

CRIME

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United Nations Congress
on the Prevention of Crime
and the Treatment of Offenders
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Agenda item 5

Effective crime prevention: keeping pace with new development

Report of Committee I on topic III

1. At its 1st plenary meeting, on 10 April 2000, the Congress allocated agenda item 5, entitled "Effective crime prevention: keeping pace with new developments" (topic III), to Committee I, in accordance with the programme of work proposed by the Secretary-General (E/CN.15/1999/6 and Corr.1, para. 8 and annex) and approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 54/125. For its consideration of the item, the Congress had before it the working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/CONF.187/7).

Proceedings

2. At the 1st to [...] meetings of Committee I, on 12 and [...] April 2000, a general discussion of the item was held under the chairmanship of Mr. R. K. Raghavan (India). The Vice-Chairman was Ms. Cristina Luzescu (Romania).

3. At the 1st meeting, the Committee was assisted in its deliberations by a panel of experts. The experts participating in the panel presentation are listed in annex [...] to the present report.

4. At the first meeting, the discussion focused on the new challenges in crime prevention, differences between organized and traditional forms of crime, and the dramatic increase in crime in periods of transition. Following a presentation by the three panellists, statements were made by the representatives of Botswana, Argentina, Haiti, Mexico, Finland and Australia.

5. At the 2nd and 3rd meetings, on 13 and 14 April 2000, the discussion focused on new strategies for and developments in effective crime prevention. Statements were made by the representatives of Cuba, South Africa, Sweden, China, France, Botswana, Venezuela, the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Republic of Korea, Poland, Croatia, Argentina, the Sudan, Canada, the Netherlands, Egypt and Latvia. Statements were also made by the observers for the Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations and Penal Reform International. The observer for the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime presented the findings of the workshop on community involvement in crime prevention.

General discussion

6. It was stated that crime prevention strategies differed, as the situations and development levels of countries were different. Crime prevention initiatives involved seeking to promote safety and security and included activities on the part of the “formal” system of criminal justice (for example, the legal system, the police, prosecutors and courts), as well as actors and organizations comprising the “informal” system (for example, schools, religious institutions and the community). Both systems exercised, to varying degrees, social control over the members of the community. The “formal” system of criminal justice worked in a preventive and repressive manner to deter or prevent involvement in crime. The “informal” system worked to instil an appreciation of the rule of law and commitment to the community and its norms. Those two systems depended upon one another.

7. It was stated that many Governments, especially in developed countries, had traditionally relied on the “formal” system of criminal justice to prevent crime. Other Governments had relied on the capacity of the community to regulate transgressions by its members. Both, however, had concluded that crime prevention was not the sole responsibility of law enforcement, that there was a need to invest in the informal mechanisms of social control and that the two systems should work together. Numerous countries had emphasized the need for partnerships between government (at the national, regional and local levels) and non-governmental organizations, professionals and civil society in order to provide effective crime prevention. Those partnerships should be formed at all levels of society, and government should play a lead role. Any national strategies must be attentive to the specific needs of, and must focus on, the community. Partnerships should include all those components at each stage of the prevention process, from diagnosis to the development of a clear plan of action, shared implementation and evaluation.

8. It was noted that there were many ways to classify crime prevention. One of the most basic classifications drew a distinction between situational prevention and social prevention. Situational crime prevention emphasized the reduction of opportunities for crime, whereas social prevention sought to reduce criminal factors and motivation.

9. It was stated that situational crime prevention, with its emphasis on reducing opportunities to commit crime, had grown the most in the previous 20 years. That approach, which had been followed to a large extent in the business sector, had led to an expanding market in, for example, private security policing, city planning, closed-circuit television, measures aimed at improved lighting and locking the starters on cars. In countries that could afford such costly measures, success had been achieved. Several speakers noted, however, that such measures were used as a last resort, when social and political strategies failed to prevent crime.

10. Social crime prevention, which emphasized reducing criminal factors and motivation through social development, was more far-reaching, required permanent partnerships and was thus more difficult to achieve. Such prevention focused on the following: (a) child development (looking at risk factors in early childhood associated with later delinquency and crime); (b) community development (involving efforts to strengthen the economic viability and social cohesiveness of local communities and to teach young people about the importance of the rule of law); and (c) social development (focusing on cases where crime developed in situations characterized by poverty, poor education and lack of paid employment, discrimination and other forms of deprivation).

11. It was noted that, in developed countries, as well as developing countries, certain segments of the population often suffered from social and economic exclusion. In such countries, it was important to place emphasis on eradicating poverty, illiteracy and other problems affecting young people (including street children) within the framework of crime prevention programmes. Such measures, all examples of forms of social development, were considered to be particularly helpful in reducing crime. There was a clear link between social development and crime; though social development was correlated with low crime rates, low crime rates also fostered social development.

12. There was a consensus among the participants that almost all countries were faced with problems involving both domestic and urban criminality, as well as new forms of transnational organized crime. Despite the difference in those forms of criminality, there was agreement that they should not necessarily be dealt with as separate issues, given the fact that urban criminality often provided the manpower for organized crime. Furthermore, transnational organized crime could only be prevented (or kept under control) through cooperative working relationships involving governments, civil society and citizens, at the local, national and international levels.

