

Excellency,

In a few days, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice will hold its eighteenth session. As I am sure you recall, the Commission is the principal United Nations policymaking body in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice. In its relatively short existence, it has scored major successes, such as the initiation of negotiations that resulted in major new international criminal law instruments, namely the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its three Protocols, as well as the United Nations Convention against Corruption. However, since the time it achieved these milestones, the Commission has not maintained the same track record. I believe all of us, Member States and the Secretariat, should work together to redress this and enable the Commission to fulfil its demanding and challenging role to the maximum extent.

The forthcoming 18th session offers an opportunity to start realizing this goal. I would like to draw your attention to some of the key issues that would be the focus of discussion under the agenda (attached) and encourage you to ensure that your Government's delegation comes prepared to engage in in-depth discussion and put forward or entertain new ideas on how to build on those topics and find common solutions for the future.

The Commission will hold two thematic discussions, scheduled to last one day each, on issues of fundamental importance.

The first such discussion, on "Economic fraud and identity-related crime," will take place on Friday, 17 April and will deal with matters very much in the public eye, particularly in the last few months. These relate, inter alia, to the extent and role that economic fraud may have played in the financial and economic turmoil that the world is currently experiencing.

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The debate should provide an opportunity to think about how we can all work together to prevent economic fraud and its repercussions in future. In addition, identity-related crime covers a wide spectrum of criminal activity, much of which is taking place in or through the electronic media, particularly the Internet. Action is urgent and requires new and innovative ideas as well as ways to work with multiple stakeholders, prominent among them being the private sector. But most importantly, it requires capacity. I am speaking of capacity at the political level to overcome divisions and challenge pre-conceived notions about the true dimensions of international cooperation. I am also speaking of capacity at the technical level to help authorities bridge the technology gap and manage to enforce the law.

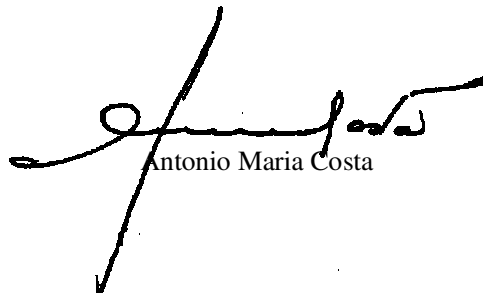
The second thematic discussion is on “Penal reform and the reduction of prison overcrowding.” This is not a new topic. Tragically, however, it has not commanded enough attention and as a result the situation in many parts of the world has deteriorated and the cost in human suffering is growing. We must rally around the Commission and enable it to look at ways of addressing this situation as a matter of urgency, putting to good use the United Nations standards and norms in this field.

The eighteenth session of the Commission will constitute the launch pad for the Twelfth United Nations Crime Congress to be held in Salvador, Brazil in April 2010. The road map to the Congress starts with this session of the Commission and includes the regional preparatory meetings which will take place between May and September this year. The Commission can and should provide guidance to this preparatory process, building on the main theme of the Congress which puts a premium on the importance and needs of the criminal justice system. The overall approach would be to have the Congress place the criminal justice system as an institution firmly at the centre of rule-of-law efforts and on the development agenda, thus enabling criminal justice systems to respond to the challenges of the 21st century. The Congress will be building on an impressive array of instruments, the United Nations Standards and Norms in Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, which have been developed over the past half century. The challenge would be to launch a process through which these standards and norms can be brought together to form the essential integral parts of a model criminal justice system. This process could offer opportunities to review instruments that were developed more than 50 years ago and may need to be brought in line with new realities or to look at areas where new standards and norms may need to be developed.

The Commission’s agenda also contains an item entitled “World Crime Trends and Responses”, under which matters relating to transnational organized crime, corruption and the prevention of terrorism would be analysed. This can offer the Commission the opportunity to shift its attention to new worrisome developments, such as the proliferation and ramifications of incidents of cyber-terrorism. This is an occasion to canvass Member States’ understanding of the term and what action the international community should put in place to tackle the problem on the international stage.

I look forward to working with your Government at the Commission’s forthcoming session and beyond in together shaping a meaningful crime prevention and criminal justice agenda and achieving measurable results.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Antonio Maria Costa