

Testimony of Eduardo A. Gamarra, PhD
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Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide testimony today about the overall situation with crime and violence in the Dominican Republic specifically and the Caribbean more broadly. Over the course of the past decade I have been working directly with the government of the Dominican Republic in addressing these problems and their impact on development and democracy. As a consultant for Newlink Research, a Miami based firm, I was asked in the fall of 2004 by President Leonel Fernandez to develop a comprehensive plan that would address what was already a visible trend: the increased presence of drug trafficking organizations, an increase in drug consumption, and a rise in violent crime.

President Fernandez made fighting crime one of the most important components of his new government. Thus, rather than waiting for the international community to help him address the problem, he devoted Dominican resources from the outset. This showed both the will and the resolve to address a problem that was achieving significant proportions. As President Fernandez told me at the time of the launching of his anti crime plan, his objective was to prevent the Dominican Republic from following the pattern of the DR-CAFTA countries.

The Plan de Seguridad Democrática (Democratic Security Plan-PSD) was a comprehensive plan aimed specifically to bring down the violent death and crime rates that had been steadily rising since the year 2002, in part, as a result of an unprecedented economic crisis. More broadly, the PSD included the development of a program dubbed Barrio Seguro (Safe Neighborhood) through which the most violence prone neighborhoods were targeted not only for increased police presence but also for the development of a battery of social programs aimed primarily at youth at risk.

Based on the results of intensive qualitative and quantitative data gathered by Newlink Research in dozens of neighborhoods throughout the larger cities of the Dominican Republic, the PSD initially had some very promising results. Violent death rates in some of the worst neighborhoods dropped dramatically and evaluations showed that in a few of these neighborhoods the Barrio Seguro program helped jumpstart citizen participation.¹ Our conclusion was that the combined presence of the police and the implementation of a variety of social programs were responsible for restoring the rights of citizens to organize and participate actively in communal activities without fear of crime

It is fair to say that the PSD and Barrio Seguro were a good faith effort to address a problem that unfortunately was larger than the Dominican Republic and the changing security situation throughout the Caribbean. Following its initial success, violent death rates began to climb again and other forms of crime, especially muggings, robbery, and the like exploded especially outside of the Barrio Seguro neighborhoods. Our own evaluations identified the factors that transformed the security situation in the Dominican Republic. These are factors common to other countries facing the same issue.

¹ The violent death rate in 2004 was 30 per 100,000 inhabitants. In 2006 the violent death rate dropped to 17 per 100,000. In 2010 the violent death rate had climbed to 24 per 100,000.

On the domestic front, the most serious problem facing the PSD was its failure to overhaul the National Police, which continues to be an institution that resists change for reasons that range from corruption to a severe lack of training and resources. A second major issue was the politicization of the PSD as those who were charged with carrying out the plan saw it as an important tool to seek higher political office. Another issue involved the lack of coordination between those institutions charged with implementing the PSD; in particular, the Plan suffered from a very serious lack of coordinated efforts between the National Police and the Ministry of interior.

A final major problem was the lack of international support for the PSD. The US embassy provided funding for very small and largely insignificant efforts to promote community policing and to strengthen the prosecutor's office. In my view, over the course of past eight years US support for President Fernandez's initiatives has been limited. Moreover, I would argue that in its yearly INCSR reports, the impact of US assistance programs is highly exaggerated. US assistance has been limited in size and scope and often it duplicates or contradicts ongoing local efforts. At times, embassy officials saw the Dominican President's anti crime initiatives with great skepticism and suspicion. The narrow focus of the very limited assistance programs – aimed mainly at the police and the prosecutor's office-- conspired against the more comprehensive security plan that President Fernandez pursued.

Funding from the Inter American Development Bank (IADB) and World Bank was also very limited and did not directly fund the PSD. In 2008, however, the IADB sent a team headed by Rafael Pardo, Colombia's former Minister of Defense to evaluate the PSD; its final report lavished extensive praise and urged the Bank to fund some of its components, especially in the prosecutor's office.

While the PSD's success was affected by these domestic and funding constraints, the reality is that the situation in the Caribbean (including Venezuela, Colombia and Mexico) had also changed dramatically during this period and was having an enormous impact on the Dominican Republic. By 2007, our research confirmed the presence of transnational criminal organizations that were increasingly using the entire island of Hispaniola to traffic drugs to both the United States and Europe. We conducted focus groups in remote areas of the country where villagers reported continuous "bombardments" of drugs from the sky.

The drugs that fell from the sky had a multiplier impact on the country. First, drug use became an issue even in small towns where traffickers were paying villagers in kind for turning over the drugs they collected. This produced not only violence but also contributed to drug consumption problems among young Dominicans. Second, increasingly drug busts were netting individuals from a variety of countries including Colombians, Venezuelans, Central Americans, Mexicans, and Haitians. Third, this trend suggested that the Dominican Republic was fast becoming not only an important transshipment point but also a place where traffickers of all nationalities were violently settling scores. In 2011, the Dominican Republic appeared to have fulfilled the prediction by some analysts in the 1990s that it was becoming the command and control center of the Caribbean drug trafficking industry.

