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SHARING NATIONAL EXAMPLES, UN CONGRESS DELEGATES SAY MODERNIZED CRIME-PREVENTION APPROACHES WORK IN BOLSTERING PUBLIC TRUST, PARTICIPATION

With the explosion of social media, modernizing law enforcement techniques in the fight against crime was essential to bolstering community trust and involvement while combating new online threats, including terrorist recruitment and cyberbullying, delegates heard on the penultimate day of the thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

A range of national examples, from online police presence and 24-hour hotlines to YouTube-style programming, were offered by speakers during their discussion of agenda item 6: “National approaches to public participation in strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice”.

The discussion was led by a guide (document [A/CONF.222/PM.1](#)) and a working paper (document [A/CONF.222/9](#)) prepared by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) that examined opportunities and challenges related to public participation, including the role of social media and new information and communications technology, community-centred initiatives and the social reintegration of offenders. The paper also identified several recommendations for Member States to consider, including the design and implementation of prevention strategies to ensure the participation of all sectors of society, with a special role for youth. Delegates were also briefed on conclusions reached at Workshop 4 on “Public contribution to crime prevention and raising awareness of criminal justice: experiences and lessons learned”.

Social media was a key channel for engaging the public and should include civil society and private-sector partners, speakers said. The representative of Thailand said his country had had that in mind when establishing the Justice Channel, an innovative YouTube-based television programme. That platform aimed at information dissemination, complementing other efforts, including the establishment of community justice centres.

In addressing the new threat of online terrorist recruitment, some delegates regretted to say that youth from their countries had, after a process of online radicalization, joined groups as fighters in conflicts abroad. To counter that trend, Norway’s representative said, police had, among other things, broadened their presence on the Internet. “It is important for us to base efforts to combat radicalization and violent extremism on the same basic principles as the general prevention of crime,” he emphasized. France’s speaker said his country had taken a number of steps, including recently establishing a 24-hour hotline to work against such radicalization.

Yet, social media carried dangers, said Canada’s delegate, pointing to high-profile cases of cyberbullying that had resulted in the victims taking their own lives. A new act now protected citizens from online crime, but there was concern about the growing trend of increased restrictions on free expression online, resulting from measures taken by some Governments to censor or control digital technologies. “The same rights that exist and are protected offline must be protected online,” he said.

Implementing measures to gain community trust in law enforcement was important for a number of speakers. The representative of the United States said that, after events in Ferguson and New York had exposed a deep-

rooted frustration, particularly among people of colour, the President had signed an executive order and created a special task force. The resulting 63 recommendations on improving trust and strengthening the legitimacy of police institutions were available on the Justice Department's website. "Community-oriented policing is a proven model of law enforcement," he said. Agreeing, Qatar's speaker said that giving a role to local communities was an important crime-prevention tool for his country, whose programme included meetings with civil society to raise awareness on justice-related issues.

Novel prevention efforts aimed at building community trust had actually lowered crime rates, Brazil's delegate said, emphasizing that there is no "one size fits all" model. Outlining several successful examples, including the AfroReggae Cultural Group's activities, she said police "pacification" units operating throughout Rio de Janeiro had led to a dramatic fall in homicide rates.

Some delegates described multidimensional approaches, with Mexico's representative saying that an overhaul of her country's justice system included reforms based on the principles of the rule of law, crime prevention and protecting victims' rights, and new laws were being discussed on juvenile justice. National efforts in El Salvador involved civil society, the private sector and robust public participation, that country's speaker said, highlighting the "Forward" campaign, which promoted dialogue with a focus on families as the foundation of social capital. Targeted projects operating in 15 priority locations had also been developed alongside a prevention and rehabilitation initiative geared towards youth at risk to tackle threats posed by gangs, or *maras*.

Volunteerism was another method used by States to boost public participation. Germany's delegate said 3,000 volunteers worked nationwide to care for crime victims and citizens could volunteer for the police or the judiciary, serving as lay judges. Libya's representative highlighted his country's voluntary police programme, but cautioned that participants must be protected from revenge attacks and from lawyers purporting that volunteers were not recognized by the Criminal Code.

In some countries, alternative approaches were also addressing issues related to offenders. China's representative described a programme whereby 700,000 individuals had been given community sentences instead of jail time. Japan's speaker said a national volunteer probation officer programme commissioned 50,000 citizens to help inmates and juvenile offenders reintegrate into society. That effort, dating back more than a century, had contributed to a low crime rate and was being shared as a unique example of community-based efforts.

Throughout the morning-long debate, speakers underlined the importance of including civil society and the private sector in various efforts. Many also said special initiatives targeting youth were important as those promoted participation in crime prevention and criminal justice efforts. A number of related issues were addressed by the Doha Declaration (document [A/CONF.222/L.6](#)), which Member States unanimously adopted at the start of the Congress. (See Press Release [SOC/CP/359](#) of 12 April.)

By the Declaration, Member States endeavoured to explore the potential for the use of traditional and new information and communications technology in the development of policies and programmes to strengthen crime prevention and criminal justice, including for identifying public safety issues and fostering public participation. They also pledged to promote the improvement of e-government systems in the area of crime prevention and criminal justice, with a view to enhancing public participation, and to promote the use of new technologies to facilitate cooperation and partnerships between the police and the communities they serve, as well as to share good practices and exchange information on community policing.

Also delivering statements were representatives of Algeria, Indonesia, Venezuela and Sudan.

The Congress will meet again at 11:30 a.m. on Sunday, 20 April, to conclude its work.