

Eleventh United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

High-level segment

Statement of Finland

Mr. Chairperson,

1. May I congratulate you on your election as President of this Congress. I am truly confident in your ability to steer us through the demanding task at hand. I would also like to thank our host country Thailand for arranging this remarkable event. Finland welcomes this UN Crime Congress as a meeting for the exchange of views and experiences. This meeting is an excellent forum for identifying actual trends and issues in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice. I am convinced that the Congress will come up with innovative suggestions to be taken up by the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.
2. Finland fully associates itself with the statement given by the presidency of the European Union. Finland is well aware of the multi-sided threats posed by the ever growing involvement of national and transnational organised crime groups in all forms of illegal activities, such as trafficking in human beings, drugs, corruption and economic and financial crime. Transnational organized crime poses a great risk to the political, social and economic stability and development of societies. I would like to stress the crucial importance of the United Nations in the fight against transnational organised crime.
3. Prevention of organized crime - both domestic and transnational - has been a long-standing concern of the Government of Finland. Finland has ratified the Palermo Convention which entered nationally into force in 2004. The legal provisions of the Convention are in effect in Finland with force of parliamentary legislation and already directly applicable. However, Finland has not yet ratified the Protocols supplementing the Convention, but is in the process of doing so.
4. Finland is fully aware of the fact that corruption severely undermines the rule of law and good governance. According to international comparisons, the level of corruption in Finland is quite low. Finland draws on a strong legalistic tradition which is upheld by clear qualification requirements, the obligation to provide public justification for decisions, an efficient criminal justice system, up-to-date criminal investigation techniques and modern budgetary, accounting and auditing practices.
5. Finland puts great importance on combating corruption both in the public and the private sector and continues to carry out anticorruption work both domestically and internationally. At present, Finland takes an active part in the anticorruption efforts of its long-term development partners, offers its contribution to multilateral anticorruption programmes and has, ever since the turn of the millennium, signed all the relevant international conventions against corruption and bribery, including the UN Convention against Corruption. Measures to implement the Convention against Corruption started last year in Finland and the work is still underway.

6. Mr. Chairperson, the government of Finland is deeply concerned about the growing problem of trafficking in persons — especially women and children. Although trafficking in persons is not a significant problem in Finland, we do everything in our competence to fight against this global phenomenon. Finland is co-operating in particular with her Nordic and Baltic neighbours and the Russian Federation in efforts to prevent and control this type of criminal activity. Finland is also involved in the ongoing co-operation within not only the UN, but also the Baltic Sea Task Force against Organised Crime, the European Union and the Council of Europe.
7. The number of prisoners started to increase in Finland in 2000 after a steady decreasing trend in the prison population during the 1980's and 1990's. Because of this there is overcrowding in some closed prisons today. The Government has tried to control the number of prison population through a number of initiatives. Most importantly, Finland adopted community service in the penal system in 1997. The community service still has a decreasing effect on the prisoner rates in spite of the recent increase in prison population. Furthermore, there are plans to limit the number of prison sentences which result from unpaid fines.
8. The new Finnish Constitution which entered into force in 2000 created a need for amendments in prison enforcement legislation. Therefore a total reform, including proposals for a new Prison Act, a new Pre-trial Detention Act and a new Criminal Code chapter on release on parole, was prepared by the Ministry of Justice. The new legislation is planned to enter into force from the beginning of 2006.
9. The basic idea of the reform of sentence enforcement legislation is to enact regulations of prisoners' rights and obligations and on restrictions of their fundamental rights in an accurate and comprehensive way on the level of law, in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution and the obligations prescribed by human rights conventions. An extremely important principle in sentence enforcement in Finland is the so-called normality principle. According to the law proposal, the conditions in a prison shall be arranged, as far as possible, so that they correspond to the living conditions prevailing in society. The possibilities of a prisoner to maintain his or her health and functional ability shall be supported. The goal is to prevent any detriment resulting from the loss of liberty.
10. According to the new legislation, individual sentence plans will have an important role in sentence enforcement. A sentence plan for the prison term is to be drawn up for each inmate. The placement of the inmates, their activities during the prison term, transfers, prison leaves and release on parole are to be stipulated in the plan. This shall increase the predictability, effectiveness and systematic character of sentence enforcement.
11. Mr. Chairperson, in the autumn of 2004, the Government made a decision in principle that adopted an extensive Internal Security Program entitled "A Safer Community", based on a wide concept of security that encompasses crime as well as other security risks. The goals of the program include the development of cooperation between different actors both at the national and local level. Currently a search is under way for the most appropriate ways in which the state can support local security co-operation.

12. Furthermore, the National Council for Crime Prevention in Finland has prepared a draft for a National Violence Reduction program. The intention is that the Government will adopt a decision in principle on violence reduction during the first half of 2005. The draft program emphasises the prevention of repeat victimization to violence and includes several proposals that seek to diminish violence, particularly serious and repeated violence and violence related to alcohol abuse.
16. Finally, Mr Chairperson, I would like to thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to express the views of the Government of Finland and I'm looking forward to the results of these discussions.