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SUMMIT TALK: HEMISPHERIC COOPERATION TO PROMOTE SECURITY

(Report of the Virtual Forum held from January 16 to February 6, 2012)

1. INTRODUCTION

This summary presents the main observations and recommendations from the virtual consultation **Summit Talk: Hemispheric Cooperation to Promote Security**, carried out by the Summits of the Americas Secretariat and the Department of Public Security from January 16 to February 06, 2012.

The virtual consultation had 249 participants from 28 countries; 89 percent of whom were from OAS member states. There was an especially active participation of representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs), multilateral organizations, the private sector and academia.

The forum allowed for an enriching regional dialogue in which the main security challenges and responsibilities of the region were highlighted. The debates had a particular focus on public security, citizen security and transnational organized crime.

2. MAIN COMMENTS AND CONCERNS FROM PARTICIPANTS

During the forum, the participants presented broad definitions of security. The origins of crime were attributed to a variety of sources, including the lack of family values, the absence of state rule, the strong influence of drug trafficking groups, guerrillas and paramilitary forces. It was pointed out that security should be assured at both the individual and collective levels, thus enabling social, economic and health needs to be better addressed. Some participants also cited concerns with other areas that might affect security, such as disasters, food insecurity and climate change.

Regarding citizen security, it was highlighted that it is the responsibility of the state to ensure a safe environment for the population by providing jobs and basic public services, such as education and healthcare as well as by combating transnational organized crime and drug trafficking. Participants also underscored the important role of individuals and communities in promoting a safe and anti-drug environment.

Participants cited concerns with the alleged involvement of some security forces in criminal activities and the lack of accountability from judiciary institutions. Attention to holding state forces accountable for military prosecutions and human rights abuses was also highlighted by them.

The concept of “co-responsibility” was a recurring theme, highlighting the different but complementary roles for individuals, communities, civil society organizations and the state. There was a particular emphasis on the concept of the family unit, as well as on the role of women and youth. Regarding women, participants argued that the mainstreaming of gender social status could serve as an important catalyst to draw attention to issues of violence against women. In regards to youth, keeping in mind that this group is at the greatest risk of involvement with criminal activities, participants were in agreement that a holistic approach is needed to properly address this problem that would include access to education, healthcare, rehabilitation programs, employment and training, etc.

3. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS

In order to address the aforementioned challenges, the following recommendations were proposed:

- To improve the judicial and criminal systems in order to ensure a higher level of accountability and transparency on security matters, as well as to discourage corruption among security personnel;
- To increase international cooperation, specifically by improving the vigilance of borders in order to diminish transnational organized crime and drug trafficking;
- To promote regional and sub-regional cooperation initiatives and the exchange of successful experiences on advancing security;
- To create guidelines or “best practices” to frame military action in interventions in public security, such as when fighting organized crime;
- To strengthen the role of women and youth in communities through different initiatives in various domains, such as education, sports etc., which might stimulate their potential to bring security improvements at family and community levels;
- To create and develop tax policies in order to stimulate private organizations to contribute to the assurance of public security by, for example, financing programs for the rehabilitation of prisoners;
- To instigate civil society to take part in open political debates about public security, in order to improve the communication between state and citizens, thus facilitating the development of solutions.