

**Regional Programme on Drug Control, Crime
Prevention and Criminal Justice Reform in
the Arab States 2011-2015**

Steering and Follow Up Committee Meeting

Cairo, 9-10 May 2012

**Opening statement by
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I am honoured in my new capacity as the Regional Representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa to attend the Steering and Follow Up Committee Meeting for the Regional Programme on Drug Control, Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Reform in the Arab States 2011-2015.

At the outset, please allow me to express my deep gratitude to the League of Arab States for hosting the meeting and our ongoing partnership under the Regional Programme.

I look forward to working closely with you towards our shared goal of promoting the rule of law and making life safer, healthier and more just for people in the region of the Middle East and North Africa.

Today, UNODC and its field network, including the Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa are recognized as a mainstay of the development and security agenda of the United Nations. UNODC is a major hub for advancing the Secretary General's reforms to adapt the United Nations to the global challenges that face us today, such as:

- achieving security and justice for all;
- helping countries prevent terrorism;
- achieving universal access to health and protecting young people from drug addiction and HIV;
- increasing international and regional cooperation and the coordination;
- defending countries against the threat of transnational organized crime;

- protecting women, men and children from being trafficked, abused and enslaved;
- safeguarding individuals from unfair criminal justice systems; and
- protecting communities from corruption by the public or the private sector.

The UN recognizes that countering crime must form part of the development agenda as well as the programme of action for the rule of law, which is the foundation for human rights.

In past years, UNODC has consistently highlighted the connection between the rule of law and development, and has called on the international community to devote greater attention to the joint pursuit of justice, security and development.

UNODC addresses these issues through an integrated programme approach. At its centre, is the development of integrated Regional Programmes. They provide the operational platforms for common initiatives by regional entities and partner countries.

The Regional Programme for the Arab States was elaborated through extensive consultations with national counterparts from the Ministries of Health, Interior and Justice and is based on fifteen years of UNODC experience in the region. Its principle purpose is to address a number of challenges posed by illicit trafficking, organized crime, terrorism, corruption, drug abuse and HIV/AIDS by working with national governments to

strengthen drug control and crime prevention responses and support criminal justice reform.

The Regional Programme was endorsed by participating States in the Regional Expert Meeting, which was held in Cairo from 27 to 29 April 2011 at the League of Arab States Headquarters.

Importantly, the countries recognized the significance of the UNODC Regional Programme since it proposes to contribute to joint efforts with Member States in the region to combat illicit trafficking, transnational organized crime and terrorism, uphold the rule of law, and promote accepted criminal justice practices.

The Regional Programme was subsequently adopted by the relevant Councils of the League of Arab States and launched by the Secretary General of the League of Arab States and the Executive Director of UNODC on 8 December 2010.

At the UNODC level, the Regional Programme is managed by UNODC Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa. A Programme Coordination and Analysis Unit has been established within the office to oversee the Regional Programme development and implementation.

Moreover, in order to facilitate the development and implementation of the Regional Programme, Sub-regional Offices and Country-based Programme offices will support the Programme Coordination and Analysis Unit in moving forward with the relevant sub-regional and national activities,

preparation of Country Programmes and in maintaining close working relationships with sub-regional and national authorities.

As you are aware, the Regional Programme is expected to address national priorities of Member States in a strategic and integrated manner, focusing on results and contributing to achieving visible impact.

My colleagues will later this morning provide a snapshot on the development and status of the Regional Programme, including action that our office has taken to support its implementation.

However, the upheaval, the unprecedented political movements and the historic transformation in the political landscape of the Arab region had of course an enormous impact on the work of UNODC in 2011, and will likely continue to do so throughout the Regional Programme period if UNODC is to respond to emerging priorities.

In order to more appropriately address emerging needs, shifting priorities and the demand for lasting reform, UNODC is currently in consultation with the Member States to identify priorities and action in this regard.

To this end, UNODC's support has increasingly been focused on the enhancement of justice and integrity as key cornerstones of development, human rights, peace and security. In this context it is of pivotal importance that due attention be given to institutional capacity building, civil participation and oversight of the security sector and criminal justice reform.

Moreover, in the aftermath of the events during 2011, public opinion clearly demonstrated that the fight against corruption is considered a national priority, with the recovery of stolen assets at the forefront of any anti-corruption initiative.

Improved governance and rule of law are the prerequisites for political stability and economic and social progress in the Middle East and North Africa region. This is only possible when individuals, organizations and institutions, both in the public and private sectors, are accountable under the laws in force. These laws should be equally applied and independently adjudicated through an institutional framework governed by the principles of transparency, integrity, and justice.

This is also in line with the Bagdad Statement adopted during the League of Arab States meeting last March emphasizing the need to meet the calls of the Arab people for freedom, social justice and political participation with respect for the rule of law.

As you are aware, the normative foundation of the United Nations' work in the area of the rule of law work is the Charter and the body of international law, including international humanitarian law, international criminal law, international refugee law, and international human rights law.

Responses to drugs, crime and terrorism that are based on the rule of law must therefore also incorporate human rights law and principles. Too often, law enforcement and criminal justice systems themselves perpetrate human rights

abuses and exclude and marginalize from society those who most need treatment and rehabilitation.

I call on all Member States to place human rights at the centre of drug control, crime prevention and criminal justice. Effective drug control cannot exist without fair criminal justice and successful crime prevention. Human rights offer guidance on the delicate balance between the protection of fundamental freedoms and the protection of public health, morals and security. It sets out the broad responsibilities of the State to respect, protect and fulfil the health and wellbeing of its peoples and specific *due process* guarantees, such as for those suspected or accused of a criminal offence.

Indeed, rights are an essential component of the rule of law, which itself requires equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness and procedural and legal transparency. Such principles and the specific due process requirements of international human rights law apply irrespective of whether the indictment involves robbery, homicide, drug-related crime, corruption, trafficking in persons, transnational organized crime, or offences involving acts of terrorism.

As such, our meeting today could not be more timely. As you are aware, the overall objective of the Steering and Follow Up Committee is to oversee the implementation, follow up and evaluation of the Regional Programme in accordance with regional and national priorities while facilitating cooperation between UNODC, the concerned member states and the League of Arab States.

In line with its overall objective, the Steering and Follow Up Committee will be fundamental in the evaluations of the Regional Programme as well as in the evaluations of its sub-programmes, as outline in its ToR, namely “to hold intermediate and terminal evaluation meeting of the Regional Programme’s implemented activities”.

I look forward to further discussing today and tomorrow how new regional and national priorities and emerging challenges can be addressed within the Regional Programme and the role the Committee could play to facilitate this process.

In conclusion, I wish to assure you not only of UNODC’s strong commitment to cooperate with all of you, but also of our desire to continue strengthening our partnerships with full dedication and commitment. I thank you for your commitment and support and wish you a successful meeting today and tomorrow. Thank you.