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Work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Implementation of technical assistance projects in Africa by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Report of the Secretary-General**

I. Introduction

1.   In its resolution 2004/32 of 21 July 2004, entitled "Implementation of technical assistance projects in Africa by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime", the Economic and Social Council, concerned that Africa had become a significant zone of transit, trafficking and abuse of drugs and trafficking in firearms and human beings, and bearing in mind that a number of African countries were facing post-conflict instability, welcomed the efforts of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to improve the implementation of its projects in Africa, both at headquarters and in the field, and encouraged the Office to continue those efforts; requested UNODC to produce a concept paper to analyse the current situation with respect to major drug and crime issues affecting the African continent and to propose policy directives, strategies and priority focus areas to gain support for assistance for Africa; and also requested UNODC, in coordination with the African Union and interested Member States and subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources, to promote an exchange of views, based on the results of the concept paper, among interested Member States, relevant agencies and institutes providing technical assistance to Africa in order:

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  * E/CN.15/2005/1.
 ** The late submission of the present document is due to ongoing consultation concerning the
    Round Table.

(a)   To discuss ways of reducing impediments to economic growth and sustainable development caused by widespread criminality, such as drug trafficking, organized crime and corruption;

(b)   To ensure that appropriate responses to drug and crime issues are incorporated as core elements within bilateral and multilateral development assistance policies in the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development and other relevant initiatives;

(c)   To explore ways of maximizing existing resources, including official development assistance, that could lead to improvements in the tackling of drug and crime issues and to the strengthening of criminal justice institutions.

2.   Also in resolution 2004/32, the Council requested Member States in the African region where projects were being implemented to mobilize national stakeholders and to make every effort to facilitate the implementation of such projects; invited Member States to promote synergies between technical assistance provided by UNODC and bilateral and regional cooperation activities in the African region, in particular in the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development; and requested the Secretary-General to report to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at its fourteenth session on the implementation of the resolution.

3.   The present report is submitted pursuant to that request.

II.   Technical assistance to Africa

4.   UNODC provides an ongoing programme of activities on the African continent through a network of field offices, including in Cairo (for North Africa and the Middle East), Dakar (West Africa), Nairobi (East Africa) and Pretoria (Southern Africa). A country office in Abuja is responsible for project implementation in Nigeria, while the office in Addis Ababa is responsible for liaison with the African Union. Technical expertise and project support are, where required, provided by UNODC headquarters, which continues to seek to improve the quality of technical assistance offered to countries in Africa, both by attempting to speed up the pace of implementation and by evaluating the impact of projects.

5.   Of the 239 projects being implemented by UNODC in 2004, just under 20 per cent were situated in the African region. Projects covered all areas of responsibility of UNODC and include drug demand reduction; drug law enforcement; scientific support; border control (including at sea ports); drug abuse and HIV/AIDS; money-laundering; countering organized crime; countering trafficking in human beings; preventing corruption; and judicial integrity. Several regional and subregional technical assistance projects are also in progress. As part of the UNODC programme of technical assistance, a series of activities have focused on African countries emerging from conflict, aimed in particular at helping reconstitute legislative and institutional frameworks (see E/CN.7/2005/10). Much remains to be done on the continent, however, and UNODC is aware of the need to expand its programme of activities, in particular in the areas of trafficking in persons, firearms and natural resources, crime prevention and criminal justice reform.

6.   A large number of UNODC activities are aimed at assisting African States in ratifying and implementing the universal instruments against transnational organized crime, terrorism, corruption and drug control. In 2003-2004 assistance was provided to Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, the Niger, the Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, the Sudan and Togo. Several multilateral and regional meetings were organized, including the Regional Ministerial Conference of French-speaking Countries of Africa and subregional expert seminars for the countries of East Africa, Southern Africa and West Africa. Much has been done to encourage States to ratify the universal instruments and future efforts must now focus on the effective implementation of those instruments, including by building the capacity of the relevant criminal justice institutions.

