

# Political Rhetoric and the Gap between Policy and Practice



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I think I would like to be a little bit provocative, as I have listened with great interest to all the remarks made during these sessions, including those by the Ministers, and I think that the law enforcement people here will understand that there is a big difference between the theory and the practice. It may be that before the end of the meeting we get down to ideas about the practice.

The Minister of Justice mentioned earlier the Special Session of the United Nations in 1998. Incidentally, I attended and addressed that assembly, and it makes me think that it sometimes takes us a long time to learn from our historical experiences, particularly in relation to this problem of illicit drugs. As long ago as 1993, a Yale professor said, “There is something very special about illicit drugs. If they don’t always cause the drug user to behave irrationally, they certainly cause many non-users to behave that way.” And in the many declarations that I have heard over many years, I have become particularly frustrated with the number of times that I hear the same ideas and the same things being expressed. I can tell you that when the Commission of Narcotic Drugs met, which I began to attend in the 1970s, I could almost write the minutes before the meeting took place. There was a great deal of rhetoric,



particularly political rhetoric, but very little action.

In the Special Session of the UN in 1998, there was a clear recognition of the problem. The political declaration said that “drugs destroy lives and communities, undermine sustainable human development and generate crime. Drugs affect all sectors of society in all countries. In particular, drug abuse affects the freedom and development of young people, the world’s most valuable asset. Drugs are a grave threat to the health and wellbeing of all mankind, the independence of states, democracy, the stability of nations, the structure of all societies, and the dignity and hope of millions of people and their families.” This was in 1998, so nobody can tell us today that we don’t know what the problem is. In the short time I have been in Brazil this trip, it is clear that the problem is recognised. In particular, the new Brazilian initiative of the National Public Security Programme with Citizenship (PRONASCI) is the clearest recognition that I have ever seen of the multidisciplinary nature of the way in which you have to approach the drug problem.

Much of the preparation for the 1998 Special Session was carried out by Mexico. Mexico and other Latin American states were the first to really insist on the idea of balancing demand reduction with repression

and law enforcement. Unfortunately, and this is what happens with political pressure, in that meeting in 1998, there was a feeling that we almost heard in a question that came up in the previous session. Somebody said maybe PRONASCI is only encouraging de-penalisation, legalisation, and so on. The same feeling was expressed in 1998, particularly by the United States. So the insistence was yet again much more on law enforcement, and much less on demand reduction. Even though the balance has been corrected to a certain extent more recently, you will find that in most countries –and this applies in all of our continents, including Europe –there is still more money invested in law enforcement than in demand reduction. So we haven’t got there yet.

What I like about the PRONASCI programme is that it tries to get the balance right. Now, the programme and the way that programme is presented are fine. But the real issue is, can you put it into effect? There are budgetary issues and there is the issue of political will. But importantly, and this is not really a criticism, but a comment: You cannot imagine that a programme which is intended to make so many different changes to what is in fact a society that has existed for many years... how can you limit a programme like that to three years? If somebody said to me “Over the next thirty years we will try to do this”, I’d say fine, that’s realistic. But three years? No. And the budget is of course an issue.

The problem we have found in the international community (and I make excuses here to my political level friends) is that politicians have a time range which is restricted to the next election. It takes a great deal of courage on the part of politicians to adopt a policy which will go

beyond that timeframe. You may not see the results of really big investments for ten years or so, particularly in the case of something like PRONASCI. So, we still haven't yet come to terms with the best way to deal with the problem, but I do believe that the recognition in the presentation of the PRONASCI programme is the right one.

The difficulty then is, as Norine MacDonald of ICS said yesterday, that you can't have security without development. The security aspect is very important. This is not restricted to Brazil, but applies to countries all over the world. At the moment we are in a situation in the suburbs of our big cities in Europe, and the same thing I'm sure applies in Brazil, where there are certain territories where the state does not control what happens. The police occasionally make inroads into these areas, with operations going on for a couple of days periodically, but there is no permanent presence. Whilst a periodic operation may be effective on some level, unless there is a long term presence, it won't change the situation because things go back to what there were before. In these "no-go" areas (although I don't like to call them that), it means the basic system within those areas is controlled, not by the state or by the police, but by the criminals who happen to have occupied the area. So we have a really difficult starting point when it comes to dealing with this kind of situation.

I think the police officers amongst you who work on the ground know what the situation is. They are often fighting a losing battle. There is the best will in the world to do something, but it means that even the training of police has to be orientated in a different way towards dealing with this kind of problem. And so I would recommend very strongly that this PRONASCI

programme is very carefully studied by everyone, and hopefully that it will be put into effect.

Issues arise in the international community, where we still hear terms such as "Zero Tolerance". We still have these expressions which don't really mean anything, but which do affect the way in which the international community comes up their recommendations and resolutions to the UN General Assembly. And I think that's a pity, because in actual fact, many of the member countries are not helped in what they are trying to do by the international community. Even the UN conventions, and particularly the International Narcotics Control Board, put across the point of view that repression and dealing with illicit traffic is 'our' problem, but dealing with demand reduction is 'your' problem. Naturally they hand over the responsibility for what is the most serious issue to the people in your own countries and territories.

To end, I will say that there are very good signs that this situation is being resolved to a certain extent.