13. It was noted that countries were constantly being confronted with new forms of crime and transnational organized crime. Experts on crime prevention should make themselves aware of weaknesses in new technology and be able to close the technological loopholes before they were exploited by criminals.

14. Representatives of several Governments mentioned the need for a coordinated crime prevention policy aimed at preventing and controlling transnational organized crime. That policy might take many forms but should be compatible with criminal procedure and cooperation in legal assistance. Empirical studies had shown that crime prevention or law enforcement measures to deal with traditional, urban crime did not lead to the displacement of crime from one jurisdiction to another as frequently as had been expected. There was insufficient evidence to draw any conclusions concerning the phenomenon of displacement with regards to transnational organized crime.

15. A number of representatives of developing countries requested that Governments of developed countries provide technical support to aid them in their fight against crime. A number of representatives emphasized the fact that there was a clear link between crime and democracy: lasting and solid democracy needed peace to survive; it also provided peace.

Conclusion

16. The Committee reached a number of conclusions on agenda item 5, including the following:

(a) Crime prevention should be promoted both as a civic duty and as a political responsibility of Government. Crime prevention and security should be compatible with democratic values and processes. Corruption and anti-democratic traits should be eradicated in law enforcement and public administrative bodies if those bodies were to receive the confidence and support of, and work together with, the community in the promotion of effective crime prevention. Law enforcement and public administrative bodies should also be held accountable for their actions;

(b) Crime prevention should be fully integrated into other social policy;

(c) A clear diagnosis was needed to develop effective crime prevention measures. That diagnosis should identify and target risk factors and segments of society. All individuals and the groups they represented should be involved in efforts to prevent crime at the local level;

(d) Responses should be multifaceted and involve a wide array of initiatives. They should be executed by means of partnerships among formal criminal justice entities, public administration, civil society and individuals in the community. Policies for security should be democratic; in other words, they should be discussed widely with all actors and the community, at all levels;

(e) Even if there were differences between developing countries and developed countries regarding the best approach to crime prevention or the operational strategies to adopt, there was a need for crime prevention responses that articulated social prevention and law enforcement aims;

(f) Evaluation should be conducted to provide evidence of effectiveness. Such evaluation should, however, be based not only on statistics or costs. Qualitative evaluation that took into account the improvements in quality of life, a sense of security and welfare was more appropriate for social prevention strategies. Given limited resources, only those projects or programmes that had proved successful should be continued. Studies should be conducted to determine whether those projects that were successful at a given time and location could be implemented in other countries and the type of conditions under which they would succeed;

(g) Humanitarian values and ethical concerns should not be overshadowed by a desire to implement effective crime prevention programmes and strategies. Such programmes and strategies should take into account those issues and avoid such actions as the invasion of privacy, the erosion of civil liberties and the social exclusion of marginalized people;

(h) Issues of transnational organized crime could not be addressed properly unless the legal authorities in Member States addressed crime at the local level. Where appropriate, crime prevention and control measures should be strengthened in both those areas;

(i) The sustainability of crime prevention measures was a goal. Only with continuity could sustainable development and democracy be ensured;

(j) In spite of limited knowledge concerning what really worked, the challenge remained in terms of how to apply the lessons learned in preventing traditional crime to the prevention and control of other types of crime, such as terrorism, war crimes and transnational organized crime.

17. The Committee called for action in the following areas:

(a) Governments should assume political responsibility for developing an integrated strategy for the prevention of crime, based on social development and law enforcement and mobilizing all political and professional actors and the community together, at different levels and in a democratic way but without rigidly imposing a preconstituted plan of action;

(b) Governments should ensure that all members of society, including the most marginalized persons, were protected against crime. Extra measures should be taken to protect those most at risk (e.g., illegal immigrants);

(c) Governments, civil society and the community at large should rearticulate traditional human values and ensure that they are instilled in the members of society. Appreciation of and respect for the rule of law were basic ideals upon which to build a safe society;

(d) Governments from developed countries should provide technical assistance to developing countries. Developing countries were struggling to cope with transfer criminality (i.e., criminality imported back into their countries by those who had made technological advances in more developed countries);

(e) In order to ensure sustainable security, which was a basic condition for sustainable development, Member States, through the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, should:

(i) Develop active cooperation through the exchange of information, experience and know-how and the provision of technical assistance in the field of prevention of crime and, at the same time, develop legal instruments to combat transnational organized crime;

(ii) Consider measures to ensure a proper balance between enforcement and prevention, while focusing on the protection of human rights.

Annex [...]

List of experts participating in the panel presentations

Mr. Ronald Clarke, Professor, Rutgers University, School of Criminal Justice, United States of America

Mr. Guo Jain'an, Deputy Director, Institute for Crime Prevention, Ministry of Justice of China

Ms. Marie Pierre de Liege, Judge, Secretary General of the National Council for Cities, France.