According to Dominican sociologist Lilian Bobea,

In recent years the surge of drug trafficking towards and from the Dominican Republic and the emergence of internal micro trafficking have become a complex, expansive, and harmful phenomena for Dominican society. Given their importance, both constitute a development engine for many sectors of the urban and rural economy of the country. Progressively and owing to its resilience, the ties of this industry strengthen an integrated vertical and horizontal transnational criminal structure that involves a

network of social and political organizations. These dynamics affect the quality of life in the Dominican Republic and they undermine trust in institutions and democratic governance...²

In 2011, more drugs are entering and exiting the Dominican Republic than ever. The Dominican National Directorate for Drug Control (DNCD) routinely confiscates cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and synthetic drugs. And these drugs are coming into the country through diverse air, land and sea routes. Within the country the distribution and commercialization routes have also become more complex and diverse and they increasingly involve a larger number of Dominicans and foreigners at every level. Not surprisingly this evolving and increasingly complex structure has contributed to a significant expansion of violent crime, especially in the largest urban centers of the country. At the same time drugs are passing through the Dominican Republic at a faster rate than ever before. According to the 2011 INCSR and the UN's World Drug Report, seven percent of all cocaine that enters the United States passes through the island of Hispaniola and 11% of all the cocaine that reaches Europe is transshipped from the Dominican Republic.

As the UNODC 2011 Global Study on Homicide shows, homicide rates experienced a sharp increase in Central America and the Caribbean. This trend is the result of multiple factors, such as a rapid urbanization, the easy availability of guns, high income inequality, a high proportion of youth, local gang structures, and organized crime and drug trafficking. A decade ago homicide rates in the Caribbean were significantly lower than in Central America. But they have recently increased, most notably in Jamaica (52.1 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants), Trinidad and Tobago (35.2), Puerto Rico (26.2), St. Kitts and Nevis (38.2), and the Dominican Republic (24.9).³

Unfortunately, most of the Caribbean countries faced this dramatic transformation with their own meager resources. Despite the launching of Plan Merida in the latter days of the Bush Administration, very few US resources were available. The diagnoses of the problem were amply documented by the research commissioned by the Dominican government. While the PSD was aimed at controlling the situation in the neighborhoods, the government opted to purchase eight A-29 Tucano planes from Brazil to shut down the drug bombardments. At this date, the presence of these aircraft has had a significant impact, yet it is still insufficient to prevent the flow of drugs from South America through air, land and sea. The purchase of these planes reveals, however, the resolve of some governments in the region to spend—and even indebt themselves—to address a problem that is undermining their countries.

Despite the best efforts under the PSD, the reality is that today the Dominican Republic is facing a more serious challenge than in 2004. And, public perception of the lack of safety has skyrocketed leading the average Dominican not only to complain about the ineffectiveness of the PSD but to also demand a much stronger and violent response by the government. My research has found that Dominicans are not as concerned about police human rights violations as are organizations such as Amnesty International.

This sentiment, which found echo among some of the most conservative politicians contributed to the whittling down of basic habeas corpus guarantees found in the Code of Criminal Procedure. USAID funding in the 1990s led to the passage of this important Code and some funding is still available to help

² Lilian Bobeá, "Vínculos y Estructuras del Narcotráfico en República Dominicana," in Eduardo A. Gamarra and Diana Pardo, *Aciertos y Errores de la lucha contra el tráfico de drogas ilícitas: Lecciones de las experiencias nacionales de América Latina y el Caribe*, (Santo Domingo, FUNGLODE, forthcoming 2011).

³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Study on Homicide 2011*, (Vienna, UNODC, 2011).

in its implementation. The Dominican Congress recently adopted modifications that are likely to send younger kids to adult prisons and will provide police with the right to hold suspects indefinitely.

The reality of this situation is being felt daily by young Dominicans, the most vulnerable sector to the growing threat posed by transnational trafficking and the deterioration of citizen security. Since 2004, Newlink Research has amply documented the plight of at risk youth especially in the aforementioned Barrio Seguro neighborhoods. They are not only the main victims of violence, they also lack educational and job opportunities and face extreme discrimination outside of their neighborhoods. Few are able to obtain formal employment if they list one of these neighborhoods as their home address. While young men are the main victims and also victimizers, young women are the main victims of intra family violence and early pregnancy further limits already scarce opportunities to success. As a result, most young Dominicans are condemned to a life in the vast informal sector of the Dominican economy. Similar results have been obtained by evaluations of USAID programs aimed at young Dominicans.

For this reason, I believe that the CBSI initiatives are a worthwhile –albeit insufficient—effort to address the problems of young Dominicans. According to USAID, the \$5 million for programs in the Dominican Republic over promise to provide:

- Region-wide assessments aimed at improving ongoing programs focused on first offenders and other at-risk youth, good governance, anti-corruption, community policing, and youth education
- Complementary education alternatives for Dominican youth, including flexible learning models and literacy campaigns
- Training in basic employment and vocational skills in the areas of tourism, agriculture, and the computer sciences for at-risk youth

While some of these programs were already underway mainly as a result of World Bank, Inter American Development Bank, and Dominican funding, the sad reality is that these are perhaps too little and too late to be effective. Moreover, these programs provide a long term solution to a very limited number of young people. In the meantime the majority will continue to face the daily problems of violence, drug abuse, and lack of opportunity.

Based on my long term experience in the Dominican Republic, I am convinced that any future engagement should not suffer from the piecemeal approach of US assistance. USAID programs should not duplicate and undermine local Caribbean efforts but seek serious partnerships instead so that it can more effectively shape their content and long term course. Underfunded programs have no real impact and instead contribute to deepening the gap between promise and performance that plagues all democracies in the Caribbean and elsewhere in this hemisphere.

Thank you.