A.   Strengthening the focus on Africa: the Round Table for Africa

7.   As part of the process of further enhancing the provision of technical assistance activities and other forms of support within the broad mandate of the Office and in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 2004/32, UNODC, in partnership with the Commission of the African Union, has organized a Round Table for Africa, to be held in Addis Ababa on 30 and 31 May 2005 following the fourteenth session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. The main participants will be ministers responsible for crime prevention, criminal justice and drug control, as well as development, together with senior officials of key regional organizations and representatives of international donor institutions. Two working groups will discuss the themes of crime and drug control, poverty alleviation and sustainable development and the links between them. Critical to the discussion will also be the definition of priority areas for action and agreement on ways in which such activities can be adequately implemented. The outcome of the Round Table will be a declaration in which participants express their commitment to the implementation of a specific five-year programme of action.

8.   Representatives of donor countries and institutions will have a critical role to play at the Round Table in discussing with Governments the effectiveness of current assistance to strengthen the rule of law and in attempting to reach agreement on what is still required to bolster the rule of law and what are the priorities for the short, medium and long term. The meeting will bring together specialists in criminal justice and drug control and those responsible for development in order to reach a better understanding of how insecurity affects development and how in turn development assistance can take account of such factors.

9.   Two recent reports have discussed the link between issues of security and development in the African context and their conclusions serve as useful inputs to the Round Table. The findings of the Commission for Africa, sponsored by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, highlight the diversity of the challenges confronting the continent, including those related to conflict prevention and the related issues of trafficking in natural resources and firearms.[1] In his recent report entitled "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights

for all" (A/59/2005), the Secretary-General also underscored the issue of countering the impact of organized crime on poor communities and ending the trade in small arms and light weapons.

10. The Eleventh Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, to be held in Bangkok, from 18 to 25 April 2005, will provide an important backdrop to the Round Table. The African Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Congress, held in Addis Ababa from 1 to 3 March 2004 (see A/CONF.203/RPM.3/1 and Corr.1), highlighted a series of critical challenges on the continent, one of which was that countries in conflict were especially vulnerable to crime, in particular organized crime and trafficking, owing to the lack of effective governance and weak institutions of criminal justice. More effective responses to such circumstances were required as part of peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives. An African common position on a range of issues was also prepared by the African Union for presentation to the Congress. The Eleventh Congress will provide a forum for the discussion of issues of particular concern to African countries and the outcome of the debate should, where appropriate, inform the deliberations of the Round Table. The Fifteenth Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Africa, held in Ouagadougou from 29 March to 1 April 2005, also requested that some of its recommendations be brought to the attention of the Round Table (see UNODC/HONLAF/2005/5).

B. Linking crime and development

11. Pursuant to resolution 2004/32, UNODC is preparing a concept paper that analyses the nature and impact of crime and drug trafficking and abuse on Africa's social and economic development. The paper notes that many African countries continue to lack the necessary resources to combat crime and maintain the effective rule of law, an area where countries emerging from conflict are particularly vulnerable. Some of the findings of the report are outlined below.

12. On the basis of both official statistics and survey findings, Africa appears to suffer from high rates of crime in many of the major crime categories. National police statistics show that Africa suffers from more murders per 100,000 citizens than any other region of the world, although the figures may still fall short of reality. Data on other forms of violence are less reliable, but, when surveyed, Africans are more likely to say they were assaulted and sexually assaulted in the previous year than people elsewhere. In terms of property crime, the police-recorded rates are low, but crime victimization surveys indicate that only 14 per cent of victims of property crime actually reported the relevant incident to the police, the lowest rate of reporting in the world. Contrary to police figures, surveys indicate that property crimes affect Africans at a higher rate than in other regions, by quite a wide margin in some categories. More Africans that others suffer from burglary and expect to be burgled in the next year; consumer fraud is also a major issue, with nearly 30 per cent of Africans polled saying that they had been victims of fraud in the previous year.

13. Criminologists and development specialists agree that many social factors used to represent underdevelopment are correlates of crime. In Africa, as elsewhere in the world, several factors correlate positively with high crime levels:

(a)   Income inequality is regarded as one of the most robust correlates of official crime rates in many countries. Africa has some of the most unequal countries in the world: on average, the richest 10 per cent of people earn 31 times more than the poorest 10 per cent;

(b)   Everywhere in the world, teenage and young adult males are the population group most likely to commit crime. Africa has a particularly youthful population: 43 per cent of all people on the continent are under the age of 15. Given the poor economic conditions in some areas, especially large urban settlements, many young men may be unemployed;

(c)   Rapid urbanization combines a range of elements that are strong correlates of crime, such as high population densities, unemployment and social and economic marginalization. Africa is urbanizing at about 4 per cent a year, about twice the global average; illegal immigration and the flow of refugees are also a factor in the process of urbanization in several African cities;

(d)   The resources available for processes of criminal justice are generally directly linked to the overall level of wealth of a country. Poor countries in Africa thus have few additional resources to invest in the improvement of their justice systems.

