

**Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein**  
“Countering Narcotics Threats in West Africa”

**May 16, 2012**

Good afternoon. As some of you know, the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control has held hearings on various regions of the world, including Afghanistan, Mexico, Central America, the Andean region and the Caribbean. We have also put out bipartisan reports on Afghanistan, Mexico and Central America which are all available on our website – **drugcaucus.senate.gov**. The Caucus is currently working on reports on the Caribbean and drug demand reduction which we hope to publish soon.

Today, we are focusing on a new topic: counternarcotics cooperation with the countries of West Africa.

As the European demand for cocaine has increased, West Africa has become a major transit point for illegal drugs coming from South America and destined for Europe. In 2009, wholesale profits for cocaine traffickers in West Africa were estimated at \$800 million. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimates that the amount of cocaine trafficked through West Africa grew from 3 tons in 2004 to 47 tons in 2007 before dropping to about 21 tons in 2009.

As traffickers have become more sophisticated, they have gone from smuggling drugs in small boats to using modified propeller planes, second-hand jets and containerized cargo. African authorities may very well be detecting less cocaine in these new conveyances than they had in the past, which makes it hard to know just how much the drug trade has expanded in the region in recent years.

Unfortunately, the problem does not stop with cocaine. For the first time ever, two methamphetamine labs were found in Nigeria within the past year. In June 2011, Nigerian officials seized a methamphetamine lab outside of Lagos which had an estimated capacity of 160 to 200 kilograms of meth production per week.

So, why should the United States care? Cocaine transiting through West Africa is going to Europe after all, not the United States. I believe there are **three** main reasons why fighting the narcotics trade in West Africa is in our national security interest:

- **First**, the same Latin American drug trafficking organizations that smuggle cocaine and other illegal drugs into the United States are operating in West Africa, particularly the Colombian FARC. As we support the Colombian government in combatting the FARC, it is certainly not in our interest to see them enriched through illicit activities in West Africa.

The same is true of Mexican drug trafficking organizations. In 2011, a Lebanese drug kingpin linked to Hezbollah was indicted in U.S. federal court for coordinating the sale of cocaine to Los Zetas by using West Africa to launder huge amounts of drug money, likely up to \$200 million a month.

- **Second**, drug trafficking in West Africa provides financing to dangerous terrorist organizations, such as Al Qaida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM. As just one example, in 2010, Mauritanian authorities reported that members of AQIM were providing security for a convoy of cocaine and marijuana. We must do everything we can to ensure that AQIM and other extremist groups are not further strengthened by the drug trade.

- **Third**, methamphetamine and other illegal drugs produced in Africa could very well make their way to U.S. markets one day. Some methamphetamine currently produced in Africa is being shipped all the way to Southeast Asia. There is no reason to believe that methamphetamine produced in Africa could not make it into the United States in the future.

At a time of limited resources, I am pleased that the State Department, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Defense Department have made West Africa a priority. As our witnesses know, I am a big proponent of highly vetted units used by the DEA called Sensitive Investigative Units or SIUs. DEA has had an SIU in Ghana since 2010 and intends to establish an SIU in Nigeria by the end of the current fiscal year. This is welcome news.

I am also pleased that the State Department has initiated a 5-year, \$60 million assistance program called the *West Africa Cooperative Security Initiative* which targets transnational organized crime by strengthening West African law enforcement and judicial systems. Of course, in the current fiscal climate, the United States cannot bear this burden alone. I hope our witnesses can explain how our European partners and other international donors are contributing to West African counternarcotics efforts.

I look forward to learning more about both the challenges we face in West Africa and potential solutions from today's panel. I now would like to turn to my Co-Chairman, Senator Grassley, for his opening statement.