



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Regional Programme for the Arab States to Prevent and Combat Crime, Terrorism and Health Threats and to Strengthen Criminal Justice Systems in Line with International Human Rights Standards (2016-2021)

Third Steering and Follow-Up Committee Meeting

Cairo, 7-8 November 2018

Opening statement by

Ms. Cristina Albertin

Regional Representative for the Middle East and North Africa

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Excellency, Minister Plenipotentiary, Yasser Abd El Moneim, Head of Legal Affairs Department of the Legal Affairs Sector, General Secretariat, League of Arab States

**Distinguished delegations from the Member States,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In my capacity as the UNODC Regional Representative for the Middle East and North Africa, I am honoured to welcome you to the Third Annual Steering and Follow-Up Committee meeting of the 2016-2021 *Regional Programme for the Arab States to Prevent and Combat Crime, Terrorism and Health Threats, and to Strengthen Criminal Justice Systems, in line with International Human Rights Standards.*

At the outset, please allow me to express our deep gratitude to the Minister Plenipotentiary, Yasser Abd El Moneim, Head of Legal Affairs Department of the Legal Affairs Sector, General Secretariat, League of Arab States, and his team, for organizing this two-day meeting and for being our host at the Headquarters of the League of Arab States.

I also would like to express my sincere thanks to all delegations for coming to this meeting, also from places far away and committing time to this yearly interaction under the umbrella of the Regional programme.

I wish also to thank you all, distinguished delegations and Focal Points representing the Ministries of Health, Justice and Interior of the

Member States, for your ongoing contributions and engagement in our thriving partnership.

The League of Arab States has been a strong partner for a long time with UNODC in the Middle East and North Africa region. Over the past 8 years, UNODC and LAS have shared common concerns, priorities and objectives to counter and prevent a wide and expanding range of crimes, and both organizations have worked together towards the achievement of common objectives. Our shared priorities have translated into two Regional Programmes for the Arab States; the first one from 2011 to 2015, followed by the ongoing Programme from 2016 to 2021.

The current Regional Programme for the Arab States aims to Prevent and Combat Crime, Terrorism and Health Threats and Strengthen Criminal Justice Systems in line with the rule-of law and International Human Rights Standards. It is grounded in the commitment of LAS member states to implement international and regional conventions, instruments and standards related to crime, corruption, terrorism, drug control as well as crime prevention and criminal justice.

The Regional Programme is comprehensive and integrated responding to the needs of the region. Later you will have the opportunity to hear more in detail about them when Mr. Ali El Bereir, the newly appointed Deputy Regional Representative of our Office will share with all of us the progress in the implementation of the RP in 2018.

Earlier this year, I participated in the biannual meeting between the League of Arab States and the UN in Geneva where common issues of concern and priorities for future cooperation were discussed. Terrorism and organized crime featured as prominent priorities on the agenda and we agreed to continue and strengthen our partnership, in particular with the Arab Council of Ministers of Interiors.

As an immediate result of this, our expert in justice matters, Ms. Mirna Bouhabib was invited to attend a workshop organized by the Council on prison management where she presented the UNODC produced handbook on prevention of violent extremism in prisons which UNODC has started to implement in the region. We found a lot of interest among LAS member states in this subject and will be happy to further discuss this issue and possible cooperation with all of you.

I am also glad to report that in the month of September we signed with the League a MoU on Health with the aim to enhance our cooperation in the areas of drug use prevention, treatment, care and rehabilitation as well as of HIV prevention, treatment and care in the community and in closed settings. Many of the LAS member states have been voicing concern about rising drug use and related problems. UNODC stands ready to support the development of policies and can provide assistance to all LAS member states based on evidence-based tools.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me briefly refer to few major developments that I think we need to focus our attention on also in the context of the overarching Sustainable Development Goals which were globally adopted in 2015.

We are meeting at a time when transnational organized crime and terrorism continue to pose increasingly grave threats worldwide and in particular to the Arab region. The nexus between different forms of organized crime and terrorism was acknowledged in 2016 by the UN Security Council and calls for concrete action to be able to dismantle criminal networks and terrorist groups, dry their funding sources, bring perpetrators to justice and provide protection, justice and support to victims and survivors. National criminal justice systems shoulder an unprecedented burden having to deal with new forms of organized crimes, incl cybercrimes and modes of operandi by terrorist and criminal groups for which more resources and training are needed. Strengthening the criminal justice response in the region is one of the core priorities for UNODC in the region working with law enforcement, prosecution and judicial practitioners and officials focusing on national, regional and international legal frameworks and how to operationalize their provisions for concrete responses through trainings in special investigation techniques, open source investigation, cybercrimes, anti- money laundering, cryptocurrencies, forensics to name a few.

This year LAS has asked us to include in the agenda of the REPSC meeting a special session on terrorism and its nexus with organized crimes. We appreciate this initiative and we are glad that we have several experts with us who will later provide an overview on the international framework in this regard and our best knowledge on what we know about the nexus and what we can do to address both.

