



Statement By
His Excellency Cornelius A. Smith
Ambassador of The Commonwealth Of The Bahamas
To The United States Of America
Before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control
“U.S. – Caribbean Security Cooperation”
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On behalf of the Government of The Bahamas, I thank you, Madam Chairman, Co-Chairman and Members of the Caucus, for the invitation to participate in this discussion on cooperation in countering the global illegal drug trade, and specifically, the security challenges it presents to the countries of the Caribbean region, including my own. We are especially pleased that underpinning this discussion is the resolve to improve the effectiveness of our response to the drug problem, in the mutual interest of the United States and of our region.

The Bahamas is on the frontline of drug control, and has been there for more than forty years now, because of the serious drug problem we face, and our commitment to national action and bilateral, regional and international cooperation in this area. Our country is strategically situated on the way from illicit drug production centres in Central and South

America and the Caribbean, and on the way to, markets in North America and Europe. It is a sparsely populated archipelago, with vast water borders and hundreds of islands that have no permanent population.

Cocaine and marijuana, the signature drugs produced in the region, are also the principle drugs in the transit traffic into and through The Bahamas. A coalition of transnational criminals, including Bahamians, continues to traffic drugs primarily through the country's maritime space in craft of all kinds, including coastal freighters and go-fast boats.

There is an intrinsic link between The Bahamas' current national security problems and the illicit drug trade. Let me refer, in particular, to our serious challenges stemming from arms trafficking, human smuggling, illegal immigration, and the prospects for trafficking in persons. These illicit activities, particularly arms trafficking, a definite offshoot of the drug trade, tend to sit on the platform created by drug trafficking. Consequently, a single trafficking exercise may now involve drugs, guns and illegal migrants.

The introduction of illegal weapons, in particular, significantly compounds the country's security situation. Guns have become the weapon of choice in the perpetration of violent crime, including murder. In 2011, the country recorded its highest murder rate, at 127, and the rates of other violent crime are cause for concern. We are determined that drug trafficking, crime and criminality, should not jeopardize the economic, social and political stability and development of our country.

Our Parliament recently amended drug and other legislation to strengthen the capacity of the criminal justice system to deal decisively with drugs and crime challenges. A new court has been designated to hear drug cases. A gun amnesty has come to an end, and persons convicted of possession of illegal weapons now face serious sentences. Soon, a wide-ranging five-year National Anti-Drug Strategy 2012-2016 will be launched. The Strategy takes into account, the marked changes which have taken place in the global illicit drug trade, defining priorities for national action and bilateral and international cooperation. We continue to invest in state-of-the-art assets for our security forces.

For The Bahamas, mutual cooperation with the United States is pivotal to confronting our security challenges. The invaluable support of some \$1.6 million dollars we received from United States Government in the first fiscal year of the CBSI, has contributed significantly to strengthening the technology, assets and expert capacity of our Police and Defence Forces in particular. Let me also note here the state-of-the-art crafts donated under Enduring Friendship, and our cooperation in OPBAT, which must remain as strong coalition for counter transnational drug traffickers. We look forward to United States cooperation in the strategic development of bases throughout The Bahamas, especially on our southern and on our northern borders, the points of departure for illicit drugs destined for the United States.

The severity of the threat drug trafficking presents to The Bahamas and generally to the small island and developing states of the Caribbean, especially in the area of crime and criminality, challenges our capacity to

confront this serious problem. At the same time, our resources, both financial and human, and assets are limited, particularly given the current state of the global economy. Our countries have therefore placed confidence in, and are committed to, the CBSI partnership and the concept of “shared responsibility” for drug control that it embodies.

The Bahamas was honoured to host a productive CBSI Second Caribbean-United States Security Cooperation Dialogue in Nassau on 10 November 2011. We found very impressive the range of financial support, assets, cooperative operations and arrangements already provided to the region by the United States, and the value they were adding to regional security initiatives.

In seeking to stem the flow of drugs through the region, our partnership is working from a significant Plan of Action that we adopted under the CBSI. That Plan allows us to concentrate our efforts where they will have the most impact. We would recommend that in this framework, further investments be made in the acquisition of maritime assets in particular, to patrol the territorial waters of Caribbean states.

The systematic and continued improvement and building of regional capacity is critical to sustainability of our joint efforts. We would therefore recommend cooperation to further strengthen national and regional security bodies and arrangements in the region. Training is not only critical, but must remain dynamic, to keep step with changing trends and patterns in the illegal drug trade. The training we recommend would

broadly include the criminal justice system, and areas including forensics, drug and firearms detection, and investigative and interdiction techniques.

The region urgently needs to address trafficking in guns and gun crimes, and it is recommended that we strengthen cooperation, regional capacity and counter measures in this critical area. Improved communications with the United States and in the region is recommended. Our recommendations would also include a more robust exchange of information and intelligence, close cooperation in surveillance and reconnaissance, and continued, targeted joint operations.

Madam Chairman, I would wish to conclude in the words of my Prime Minister when he opened the Second CBSI Dialogue, ***“I give my assurances that The Bahamas is a willing and committed partner in CBSI. And, we will actively participate and contribute towards ensuring that the CBSI can and does improve the common security challenges and the safety and security of the region and of the United States”.***

Thank you, Madam Chairman