

Canberra, Australia, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017

**Mr. Peter Jennings**  
**Executive Director, Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI)**

Dear Mr. Jennings,

It is a pleasure to greet you, and I sincerely hope this letter finds you well.

As an avid follower of the work carried out by your prestigious Institute, my attention was recently caught by the report published last July entitled “*Santa Muerte, are the Mexican cartels really coming?*”, under the pen of Mr. John Coyne, about which I would like to make some comments.

In a global world, few things are more globalised than crime. The transnational character of organised crime is rightly highlighted throughout the report (p.4., 7, 9, 12 etc.). In this regard, it is misleading to emphasise the national denomination of any particular criminal group, since they will not hesitate to recruit, employ and coerce people and organisations simultaneously in countries of production, transit and consumption, as Mr. Coyne points out.

It is for this reason that no country, no matter how powerful, can face alone the threat of transnational organised crime. That is also the reason why Mexico, geographically located in a zone of confluence of production and demand, has long insisted in the principle of shared responsibility as the necessary approach to tackle it. Fortunately, some of our neighbours and partners in this struggle share that vision. During a recent meeting with his Mexican counterparts, Mr. Rex Tillerson, US Secretary of State declared: “...*We as Americans must confront that we are the market. There is no other market for these activities. It is all coming here. But for us, Mexico wouldn't have the trans-criminal organized crime problem and the violence that they're suffering*”.<sup>1</sup> Hence, highlighting the existence of an alleged “permissive environment in Mexico” (p.5.) to explain the ascent of transnational crime operations is biased and fails to acknowledge the complexity of the issue at stake. It also fails to acknowledge the fact that few countries in the world are devoting as many resources, human capital and law enforcement capabilities to address such an enormous challenge of world proportions.

The paper depicts (albeit without much hard evidence) the presence of Mexican Cartels as a “growing” and constant threat, one that needs to be contained either through a very limited regional (e.g. ASEAN) or purely unilateral (e.g. Australian law enforcement) approach. Yet, it crucially fails to incorporate any acknowledgment of bilateral cooperation between Mexico and Australia in the realms of law enforcement, prevention, experience and knowledge-sharing, as well as adopting a common approach in multilateral fora. Mexico maintains a solid relationship with the authorities of Australia in all these fields, as it does with many other countries, and remains open to cooperation and mutual assistance for such matters.

Furthermore, a wider multilateral approach is not only desirable, but needed, in order to address this challenge. For example, both countries shared a common position during the preparatory process towards the 2016 Special Session of the General Assembly (UNGASS) that was devoted to the world drug problem. Additionally, Australia co-sponsored Mexico’s resolution introduced in UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs

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<sup>1</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/18/politics/tillerson-mexico-drug-trade/index.html>

in March 2016 which, among other things, highlights the necessity of incorporating the gender perspective to drug-related policies and programmes, and signals a shift towards a broader approach that includes prevention and sentence proportionality. Both countries have coincided as well in the importance of a health-based perspective and strengthening cooperation in order to address the problem of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS).

From a methodological perspective, it is my candid assessment that the paper lacks the rigour and evidence standards expected of such a prestigious institution as ASPI, from the use of an obviously appealing imagery of a completely unrelated topic (the “Santa Muerte”) to some of its broader generalisations that lack a reliable source or supporting evidence. In this regard, it would have greatly benefited from the incorporation of contrasting sources that could provide a broader perspective on the phenomenon of global transnational crime, as well as less selectivity for those sources that were actually included.<sup>2</sup> For example, the 2015-2016 Illicit Drug Data Report by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, one of the sources quoted by the paper, makes a single mention of Mexico in more than 200 pages, a fact that reflects much more adequately the role of the so called Mexican Cartels in the drug trade in Australia and the region.

Mexico is well aware of the challenges posed by the expansion of transnational crime networks that are global, rather than national, in its character. As mentioned before, such a phenomenon cannot solely be attributable to a single country, and hence an emphasis on a multilateral, global, and shared responsibility approach is needed to address it. To quote Mr. Coyne, “...generalisations lack the necessary granularity to be useful in the development of disruption- and mitigation-focused strategies” (p.4).

In the spirit that characterises ASPI of encouraging an honest, evidence and policy-based debate, I bring forward to your kind consideration the possibility of publishing this letter on the website dedicated to the report.

I sincerely thank you for your attention, and I make vows for your continuous personal success and that of ASPI.

Sincerely,

Armando G. Alvarez  
Ambassador

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of sources that could have been included to provide a global perspective to the world drug problem include: Resolutions and Decisions of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session 2016 (UNGASS) <http://www.unodc.org/ungass2016/>; World Drug Report 2017 of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) <https://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/>; Annual Report 2017 of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) <https://www.incb.org/incb/en/publications/annual-reports/annual-report.html>; UNGASS on The Drug World Problem 2016. Report of Proceedings, International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) [http://fileserver.idpc.net/library/UNGASS-proceedings-document\\_ENGLISH.pdf](http://fileserver.idpc.net/library/UNGASS-proceedings-document_ENGLISH.pdf)