When strengthening the criminal justice response, it is important to remember that prisons are part of the criminal justice system. While prisons serve as a place where perpetrators serve their sentence and rehabilitate for the future life in the community, it is well known that prisons have become and have the potential to become places for radicalization and recruitment of future criminals/extremists/terrorists. Overcrowding and challenging detention conditions do generate resentment and can contribute to the emergence of extreme behaviour in the presence of perpetrators of extremism and terrorism. On the other hand, custodial settings can provide opportunities for prisoners to disengage from violence and function as catalysts for positive change as and when appropriate programmes are provided. Special attention should be given to young offenders as they prepare and rebuild their lives for the future in their community. In the past years, UNODC has been supporting a number of Arab countries in sustaining rehabilitation and reintegration services for children in conflict with the law as well as adult prisoners. Our support has extended through establishing rehabilitation workshops in juvenile institutions, ensuring appropriate medical services and education, in addition to reintegration services for released detainees. Strengthening and

supporting such services is a top priority for our future work in the region also considering the return of FTFs and the developing criminal justice response to ISIL in the region.

Let me now turn to migration related issues:

Mixed migration flows are posing their own challenges for the MENA region. UNODC's Global Report on Human Trafficking 2016 and the ever first UNODC Global report on Smuggling of Migrants published in 2018 convey a clear picture on the trends and facts about both forms of organized crimes including the trafficking and smuggling routes, profits gained by SoM and the prices migrants have to pay to smugglers for the thin hope for a better life. In response to this many member states of the LAS have requested more international cooperation and technical assistance in developing their response to TiP and SoM in line with the applicable UNTOC and its two protocols on TiP and SoM. UNODC has been responding to this by conducting many trainings across the region on how to better investigate, prosecute and adjudicate TiP and SoM cases and this will continue to be our priority focusing on bringing traffickers and smugglers to justice, applying victim-centered approaches and protection services for the survivors. I am pleased to be able to report that we now also cover Sudan and South Sudan in our capacity-building on TiP and SoM.

Six weeks ago, we hosted the ever-first Africa-Europe conference in Egypt together with the PG's office of Egypt for prosecutors to promote judicial cooperation in human trafficking and smuggling of migrants. Almost 30 countries participated mostly from Africa and including

many delegations from LAS member states expressing the need and willingness to enhance cooperation.

In the context of human trafficking, we are proud that our UNODC Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking, Ms. Nadia Murad, a young Yezidi woman from Iraq who survived ISIS enslavement has been awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018 together with a Congolese doctor for her efforts to end sexual exploitation in conflict. This award sends an important message in support of global efforts to end human trafficking in particular in the region where so many women have been enslaved by ISIL.

We are also delighted that three-member states of LAS, Egypt, Sudan and Tunisia have joined this year the Blue Heart Campaign, a global UNODC campaign to raise awareness on human trafficking and to visualize the plight of its victims. We would like to invite also other member states and LAS to consider joining the campaign and thus support the global fight against human trafficking.

Before concluding, let me elaborate on one more problem that I mentioned briefly before and that often has gone unperceived, unreported and underestimated and that is the problem of drug production, trafficking and use in the Arab region. Many countries in the region have been ringing the alarm bell on drug use. The annual World Drug Report, UNODCs annual flagship report on drugs since 1997, has little data on drug trends in the region and this should and could change. As requested by many of you, we are keen to support all

LAS member states in drug control, both on the law enforcement/judicial side and on the health side. We have contacted you all to provide us with available data and we are analysing the responses received by a number of Member States while we await others to respond. Your input will help us to develop a comprehensive programme to counter drug trafficking and address health related problems. In this regard, we are already working in some countries to strengthen the capacity to provide evidence-based drug use prevention, treatment, care and rehabilitation as well as related HIV prevention, treatment and care services among people who use drugs, in community centres and in closed settings and we are ready to expand this also to other countries.

Many challenges lie ahead of us, but we firmly believe they can be overcome through strong and effective legal, institutional and policy frameworks, constant capacity building measures and solid partnerships. An effective criminal justice system is key to reaching the SDGs under a participatory approach without leaving anybody behind paying special attention to victims and survivors of crimes and to vulnerable, marginalized and stigmatized population groups. In the coming year, our work will be also be increasingly guided by our recently approved Strategy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, aiming at empowering women in leadership positions and supporting those women and girls who have been subjected to violence in achieving a fair justice response.

Let me assure you that UNODC is deeply committed to continue to support Arab League member states in the region in the evolving needs and challenges you are facing within our mandates given by the UN and enshrined in the Regional Programme. We recognize and value the instrumental role of the League of Arab States in this partnership without which our achievements would not have been possible. We appreciate the engagement and dedication of all the officials involved as well as the commitment from all Member States of the League of Arab States.

Let me conclude by thanking each of you present here today for your engagement in this partnership, your dedication, commitment and support. Let us all work together and strive towards concrete results and changes for the wellbeing and safety of all the people in the region.