



Speech
by
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at the opening of
European Cities Against Drugs
the 12th Mayors' Conference
Oslo
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Distinguished Mayors
Ladies and Gentlemen

Recent decades have been an outstanding era of progress, a unique epoch in the history of Europe. Our economies have advanced, granting prosperity and opportunities to our people. Democracy has for the first time become the shared experience in each and every nation, making a practical reality the European vision of free citizens deciding together on their future course. The welfare of our people has also been transformed, bringing healthcare and education to most of those who could hardly afford it before.

These have indeed been extraordinary times and celebrations would certainly be in order if the shadow of a new threat had not emerged in our cities, growing larger and more menacing, more disastrous and more deadly with every year that passes.

The victims are counted in thousands, the tragedies overwhelming, families and friends in mourning, the happiness of relatives and classmates destroyed.

The narcotics industry has succeeded in establishing a mounting presence in our midst, first slowly and without gaining serious attention, almost as if it were providing additional glamour, entertainment in our lives; and then with determination and strength, organisational brilliance, employing force and illegal weapons – now using the means of modern telecommunications, mobile phones and personalised information

technology to create a network of trade and enforcement which has become almost overwhelming in its effectiveness and scope.

The openness of our borders, the free movement of people from one country to another, certainly a laudable aim and a blessing for many, has also provided the narcotics industry with a new mobility, opportunities for advances which did not exist before.

To some extent it is succeeding in criminalising our societies to a degree which would have been unthinkable ten years ago, creating a terrifying reality, both foreign and strange to our decision-making process, to our democratic institutions, to the public leaders who have been chosen to better our lives.

It has fallen to our cities to be in the forefront of the defence, to lead in the struggle against this new and terrible threat. Of course the cities are not alone, no one can declare their neutrality in this fight, certainly not the national governments nor the police forces of our countries, not the schools nor the educational authorities, not families nor neighbours.

Indeed each and every one must be accountable, willing to lend a helping hand, prepared to acknowledge that we are facing a new type of war and victory is by no means in sight.

Yes, it is indeed a war, not in the traditional sense, fought by soldiers, air raids or tanks. But a war reflecting the technology of our times because the means are more modern, the boundaries more elusive, a war creating victims different yet also mostly young; their number increasing, the death toll mounting.

Therefore our cities continue to bury the young, some even thousands every year, often hundreds every month, sometimes many every week, the victims of the narcotics trade, the victims of this new type of business, a business which has become an international industry armed with weapons and using special troops for enforcement.

How do we respond? What can we learn from each other? Which policies have proved effective? Where can we see positive results?

In Reykjavik, the capital of my country, an elaborate programme of information and guidance in schools and also aimed towards all the family members has brought improvements. Scientific studies are now available, showing in concrete terms the scope of our success.

Similarly other cities offer a multitude of lessons, programmes which have produced promising results.

Our cooperation and continuous dialogue is of paramount importance because the enemy is unfortunately growing in strength, becoming more global and more effective, amassing great wealth from the suffering of others and arming itself to escape our efforts.

The narcotics industry has attained a new scope in Europe and the criminal global network which we now face is among the greatest challenges of our future.

The goals which led to the formation of your organised effort, European Cities Against Drugs, are therefore now more urgent than at the outset, the need for our cooperation more burning.

I consider it a privilege as well as a duty to be a part of your endeavours and I hope that we will be able to lend each other a helping hand.

The dialogue here in Oslo will certainly contribute towards a more comprehensive understanding, more effective policies, illustrate how successful measures can be undertaken by our cities and our nations.

We are all in this fight together. No one is safe or secure. The next victim could be our family member, our friend, our daughter or our son.

Let our actions therefore reflect that only by advancing together can we hope to drive this new threat from our cities.