



The World Today

On the issue of the War against the Illegal Drug Trade

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This semester, undergraduate and postgraduate International Relations students at UWI undertook research on Caribbean security issues. Many traditional and non-traditional issues were identified including military and territorial threats, political instability, poverty, disease pandemics such as AIDS, environmental concerns such as global warming, the illicit drug trade, arms trafficking, money laundering and unfair market economics.

Many students agreed with the work of Annette Jessen and Enrio Rodriguez which suggests that Caribbean countries face at least three major challenges:

- **Sustainable economic growth**

Caribbean countries need to attain more sustainable, positive economic growth rates. This must be achieved along with consolidating their individual adjustment programs, most of which were initiated in the late 1980s. This can only be attained through improved export performance and the creation of attractive conditions for investment.

- **The challenges of Globalization**

The world economy has become more globalized and competitive. Major transformations in the relationships between developed and developing countries and regional trading blocs; coupled with the gradual erosion of trade preferences in their principal export markets presents a crucial test for Caribbean countries.

- **Eliminating social ills**

Caribbean countries must confront a number of social problems that directly impact on the Region's future development potential. The social problems that need to be address include differences in national education systems, high unemployment levels, the rise in poverty and the growing problem of crime.

Of all the issues discussed and analyzed by the students, none was more compelling than that of the illegal drug trade.

As an example of the wider Caribbean, Colombia paints an interesting picture. Some have argued that Colombia earns more from the drug trade than any other country in the

Western hemisphere. It has been reported that 70% to 80% of the refined cocaine and 50% to 60% of the marijuana available in the US comes from Colombia.

Moreover, it is believed that Colombian criminal organizations may be involved in virtually every aspect of the narcotics trade: from financing drug plantations and laboratories in Colombia and other South American countries, smuggling operations through the Caribbean island chain, to distribution networks at both the wholesale and street levels in the North America and Europe. Despite of the crackdown on drugs by both North American and European countries, it has become increasingly difficult to curtail the drug traffickers' influence.

According to some writers, during the early 1980's, the Medellin drug cartel's influence and prominence grew within the Region. It strengthened its ties in the Bahamas and Jamaica as well as gained allies in Cuba, Haiti, Belize and several smaller Caribbean countries. This resulted in the creation of new drug routes and the proliferation of political corruption within the region. This created a glut and the prices of cocaine plummeted.

Due to this, it was alleged that about 40 percent of the cocaine entering North America had been diverted from the traditional Caribbean routes to the US – Mexican border. It is believed that this changed after 9/11 where stricter border patrols on the US/Mexican border may have forced the drug lords to revisit their Caribbean Sea routes. Students were able to identify large drug shipments seized in recent times in Trinidad and Tobago and in Guyana, worth \$800 million and \$500 million respectively.

The illegal drug trade and its consequent criminal activity remain prominent political issues. The students offered some recommendations to deal with this menace:

- **Stronger commitment by Caribbean governments**

Caribbean governments should fulfill the promise to cooperate and share information amongst each other. In the CARICOM region, the recommendations suggested by the Caricom Task Force on Crime and Security should be implemented.

- **Greater cooperation with North America and Europe**

Caribbean governments should seek increased financial and technical assistance from developed countries in the war against drugs. This strategy would entail provision of more firepower, helicopters, communications equipment and intelligence support. These collaborative efforts should also maintain bilateral agreements as it relates to the extradition and trials of drug dealers and mutual assistance in every aspect of drug interdiction.

- **Economic alternatives**

Caribbean countries should collaborate with developed countries in providing viable economic alternatives to drug production. They could open up new economic

opportunities by lowering import barriers for legitimate exports – textiles, sugar, coffee, flowers – to the countries of the wider Caribbean that are willing to adopt serious anti-drug campaigns. Undoubtedly, revitalized regional economic development is a necessary component of any successful, long-term effort to eliminate drug trafficking.

Needless to say the war on drugs wages on. The profitability of the drug trade ensures its viability and the participation of Caribbean countries. Nonetheless, as some students argued, the Caribbean appears to be the right track in its fight. Though there are many hurdles, the Region must never lose hope.