



Thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

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Agenda item 6

National approaches to public participation in strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice

Draft report

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Addendum

National approaches to public participation in strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice

Proceedings

1. At its 13th plenary meeting, on 18 April 2015, the Congress considered agenda item 6, entitled “National approaches to public participation in strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice”. For its consideration of the item, the Congress had before it the following documents:

(a) Working paper prepared by the Secretariat on national approaches to public participation in strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice (A/CONF.222/9);

(b) Discussion guide for the Thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (A/CONF.222/PM.1).

2. The 13th plenary meeting was chaired by Mitsuru Kitano (Japan), Vice-President of the Congress. A representative of the Secretariat introduced the agenda item and a summary was presented by the moderator of workshop 4, entitled “Public contribution to crime prevention and raising awareness of criminal justice: experiences and lessons learned”. Statements were made by the representatives of Thailand, Germany, Japan, Norway, Canada, Algeria, Brazil, China, the United States, France, Libya, Indonesia, Qatar, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), El Salvador, the Sudan and Mexico.



General discussion

3. Many speakers acknowledged that public participation was critical to strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice, increasing public trust and confidence in justice systems and allowing for public oversight and accountability. Public participation was considered by several speakers as important to creating a culture of lawfulness and respect for the rule of law. As one speaker mentioned, countering crime with only law enforcement and justice was ineffective; knowledge-based prevention approaches involving civil society were crucial. Another speaker drew the attention of participants to the fact that processes aimed at supporting the involvement of citizens needed to be adapted to the environment in which they would be applied and that there was no “one size fits all” model.

4. Many speakers provided examples of consultative and participatory processes, often at the local level, such as prevention committees, security partnerships and community justice centres, as well as specific programmes to engage the public as volunteers in the prevention of crime and the delivery of justice, including as lay judges, police volunteers, probation officers and members of youth justice committees. Many speakers highlighted the need to build trust between the police and the community and to foster more collaborative relationships, as well as to overcome challenges faced in that regard. Community-oriented policing was frequently referred to as a promising model of policing that helped law enforcement agencies to take proactive action with a view to preventing crime. One speaker referred to police councils as another example of partnership with communities; they offered formalized cooperation between local police and municipal authorities. Experience showed that a comprehensive, written agreement on concrete aims and expected results, along with clear agendas for meetings, were important for the success of such councils.

5. Several speakers emphasized the important role of victims in the criminal justice system and the importance of supporting victims of crime, including through legislative measures and appropriate services. Initiatives that were mentioned by speakers in that context included restorative justice initiatives and pro bono legal advice services, as well as other legal aid services funded by the state in line with the United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems. One speaker cautioned that restorative justice initiatives were not appropriate in circumstances in which a victim or his or her family might be reintroduced to danger or trauma, or might suffer revictimization as a result of repeated interaction with an offender. With regard to the provision of legal aid to citizens, including those in financial difficulties, and to special groups such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, and migrant workers, it was suggested that countries should share information on their approaches and experiences.

6. Community support for the rehabilitation and social reintegration of offenders, including through the use of alternative measures to imprisonment through the provision of assistance in finding employment and housing and accessing public services, was mentioned by many speakers. In that context, one speaker presented the use of volunteer probation officers as an effective tool for the prevention of recidivism. Within the context of penal reform, a speaker noted the revision of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, and stated that he looked forward to the consideration and adoption of the revised Rules by the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

7. Many speakers referred to social media and new communications technologies and how those technologies could be used to engage the public in crime prevention and criminal justice, in particular by law enforcement through information-sharing and awareness-raising regarding crime and violence. One speaker noted that social media could be used to provide more information about the justice system, which was crucial in an era in which an increasing number of accused were not represented by lawyers. As regards the threat posed by social media and new technologies in terms of how they could be used to incite violence and commit crime, one speaker stressed the need to prevent cyberbullying.

8. A number of speakers pointed to the role of the media in strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice. It was stressed that well-functioning, diverse and critical media could help raise awareness of crime and lay a foundation for discussion on improving police efforts. One speaker referred in that context to freedom of the media and expression as an important cornerstone of democratic societies and as essential to the protection of human rights. Another speaker indicated that the media, including radio and television, were helpful in providing information on trafficking in human beings and in addressing local disputes among citizens.

9. While welcoming the participation of citizens in crime prevention and criminal justice activities, several speakers noted that engagement of the public should take place within the appropriate regulatory frameworks. It was also noted that public participation should be complementary to State efforts to address crime and victimization.

10. Several speakers recognized that the participation of civil society and the private sector in the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of governmental policies was a key element of guaranteeing their effectiveness. With regard to criminal justice reform processes, one speaker outlined efforts to engage the public in supporting the transition to an adversarial justice system, including the development of guidelines to ensure that the public could assess results of the process.

11. One speaker referred to the globalization of crime and the role played by transnational organized criminal groups. Another speaker expressed support for civil society involvement in the working groups under the Organized Crime Convention and the Convention against Corruption.

12. Concerning youth and crime prevention and criminal justice, one speaker noted the development of laws and procedures applicable to young persons who committed crimes and how that might result in a decline in the number of charges and deprivation of liberty. It was also acknowledged that communities, families and health and educational professionals played a crucial role in preventing and responding to youth crime. One of the speakers underlined that youth, in particular youth at risk of offending, were an important group that had to be taken into account in initiatives aimed at achieving peaceful coexistence and reducing crime. Reference was made to specific urban crime phenomena, including crime committed by gangs, which required new approaches to crime prevention.

13. Speakers recalled that addressing radicalization by terrorist groups and recruitment via the Internet was high on the political agenda, including the issue of youth who joined such groups as fighters. One speaker noted that one prevention

measure included an increased presence of the police on the Internet, through active participation in discussions, including on websites that promoted radicalization and violent extremism.

14. The Doha Youth Forum was recognized as a very good example of involving youth in crime prevention and criminal justice discussions at the global level. It was suggested that similar youth forums should take place at future congresses.

15. Several speakers noted that more sharing of practices and lessons learned regarding how to involve the public effectively in crime prevention and criminal justice was needed, including discussions at the international level. The fact that the Thirteenth Congress had addressed that topic was therefore welcomed. One speaker expressed particular interest in exchanges of best practices and lessons learned among Member States with regard to the implementation of strategies in communities with high levels of criminality. Appreciation was expressed for the role of UNODC in promoting the exchange of ideas and expertise. One speaker expressed the hope that more would be heard from the Secretariat on the scope of guidelines on public participation in strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice, as had been proposed in the working paper for agenda item 6.