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**OPEN DEBATE OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE IMPACT OF TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME ON PEACE, SECURITY AND STABILITY IN WEST AFRICA
AND THE SAHEL REGION**

(February 21, 2012)

Mister President,

Thank you for convening this meeting, and especially many thanks for joining us personally today. We also appreciate the conceptual note your delegation circulated to inform our debate.

Mister President,

I would like to make five points, centered more on the thematic aspects rather than the geographical ones that form part of the title of our open debate. While there is little that we would have to contribute to the singular situation of West Africa and the Sahel region, unfortunately my country has been a direct victim of transnational organized crime, and therefore has some experiences that it can share with others.

The first point is precisely that. Although our attention today is centered on West Africa and the Sahel region, we could equally be discussing my own region, Central America. This is to say that transnational organized crime is a universal problem, whereby numerous low or medium-income countries are transformed into transit points of illicit activities, be those drug trafficking, human trafficking, contraband of stolen durable goods, trafficking in precious stones or others. The phenomenon has some common characteristics, the main one being the vulnerability of the countries involved. Those countries tend to have a geographical location which is favorable for the moving of illicit goods and services from their source to the markets of their final demand. They tend to be low or medium income countries, with relatively weak institutions of justice and security, which large contingents of low-income population (and consequently sensible to be tempted to expose themselves to activities outside of the law) and with a culture of opaqueness in the management of finances. Further, it is in the economies of limited dimension where the magnitude of resources managed by transnational criminal cartels has a heavy relative weight, which facilitates cooptation – or, alternatively, intimidation – of those persons that can facilitate their illegal activities. The phenomenon does not always constitute a threat to peace and security, although clearly it has that potential in some cases.

This takes me to my second point, which is that if the illicit activity is of a transnational nature, it must be addressed by actions that combine robust responses in each country, combined with a strong element of international cooperation. Although it sounds like a platitude, it is nevertheless true that the countries that offer the main markets that encourage the activities of criminal cartels are co-responsible for the phenomenon of transnational crime, and, in consequence, they should also assume their responsibility in facing this scourge. Cooperation has an ample host of expressions, which encompass from cooperation to build local capacities to International covenants and norms. Guatemala has an interesting experience in having associated the United Nations, the Government and the donor community in establishing the International Commission against impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). As to International Covenants and norms, and just to illustrate, we are a party to the Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoptions, and to the three international conventions on the illicit traffic of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. As is known, the Security Council, as well as the General Assembly, has made a contribution on limiting illegal transactions of diamonds, especially when the proceeds of their trade fuels armed conflicts. All of this is a result of international cooperation.

In the third place, combating transnational crime is a highly propitious field for international cooperation, be it in West Africa or in Central America. When a group of small states faces this phenomenon, logic dictates closing ranks and cooperating to face a common challenge. For example, in our case the Central American Governments adopted a Regional Security Strategy, which contains four components: combating crime, preventing crime, strengthening and rehabilitation institutions, rehabilitation and management of penal systems. A Commission on Central American Security has been established to follow-up on the execution of the specific projects that form part of each of the alluded components, and a close collaboration has been adopted with Mexico and Colombia, as well as the cooperation of bilateral and multilateral donors. All of this is undertaken in the framework of the Central America Integration System (SICA).

In the fourth place, transnational crime, whose purview in the United Nations tends to be concentrated in the Office against Drugs and Crime, impacts on virtually all the activities of our Organization. That is why the matter has been a matter of concern in the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, some of the subsidiary bodies of the latter, and, of course, of the Security Council, depending on the aspects under consideration. It is a cross-cutting issue, which, among many other aspects, has the potential of perturbing international peace and security. But our preference is to address this phenomenon with a more ample approach, including a strong component of alternative strategies to encourage economic agents to dedicate themselves to profitable and licit activities.

Finally, and precisely because of what was stated in the previous point, facing organized transnational crime requires an integral and holistic approach. It should be attacked from the supply and the demand sides of the goods and services traded. It requires strengthening our institutions of security and justice, of criminal prosecution, and holding people accountable. In addition, it needs to offer alternatives for those who live in the shadow of illicit activities, both the leaders of cartels as well as the great number of individuals who make their livelihood from these activities, due to a lack of better opportunities.

I trust, Mister President, that these lessons drawn from our experiences in Central America are useful for your own region.

Thank you.