

Prime Minister's Office

National Drug Secretariat (NDS)

Conference on Substance Abuse for Countries of the Western Indian Ocean

Region

Sir Harilal Vaghjee Hall, Port-Louis, 26 – 28 April 2023

Communiqué

The Representatives of Comoros, Djibouti, France/Reunion, Madagascar, Republic of Mauritius, Seychelles, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa, regrouping coastal and island states the Western Indian Ocean, as well as the General Secretariat of the Indian Ocean Commission, met in Mauritius on 26-28 April 2023, under the auspices of the Government of Mauritius. Were also present the Regional Maritime Information fusion Centre, the Regional Centre for Operations Coordination of the WIO region, the European Union, the United states of America and the United Nations Resident representative, as well as various institutions and non-state actors of Mauritius. They have expressed commitment to put in common their efforts and reinforce regional cooperation for promoting their respective mandates in addressing drug trafficking, substance abuse and addiction.

The following aspects were acknowledged:

- The Western Indian Ocean region is at a crossroad in addressing the problem, as it is experiencing rapidly rising consumption of drugs, the introduction of new psychoactive substances which represent serious threat, and an upsurge in the volumes of drugs trafficked within and through the region;
- The drug market is intricately interconnected in the region, linked mostly by the maritime routes.
- The core role of the Indian Ocean commission (IOC) has been highlighted, in particular the MASE programme, mainly financed by the EU, regarding maritime security.
- The serious social and health consequences of drugs and substance abuse on individuals, including drug overdose and related death, HIV and AIDS, as well as the threats from drug trafficking on the social equilibrium, the security and stability of the States and the Region;
- The diversification of drug consumption and trafficking through the region is of significant concern, and that the widespread synthetic cannabinoid use is already causing significant public health, social problems and disrupting family lives in the affected countries.

During the discussions, there was a general acknowledgment that the fight against drugs **requires a holistic, integrated, transversal approach and regional cooperation though four main pillars:**

1/ **Prevention** measures through sensitization and training of citizens and stakeholders in the society and outreach programs;

2/ **Break the supply chain by tracking** drug traffickers and their networks, exchange of information, police, customs and reinforced judicial cooperation among countries and at the regional level when possible;

3/ **The health and social aspects**, with exchanges of best practices and development of appropriate treatments, specialised medical care of addictions and training of health and social professionals.

4/ **A strengthened regional and International Cooperation, coordination as well as political commitment and accountability:**

- the challenges related to drugs trafficking and substance abuse concern all countries and cannot be solved by a country alone, requiring improved cooperation and that issues of common concern should be addressed collectively;
- lessons could be learnt from shared experiences ,
- regional strategic response and improved cooperation among countries can bring added value to efforts already undertaken at national levels.

The representatives of different countries of the region expressed their interest to establish a regional cooperation framework to address illicit drugs and substance abuse. The aim is to synergize the efforts, to seek a common approach and exchange of best practices, in particular to reduce demand for drugs (through prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare) and tackling the consequential damages associated with illicit drugs and substance abuse, and to fight against drug trafficking for preserving peace and stability of societies of the States.

Representatives acknowledged that National bodies responsible for coordinating drug response in charge of the fight against Drugs must reinforce their cooperation by establishing a regional network of contact points in all countries.

The conference encouraged all countries in the region to develop and implement their national drug strategy and/or action plans with clear monitoring and evaluation framework.

It was also recommended that the respective national agency responsible for drug response to meet and discuss a way forward for promoting regional cooperation, dialogue and exchanges against drugs and substance abuse and the establishment of a regional drug Observatory .

The participants thanked the government of Mauritius for organizing this conference and for their hospitality.