



Preface

Central America and the Caribbean, particularly countries in the Northern Triangle, face extreme violence inflamed by transnational organized crime and drug trafficking. According to UNODC's own studies, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras now have some of the highest homicide rates in the world.

There is little doubt, therefore, that these transnational issues present major challenges to countries within the region and to the wider international community. Criminal networks and their activities disrupt stability, undermine democratic institutions and hinder the economic activity so vital to the region. All of these issues are apparent within Central America and the Caribbean.

However, as the report *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment* makes clear, the violent impact of drugs and crime forms only part of the region's problems. The trafficking of illicit cocaine has undoubtedly given stimulus to the violence, but the instability is embedded in weak institutions and the presence of non-state actors.

As the Report stresses, governments need to build effective, humane and efficient criminal law systems. Above all, 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.

UNODC's role is to offer assistance and support to countries in the region. As a first step, the implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the UN Convention against Corruption is crucial. UNODC is also focusing on developing a strategy based on its integrated regional programmes.

These activities are supported by a re-profiled office in Mexico and other countries in the region being linked to the Regional hub for Central America and the Caribbean in Panama. Centres of excellence have been established in Mexico regarding public security statistics and in the Dominican Republic concerning drug demand reduction and the reform of prisons.

Within Panama, UNODC has helped the government establish a Regional Anti-Corruption Academy. The network of prosecutors in Central America known as REFCO is also using best practices and the exchange of information to build strength in the criminal justice chain.

Robust policies flow from strong research. The *Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment* has highlighted many of the underlying problems. The international community now needs to commit itself to working closely with countries in the region to build strong democratic institutions as the cornerstone and guarantor of human rights, economic and social development and stability.

The international community also needs to acknowledge the scale of the challenges faced by these regions due to the violence. Countries in the region have called for our collective support, we must not ignore them.



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