and 1998. Judge of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights between 1988 and 1994.

Tomás Eloy Martínez (Argentina) - Writer. Among his featured works are “Lugar Común la Muerte” (1979), “La Novela de Perón” (1985), “Santa Evita” (1996) and “El Vuelo de la Reina” (2002), the latter a winner of the Alfaguara Literature Award.

The Commission’s objective is to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of current drug policy in Latin America and to contribute towards more efficient, safe and humane policies. The first meeting was held in Rio de Janeiro on April 30th 2008, marking the beginning of a frank and audacious debate on the subject, defying the long period of silence and taboos around the drug problematic. The issue is a current problem in several dimensions and can no longer be thought only as State responsibility.

Three documents were presented at the meeting. The first one, elaborated by Martin Jelsma, from Transnational Institute in Holland, explained the drug policy situation in the European Union and the current state of debate in the United Nations agenda. The second document, developed by Peter Reuter, specialist in domestic and international drugs policy in the United States, concerns the present North American situation related to drugs. In the third document Rubem Cesar Fernandes, executive director of the Non Governmental Organization Viva Rio, reported the situation of Latin America, related to the production, traffic and consumption of drugs. The presentations objective was to launch the debate on the Latin American reality, in the context of countries and regions with longer tradition in drug policies.

There are several evidences on the progressive growth of the drug problem in Latin America, as well as the inefficiency revealed by current policies to combat it. The violence and the corruption associated to drug traffic and the ineffective current policies are corroding the civil society and democratic institutions. Due to such evidences, the Commission is open to an ample debate on the subject, listening to specialists, discussing experiences, evaluating alternatives and formulating recommendations.

According to the affirmations of one of the co-presidents, the proposals elaborated by the Commission will be presented to public opinion of Latin American countries as well as to the international community. The expectation is that the voice of Latin America will be heard in the global debate about a transnational problem that affects everyone.

Relevant aspects of the debate:

The members of the Commission agreed that the policies implemented in Latin America had different impacts in the countries of the region, but failed in general.

There was a generalized recognition about the weakness of the unique approach on the reduction of drugs supply. It was detected a necessity with a high priority focus in the prevention of the consumption and the need to evaluate, within the Commission, the option to decriminalize and de-penalize drug consumption. It was also considered that the problematic drug situation must be faced not only by governments but should involve more and more key civil society actors such as universities, health professionals, families and other institutions as Churches, for example. The conclusion was reached that young people form the main risk group and they must be the central target of the advertising campaigns of prevention.

Immediate measures were defined as the creation of a document on the subject that will serve as a reference for Latin America, the analysis of the financial aspect of the drug policies, the opening of a oriented debate to promote a less moral and less ideological speech on the dilemma that involves the press media in a oriented strategy to local discussions, deliberating to the utmost the resources for population sensitization.

It was indicated the importance of accompanying and evaluating, in an independent way, the current policies, from a scientific approach.

September, 2008 and February, 2009 were proposed for the realization of the second, and the third and last meeting, of the Commission, respectively.

More information in www.drugsanddemocracy.org