

“ War on Drugs ” Holds Back Holistic Approach to Narcotics Problem

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- Law enforcement must work with public health professionals, experts urge at the World Economic Forum on Latin America
- A more holistic approach to addressing the region ’ s drug problem is needed
- The World Economic Forum on Latin America is taking place in Lima, Peru, on 23-25 April 2013
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Lima, Peru, 25 April 2013 – The term “ war on drugs ” is counterproductive and a barrier to a more holistic approach to addressing the region ’ s narcotics problem, experts urged at the World Economic Forum on Latin America today in a televised session.

“ War cannot be applied to public security, ” said Oscar Adolfo Naranjo Trujillo, Director, Instituto Latinoamericano de Ciudadanía - ILC, Mexico. “ War implies winners and losers on all sides. Anti-drugs policy should ban this term. ”

“ When we add the concept of war, what happens is that the criminal knows his only option is death and so the logic is he has to kill or he will be killed. So, the term should be banned, ” Naranjo Trujillo added.

Michael Botticelli, Deputy Director, National Drug Control Policy, USA, tentatively agreed and said a balanced approach is necessary. “ We have to think of this as a public health issue and a public health response in partnership with law enforcement, ” he said.

José Miguel Insulza, Secretary-General, Organization of American States (OAS), Washington DC, noted that attitudes have already changed for the better and that, increasingly, “ people who consume drugs are not treated any more like criminals but people who needed to be taken care of. ” He also warned that drug gangs are enterprising and that authorities must be attentive to other, sometimes related, organized crimes issues.

“ Nowadays, it is interesting to see that the industry has diversified, ” Insulza said. “ For example, we have people trafficking, which is a new component, as well as extortion. Intellectual piracy in counterfeit products is much better organized. If the [drug] problem disappeared, organized crime would continue for a long time. ”

Better social policies would go some way to helping the poorer citizens who are on the frontline. Health and education policies are fundamental as is the role of the family, many of which have been decimated by the violence.

“ There is genocide in the favela, ” said Washington de Oliveira Rimas, Director, Cultural Afro Reggae, Brazil. “ The people that are most affected are those at the bottom of the pyramid. ” He said a wider debate needs to take place over what is a drug and what action should be taken on each. Alcohol, marijuana and cocaine are all considered drugs but they all have very different effects on users and society. “ We need to take a position and decide what society wants, ” he said.

Notes to Editors

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