

Abstract for the Ninth Meeting of the United Nations Open-Ended Informal Consultative Process on the Oceans and the Law of the Sea 23 – 27 June 2008.

“Prevention and suppression of transnational organized crime”

The geographic layout of the Caribbean region adds to the complexities of dealing with transnational crime, in particular illicit traffic in narcotics, and smuggling of persons by sea. This tropical region geographically links the major narcotic producing countries of the Andean Ridge of South America to North America. Of equal significance is the fact that the region straddles major sea lines of communication to and from the Panama Canal, to the eastern seaboard of the United States of America and to major cities in Europe. The proximity of the chain of islands to the major maritime routes and their extensive open coastlines and territorial seas make the Caribbean region a natural transit route for narcotic trafficking into the United States and Europe. The challenge for all islands then is to develop the intelligence and policing systems for maritime enforcement and to engage legal arrangements to treat with international crime and the terrorism potential.

Trinidad and Tobago lies at the southernmost end of the eastern Caribbean island chain and it is very close to the South American mainland. It is the most industrialized island of the region with its economic resources being derived from oil and gas from offshore marine sources. As a result of its good air and sea linkages to the major cities in North America, the UK and Europe, Trinidad and Tobago has become a significant trans-shipment point. In addition to narco-trafficking, the weapons that accompany the shipments into the country fuel the escalation of violent crime within its borders.

The threats to the region therefore are illicit narcotics, arms smuggling and the potential for terrorist acts against the cruise ship industry and in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, against the offshore energy sector. These challenges loom large for many nations in the region. They are transnational, adaptive, and insidious threats to those seeking peace, stability and economic development. By their nature, these challenges cannot be countered by one country alone. They require cooperative solutions involving a unified, full spectrum governmental and international approach in order to best address them.

International criminals have been able to innovate, expand, and flourish in a furiously changing international scenario. The globalization process, coupled with the communications/technology revolution, have made the international system more interactive, integrated, interrelated, and interconnected. The countries in the region must adopt a similar approach.

Enforcement strategies must of necessity involve sub-regional and regional cooperative efforts in policing the seas under the various national jurisdictions of the region. They include bilateral operational agreements that involve naval forces from the United States of America, United Kingdom and France; the development of regional intelligence systems, establishment of sub-regional electronic observation systems, development of an Advanced Passenger Information System; vulnerability assessments of critical infrastructure in the energy sector, transformation of the ports to become Container Security Initiative Ports able to pre-screen maritime cargo

containers, adoption of the ISPS Code and the development of protocols for extradition for prosecution either abroad or within the region.

In this regard, Trinidad and Tobago has taken a leadership role under its CARICOM responsibility.