

## **THE U.N. CONGRESS ON CRIME MUST STICK TO THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW**

The Seventh United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders convenes at the end of this month in Milan. Its aim is to "promote and strengthen international cooperation in the field of crime prevention and control." In the past, such conferences have stuck to the straight and narrow and thus have been useful gatherings of criminologists, policy makers, criminal law specialists, and other professionals concerned with crime prevention and criminal justice. This year's conference, however, threatens to undermine what has been an effective United Nations forum. Instead of continuing to focus usefully on crime as it universally is understood, the Milan conference is expected to attack the West by expanding the definition of victims of crime to include developing countries that allegedly have been "victimized" by Western multinational corporations. Assaults on multinationals already have diverted attention from legitimate concerns at the International Labor Organization (ILO), U.N. Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and World Health Organization (WHO). Introducing this debate at the Crime Congress will reduce the time spent on the important discussions of crime prevention and the treatment of offenders.

Crime Congresses are held every five years to guide the U.N.'s efforts in crime prevention and criminal justice. Past Congresses have addressed juvenile justice, crime trends, deinstitutionalization of criminals, alternatives to imprisonment, and prevention of torture. Hints of problems appeared, however, in 1980 at the Caracas Congress when radical Third World delegates succeeded in adding to the conference's final declaration a reference to the controversial New International Economic Order (NIEO). Later, the U.N. General Assembly stressed the importance of discussing crime in an NIEO context. As a result, this year's Milan Congress definitely will include the NIEO in its discussions. And the Third World majority will surely argue that developing countries have been exploited by the industrial countries and victimized by multinational corporations operating within the Third World.

If it follows the pattern of other U.N. agencies and conferences, the attack on the multinationals at the Crime Congress will aim at curtailing their activities in developing countries. The attacks, moreover, will ignore the positive contributions multinationals make to Third World economic development. In many instances, these multinationals create a stable economic climate, are a source of foreign investment, and provide technology, training, and market outlets. If the Milan Congress were to succeed in attaching a criminal connotation to such investment development, it would demonstrate that the Crime Congresses have fallen victim to the kind of anti-Western, anti-free market politicization that has made other U.N. agencies ineffective.

The U.S. delegation to the Crime Congress must be prepared to stand firmly against the politicization of the conference. The U.S. must demand that topics discussed respect the legitimate aims and objectives of the Congress. The U.S. has five priorities to pursue in Milan: international terrorism, international drug trafficking, international money laundering, international organized crime, and development of an international set of crime statistics. These are the kinds of issues that will focus the United Nations fight against international crime. The Milan Crime Congress must take this responsibility seriously and concentrate on combating true crime. The Crime Congresses of past years have done so and deserve commendation. Milan should stick to the straight and narrow and not be allowed to break with these precedents.

Melanie L. Merkle  
Research Associate

---

For further information:

Roger A. Brooks, "Multinationals: First Victim of the U.N. War on Free Enterprise,"  
Heritage Foundation Background No. 227, November 16, 1982.

U.N. Document A/CONF.87/14/Rev.1, Sixth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, Caracas, Venezuela, August 25-September 5, 1980.

U.N. General Assembly Resolution 36/21, November 9, 1981 on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and Development.