

Press Conference by Executive Secretary of United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

SALVADOR, 12 April (UN Information Service) – Emerging forms of crime, such as environmental crime, cybercrime and piracy, were expected to figure alongside “traditional” forms of crime, such as bribery and money-laundering, in discussions during the Twelfth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, John Sandage, Executive Secretary, said at a press briefing today.

Mr. Sandage of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), said Member States were expected to discuss whether to launch new negotiations on an international instrument on cybercrime and prison conditions, among other things, although it was uncertain whether a decision to start those talks could be reached at this time.

Accompanying Mr. Sandage was Brazilian Justice Minister Luiz Paulo Teles Ferreira Barreto, who said that another new focus of the Congress, being held in Salvador from 12 to 19 April, was how to tackle cultural property rights, which was related to intellectual property rights. Elected this morning as President of the Twelfth Crime Congress, he said plants with herbal properties were increasingly being smuggled out of their countries of origin with the aid of transnational organized crime networks, alongside more traditional smuggled goods such as drugs, weapons and ammunition.

Likening the removal of such cultural heritage to moving “stolen property”, Mr. Barreto said it was important to penetrate organized crime networks that helped in their theft and to recover the proceeds from their illegal use. It was the first time at a multilateral gathering that cultural rights were receiving attention, he noted, commenting that flora and fauna from culturally rich countries found their way abroad for research and eventually turned into patented products.

Exploiting plants with medicinal value was a form of environmental crime, like logging and the smuggling of exotic animals, and had been a topic of conversation over many years, explained Mr. Sandage. However, it was hard to say where those discussions would lead since Member States had not reached a consensus on logical next steps.

Mr. Barreto said money-laundering and drug trafficking were major concerns, with organized crime networks increasingly turning to modern communications technology to gain advantage. He called for better use of the United Nations Palermo Protocol, signed in 2000, which contained provisions to allow cooperation between States in freezing bank accounts with criminal links, and to recover and repatriate funds as required.

Romeu Tuma Junior, Brazil’s National Secretary for Justice, said the Twelfth Congress was a landmark session, having taken place in the aftermath of a global financial crisis. As a reaction to the crisis, financial institutions had established mechanisms to protect financial markets, which could be used to fine-tune regulations to help advance crime-fighting goals.

Mr. Barreto added that fiscal oversight required international cooperation, and that one strategy was to apply pressure on countries that were intent on protecting their banking systems, especially when funds were found to have links to the drug trade, terrorism and corruption. On a positive note, there had been a noticeable shift in attitudes after the events of 11 September 2001, whereby countries were adopting a more cooperative stance towards the recovery of funds moved abroad illegally.

Noting that Brazil had concluded agreements with various territories, such as the British Virgin Islands, the Isle of Jersey in the United Kingdom, the Bahamas and Liechtenstein, with regard to more serious crimes, he stressed that in order to combat international criminal networks, States must create their own international network.

Mr. Barreto said countries in South America had enough political will to establish police, legal and judicial cooperation among origin, transit and end-use countries in combating the drug trade. However, such collaboration was hard to achieve at times, because some countries lacked the means to offer speedy cooperation. In an ideal world, real-time cooperation would allow authorities to track drug activities from production to transportation and sales, and would involve the police, prosecutors, attorneys, and other members of the judicial branch of Government.

Giancarlo Summa, a United Nations official, said President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil was expected to attend a high-level segment during the final three days of the Congress, alongside 60 to 70 high-ranking Government ministers from various other countries.

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