

Statement by Dr Marcus Day, Head of Delegation of St. Lucia
To the High-level Segment of the CND, 12 March 2009

Madam Chair,
Members of the Head table,
Excellencies

Madam Chair, in our desire to be respectful and keep the time limit, we strongly support all the accolades previously extended to the Chair.

We have been asked to speak on the progress achieved and the challenges encountered in meeting the goals and targets set out by the political declaration at the 20th Special Session.

In progress – we are now getting used acknowledging that drug users are entitled to human rights.

The challenge is actually applying those human rights and due process under the law to people who use drugs.

Progress: We have a greater acknowledgement of drug use as a public health issue. In my country, we have begun street-based care for homeless crack cocaine users, assisting them to reduce the social and health consequences of their drug use, helping to keep them as healthy as possible until they chose to exit their drug using career

The challenge is calling this intervention Harm Reduction. For some reason that I fail to understand, even countries that provide services that can only be called harm reduction services, continue to refuse to call them that and actively discourage other countries from using the term. The UNODC is comfortable using the term harm reduction when will the rest of catch up.

Harm Reduction is a strategy to address the health and social needs of drug users while they are using drugs. These are strategies designed to keep people alive and infection free while they work on their issues.

Harm reduction is not about legalization of drugs.

Harm reduction is not permission to use drugs.

Harm reduction is engaging people in a process that leads them to a healthier life style.

In the name of supply reduction – of reducing the size of the drug market rather than the consequences of the drug market, we can not claim much progress. Our law enforcement services work hard and place themselves in harms way to reduce the transit of cocaine through my nation. Nonetheless, even with increasing numbers of seizures, the quantity of cocaine and the price of cocaine on the street have remained steady. Not only have our interdiction efforts failed to reduce the supply of drugs, we are victims of the “unintended consequences” of supply reduction.

Our prisons are over-crowded: 13 Caribbean states are among the top 20 nations that have the highest incarceration rate (per 100,000 population) in the world.

In the name of supply reduction, the homes of cannabis farmers have been destroyed during eradication exercises as a way to discourage re-planting of the crop.

Further, several countries in the Caribbean, including my country, have been named in a recently-issued human rights report as having a high level of extra-judicial killings.

Corruption fueled by the huge sums of money generated by drug trafficking make small island states such as mine vulnerable to the influence of organized crime.

So, while we have made progress in working with people, we still have many more challenges to overcome. Assisting us to overcome these challenges are the support of our international partners, so I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Canadian Government, the British Government, the European Union, OAS/CICAD and the World Bank for their assistance to my country and all CARICOM states in supporting projects in the area of drug demand reduction, HIV prevention and poverty reduction.

I further acknowledge the commitment and support of UNODC for organizing the Meeting of Ministers of National Security in Santo Domingo two weeks ago, and for inviting me to speak on issues of HIV and Drugs. The UNODC clearly recognises that HIV is an important security issue for our governments, and not only a health issue. So allow me to take this opportunity to request to our friends that where possible they support the Santo Domingo Pact and the Caribbean Plan of Action, especially those areas related to harm reduction, HIV prevention, prison reform, alternative sentencing and poverty reduction.

Madam Chair

Allow me as I close to express a reservation to the political declaration that I would like recorded in the official record.

Saint Lucia is a small island developing state and does not have a permanent mission in Vienna. Saint Lucia was keen to participate in the negotiations but as was with many smaller nations left out of the process in its final stages. The last draft of the political declaration we received was dated 27 February. The political declaration has clearly undergone significant changes since that time.

While my country supports the content on the Political Declaration, recognizes the many good points raised in it and will endorse it, we find the assumption of our acquiescence disrespectful and for this reason lodge our reservation and invite other nations who feel similarly to join us in this reservation.

Thank you Madam Chair