

CRIME PREVENTION

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Distinguished delegates, the United States supports one of the substantive themes of this Tenth Congress which is effective crime prevention and the need to keep pace with new developments. This same theme is reflected in a workshop that will be taking place this week on community involvement in crime prevention.

Crime prevention is a very broad concept that encompasses a wide range of activities. These include primary prevention efforts (for example, in communities and with children), and secondary prevention efforts that are intended to intervene with those most at risk of offending. We recognize that comprehensive crime prevention strategies at national, regional, and local levels must address the root causes and risk factors of crime and victimization. A strong emphasis within the charge to this Congress is the call to rigorously evaluate all crime prevention efforts, of whatever kind, so as to know what works and what doesn't work to prevent crime. Indeed, the UN Commission for Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice has issued just such a call, stressing that crime prevention strategies should be evaluated with respect to their effectiveness and efficiency.

We believe that only through ongoing assessment and evaluation can we identify the bench marks for successful prevention. In light of this emphasis, the United States wishes to share some recent experience, and accent the point that crime prevention efforts of all types must be carefully examined before they are advertised as successes.

In 1996, the U.S. Congress directed the Attorney General of the U.S. to provide an independent review of the effectiveness of all state and local crime prevention programs supported by the U.S. Justice Department. The congressional directive required specifically that the review use "rigorous and scientifically recognized standards and methodologies." In response to this directive, a report commissioned by the National Institute of Justice was

submitted in 1997 to the U.S. Congress. The report contained 500 evaluations of crime prevention practices. We believe that this report and its findings are critically important to the issue at hand, and thus we want to commend its findings and implications to you. A summary version of the report is available in this National Institute of Justice Research in Brief that is available for distribution at this Congress.

What can the global community learn from this experience? And how can we employ this knowledge to help achieve the goal that we all share, namely that of effective crime prevention? Three answers seem to be in order. First, we must look to replicate, to repeat -- in comparative, cross-national settings -- those programs that have been shown to work. Second, and just as important, we should stop spending time, effort, and resources on programs that have been proven not to work. Third, to continue evaluating those programs on which we need more information.

The central conclusion of our report -- and the major implication for us -- is that the current process of gaining scientific evidence on crime prevention is so limited and flawed as to make practically any results inadequate for purposes of policy-making. For example, fewer than one in five of the programs examined for this report could be judged as to its effectiveness. This is because the necessary sound evaluations have not been done. Although there may be some disagreement about the particular scientific standard that ought to be applied in a particular case, we can all agree that much more rigorous evaluation is very much needed. Crime prevention efforts that work, or are at least Promising, should continuously be replicated and carefully evaluated in order to build a solid foundation of demonstrable best practices. We caution, however, against attaching the label of "best practice" to any programs that have not been adequately tested.

Thank you.