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FIRST UN CONGRESS ON THE PREVENTION
OF CRIME AND TREATMENT OF OFFENDERS

CONGRESS HEARS LECTURE BY DR. ISRAEL C. DRAPKIN
Medical Director of the Institute of Criminology
Prisons Administration, Santiago de Chile
ON MODERN TRENDS IN THE PREVENTION OF CRIME
AND TREATMENT OF OFFENDERS IN LATIN AMERICA

The first United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders met this morning in plenary session under the chairmanship of Mr. Sanford BATES (United States), Honorary Chairman of the Congress.

Dr. Israel C. DRAPKIN (Chile), Medical Director of the Institute of Criminology, Prisons Administration, Santiago de Chile, gave a lecture on "Modern trends in the prevention of crime and treatment of offenders in Latin America".

After outlining the geographical, climatic, demographic, economic, political and social characteristics of the Latin-American countries, he spoke of the main trends in their crime. Unlike the "organized crime" peculiar to industrially and economically advanced countries such as the United States, and the psychopathic crime so frequent in culturally-advanced countries such as those of Europe, crime in the Latin-American countries is characterized by its primitiveness - its instinctual aggressiveness.

These primitive crimes vary in form from one Latin-American country to another according to its national and regional characteristics and conditions. In most of them, for example, knives are used more frequently than firearms. Mutilation, acid-throwing and poisoning are rare.

The two main factors determining these forms of crime are poverty and alcoholism together with illiteracy and lack of culture.

During the colonial period the criminal law was that in force in the conquering countries, especially Spain and Portugal. After independence the Spanish and French penal codes most strongly influenced the legal draftsmen of the Latin-American countries.

Italian legal thought, especially the work of Cesare Lombroso, had been a tremendous influence. Vervaeck's work has also been important. José Ingenieros established at the Buenos Aires National Penitentiary the world's first institute of criminology, an achievement to which all Latin Americans can point with pride. Most of the Latin-American countries now have similar institutes.

Dr. DRAPKIN went on to speak of the sexual problem of prisoners. Various systems have been organized in Latin America, especially by Mexico, Argentina and Colombia, for enabling convicts to satisfy that fundamental human instinct. Elsewhere, as in Chile, public opinion has steadfastly opposed all such ideas. He thought that the subject might usefully be discussed at length at a future Congress.

Referring in general terms to modern aspects of the prevention of crime and treatment of offenders in Latin America, he gave details concerning the treatment of prisoners, the training of staff, the various types of penal institutions, etc.

He concluded by expressing his gratitude to the United Nations, and especially, to its Section of Social Defence, for their excellent work, which has largely contributed towards spreading the modern ideas now being slowly but surely embodied in the various codes, statutes and regulations of the Latin-American countries. These appreciate that work at its true worth, and their greatest desire is that it should continue, for it places them, in penal and penitentiary matters, on the same level as the other civilized countries.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m. This afternoon, the Congress is to discuss the selection and training of personnel for penal and correctional institutions.

This archiving project is a collaborative effort between United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and American Society of Criminology, Division of International Criminology. Any comments or questions should be directed to Cindy J. Smith at CJSmithphd@comcast.net or Emil Wandzilak at emil.wandzilak@unodc.org.