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COMMISSION BEGINS DEBATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS OF MINISTERIAL MEETING ON CREATION
OF EFFECTIVE UNITED NATIONS CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROGRAMME

VIENNA, 21 April (UN Information Service) -- There was concern that the freedom of thought that had guided the work of the Committee on Crime Prevention and Control, which was made up of experts, might be sacrificed for political expediency in the new Commission which was composed of government representatives, an expert of the former Committee told the Commission this afternoon.

The Committee, the expert from Sudan added, had sacrificed its own existence to allow the new Commission to be formed, motivated by the hope that it would achieve something more tangible. He was addressing the Commission as consideration began this afternoon of the recommendations of the Ministerial Meeting on the Creation of an Effective United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme, held at Versailles, France, from 21 to 23 November 1991.

In an introductory statement, Eduardo Vetere, Chief of the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch of the United Nations Office at Vienna, emphasized the strain of inadequate resources under which the Branch had been labouring to fulfil the many demands placed on it. "The task of the Commission now is to give greater content to the vision of Versailles of what the new Programme should achieve, and how", he said.

The Chairman of the former Crime Prevention Committee, Dusan Cotic, representing his Government (Yugoslavia) at the Commission, outlined the work the Committee had done and suggested that the Commission focus attention on implementation of United Nations guidelines and norms adopted in the past and assess their impact within domestic legislation and jurisdiction.

The expert from Finland, a member of the former Committee, also expressed his opinion on the future role of the Commission.

Statements in the general discussion on implementation of the recommendations of the Ministerial Meeting were made by the representatives of Germany, Italy, France, Austria, Japan China, and the United Kingdom. The representative of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) also spoke.

The Commission will meet again at 9.30 a.m. tomorrow, 22 April, to continue its general discussion.

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not been able influence the national delegations towards a greater restraint and selectiveness in producing resolutions with new mandates and requests for additional activities. He hoped the Commission could exert a stronger influence over the creation of new instruments and mandates and generate the necessary response for practical action.

DIETER SCHAAD (Germany) said it was time to make a fresh start in properly structuring the future work of the Commission. Inter-sessional working groups should be encouraged to cut costs and allow for intensive discussions. By the same token, pre-sessional working groups should be avoided.

The Commission should also focus on such priority topics as international crime; organized crime; environmental crime; and social prevention of crime, especially in urban areas. Because of the need to stress respect for human rights in the area of criminal justice, the Crime Prevention Branch should intensify its contacts with the Commission on Human Rights, he said.

It was absolutely imperative that the Secretariat always be able to provide information on the budgetary implications of particular activities or new actions demanded by Member States before any decisions were taken, he said. In the past, a good estimate of costs had been provided too late or not at all. It was also his understanding that the restructuring of the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme had to be absorbed through redeployment of funds within the overall budget of the United Nations.

New institutional structures, including the upgrading of the Crime Prevention Branch into a full-fledged division with commensurate staffing and resources, should not be decided on at the present session, he said. The first task should be to gather information and revise the 1992-1997 medium-term plan to reflect the changed status of the Programme. Only after a thorough study of the revised medium-term plan should a decision be taken on new institutional structures.

GIOVANNI FALCONE (Italy) said the Commission had the difficult task of making the new Programme substantial and concrete, while resources for it remained limited. At its first session, the Commission should concentrate on defining the organizational aspects of its work and on the selection of priority themes for concrete action.

The Commission should set specific objectives for each priority theme chosen and adopt operational projects for the achievement of those objectives, he continued. It must be indicated what each project entailed and the time it would take to be implemented so that it could be monitored. In choosing priority themes, the Commission should take into account activities currently being carried out and include them into future plans of action, as necessary.

The United Nations standards and norms for criminal justice and the model treaties that had been developed over the years were of great value, he said. But, in the future, the aim should be to enhance their usefulness with technical cooperation activities, rather than making additions or refining existing ones. Operational activities, such as exchange of experiences, legal advisory services, informative seminars, and preparation of practical manuals should be undertaken. The collection of crime-related data should also be stepped up. The participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the United Nations in crime prevention and criminal justice should be encouraged.

On priority themes, he suggested that organized crime and economic crime be tackled as a first priority since those crimes affected the national institutions and social fabric of countries in all regions of the world. Those crimes included drug and other illegal trafficking, money laundering, corruption and fraud. The United Nations could assist in the fight against such criminal activity by contributing to the preparation of national measures and to the norms of cooperation among nations. Suitable forms of coordination should be found with the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) in such fields as drug trafficking and recycling of money.

JEAN-MARIE DELARUE (France) said the time had indeed come to move from words to deeds. The Commission must move towards concrete action in implementing the guidelines set out by the Ministerial Meeting. First of all, the Commission must focus properly on the subject of delinquency. The international community must remain vigilant to ensure that the action envisaged met the requirements of the growing complexity of crime. There were types of delinquency and crime rampant today that did not exist 10 years ago. Scarce resources must be carefully allocated to the implementation of the action programme. Analysis of such phenomenon was also essential for planning long-term action. Among the new forms of crime that needed greater analysis was the crime of corruption and racketeering which was growing in his country, as in others.

The Commission must also concentrate on practical implementation of existing United Nations guidelines and norms, he continued. Technical assistance, pilot projects, information exchange, training and other activities had to be carried out within existing resources. It was therefore necessary to develop a priority list so that resources could be allocated in the most efficient manner. To be identified as a priority theme, any issue should be relevant to criminal justice and should enjoy the interest of other United Nations agencies. He also supported action that would increase cooperation and coordination between police and justice services of Member States.

On technical cooperation, he said that intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and interregional institutes must be involved in United Nations activities for maximum effect. He also supported the call for evaluation of activities and projects in long-term planning.

Further, he believed that the Commission should urge the Economic and Social Council to upgrade the Crime Prevention Branch into a division. The United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme should also be conducted in cooperation with other United Nations bodies to avoid duplication. Systematic exchange of information should be ensured between those bodies to eliminate any duplication or overlap. The idea of establishing a technical assistance foundation should be pursued in a working group at the current session of the Commission.

RICHARD WOTAVA (Austria) said the Commission should concentrate on practically oriented activities rather than merely organizational or theoretical issues. It should become the focal point of the United Nations system in the fight against all kinds of organized and transnational crimes, particularly money laundering.

Cooperation with other bodies of the United Nations system, such as the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, should also be stressed, he said. It was impossible to tackle effectively the problem of drug abuse control and drug-related crimes without simultaneously taking into account aspects of crime prevention and criminal justice. The recent session of