

Violent crime and drug-related trafficking pose serious threats to rule of law and development in Central America and the Caribbean, says UNODC Report

New York/Vienna - 27 September (UNODC) - Although cocaine trafficking has sown violence in Central America and the Caribbean, there is a need to promote good governance and strengthen institutions, which are exploited by powerful cross-border criminals, according to a study launched today in New York by Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The study *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment* examines the impact of the major trafficking flows of cocaine; women and children coerced into the sex trade; migrants smuggled for labour; and firearms. Even if the northbound cocaine flows dwindle, it says, these groups would vie for profits from other highly lucrative illicit activities and continue to spread mayhem.

“The relationship between development, the rule of law and security needs to be fully understood. Drugs and crime are also development issues, while stability can be promoted by embracing human rights and access to justice,” said Mr. Fedotov.

Central America has some of the highest homicide rates in the world, with 39 murders per 100,000 citizens in Guatemala, 69 per 100,000 in El Salvador and 92 per 100,000 in Honduras in 2011.

Wedged between the suppliers of coca in the South and the consumers of cocaine in the North the region has become a transit corridor; however, the high rates of violence are not always associated with drug trafficking. El Salvador, for example, has a relatively low cocaine flow of 4 to 5 tons per year but registers the highest sustained murder rate in the region (over 65 per 100,000 between 2000 and 2010).

Rather, it seems that lower demand and increased law enforcement has sparked brutal turf wars between traffickers as they fight over a share in a reduced market. The implementation of Mexico’s security strategy in 2006, which disrupted the northbound supply of cocaine, triggered conflict over new “plazas” at key border crossings, notably along the Guatemalan/Honduran border. Displacement of trafficking routes to the Caribbean also remains a threat.

According to the study, contraband flows have become concentrated in the countries least capable of dealing with them. The challenge is to tackle impunity and corruption, it says, while building police and criminal justice capacity. Chronic crime impoverishes nations by driving away business.

The Report will be discussed at a High-level presentation to Ministers and Ambassadors from the Central American region on 28 September at 15:15 (EST) in Conference Room 2, North Lawn Building, United Nations Headquarters, New York. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Italy, Mr. Staffan De Mistura, will also be in attendance.

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