14.   The issue of crime prevention and drug control has recently grown more prominent in debates on the challenges facing Africa. While that issue could be regarded as less serious than the pressing priority to alleviate poverty and disease in Africa, there is an emerging consensus that high levels of crime can interfere with development, undercutting in particular prospects of achieving stable and economically viable societies that would bring benefits to all citizens. There is recognition of the importance of responding to the issue of crime prevention and drug control, but one factor that has worked against an effective response is the overall lack of data on the nature and extent of the problem. Limited government capacity has meant that official data on crime in Africa do not provide a comprehensive picture of the nature and extent of the problem. Independent research, including surveys of victims of crime, have also been limited.

15.   As noted above, societies in conflict and post-conflict situations provide conditions conducive to the development of some types of crime, including trafficking. In recent years Africa has seen not only the resolution of a number of long-standing conflicts (most notably in Angola, Burundi, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and elsewhere), but also the reignition of wars where peace had recently been achieved (for example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo) and the onset of new wars (such as in Côte d'Ivoire). This has made the continent particularly vulnerable to drug trafficking, drug abuse, the growth of organized crime and trafficking in a variety of commodities. The abuse of drugs among combatants contributed to the severe atrocities perpetrated during some conflicts and effective drug control has become a priority for several African countries emerging from conflict, most notably Sierra Leone. The growth of organized crime in many countries of the continent in the last decade is also seen as cause for concern. Weak institutional capacity has sometimes prevented effective responses.

16.   The impact of crime in Africa, the report concludes, is such that it has both economic and social costs. With regard to the former, crime drives away business and investment and increases the costs for businesses, both local and international,

that conduct commercial activities in Africa. Crime also has significant social implications: violent crime leads to medical costs and loss of productivity, while those who bear the greatest costs of crime, the poor, also have the fewest resources to absorb its impact. In addition to these direct costs, crime impedes economic development by limiting movement and access to possible employment and educational opportunities. Making citizens averse to risk retards entrepreneurial and other economic activity. The presence of corruption also impedes the ability of States to promote development, making economic activity both more expensive and less predictable. In the longer term, corruption undermines the belief of citizens in the integrity of the State itself, undercutting democratic governance.

C. Key issues

17.   While the issues covered by the report are of great importance, it is also essential for an effective and sustainable programmatic response to be developed to counter the challenges that are highlighted. On the basis of the information gathered in the preparation of the report and input from a small group of African experts who will meet on 3 and 4 May 2005, a series of critical areas for intervention will be identified for discussion at the Round Table.

18.   Those areas will include requirements for the ratification and effective implementation of the universal legal instruments on drug control, organized crime, corruption and terrorism; effective measures to combat and prevent corruption in both the private and public sectors; measures to curb the laundering of the proceeds of crime and to recover assets that have been acquired through crime; countering illicit trafficking, including in persons, drugs, firearms and precious materials, by, inter alia, more effective law enforcement and border control; strengthening data collection capacity; curbing the demand for illicit drugs and focusing on the link between drug abuse and the spread of HIV/AIDS; preventing crime; and building the capacity of criminal justice institutions to deal effectively with these challenges, with a focus on countries emerging from sustained periods of conflict or political and economic transition. Programmatic responses in each of the above areas will form the basis for the proposed priority programme of action for Africa for the next five years.

Conclusion

19.   Economic and Social Council resolution 2004/34, the resultant process of data collection and analysis and the holding of the Round Table for Africa indicate the priority that Member States accord to the challenges confronting the African continent. The Commission may therefore wish:

(a)   To take note of the preparations for the Round Table, indicating in particular any issues raised at the Eleventh Congress that will be relevant to its discussions;

(b)   To urge both African and donor Governments to accord importance to the Round Table by, among other measures, sending high-level delegations representing all concerned ministries and departments to the meeting;

  (c) To pledge its support for the outcome of the Round Table.

Notes

  [1] Commission for Africa, *Our Common Interest: Report of the Commission for Africa*, March 2005.

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