

ILLCIT DRUG TRAFFICKING in the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

2013- May 2017

IN the IMAGE and LIKENESS of PAX MEXICANA!

©DAURIUS FIGUEIRA May 2017

## Illicit Drug Trafficking in the Dominican Republic (DR) 2013-May 2017

This study of the terrain of illicit drug trafficking in the DR is a continuation of studies presented in “Cocaine and Heroin Trafficking in the Caribbean Volume 2” and “Cocaine Trafficking in the Caribbean and West Africa in the Era of the Mexican Cartels”. For the period 2013-May 2017 the most important instances of the evolution of the illicit trades of the DR in the public domain will be presented.

### Drug Laboratory

The premier event of this study was the discovery of a cocaine hydrochloride production facility converting coca paste to powdered cocaine. The DR1 Daily News of 2 September 2013 reported the discovery of the underground laboratory on 1 September 2013 at a compound at La Rosa, Sabana Toro, San Cristobal in an operation in which the DEA participated. DR Police reported that 225 kilos of coca paste were found on the compound and the laboratory was built by two Colombians Johan Jairon Estrada and Angel Fernandez Vargas. The presence of coca paste indicates that the facility was in production confirming that the strategy of the MTTOs to locate production facilities within export points is in operation in the Caribbean. It is therefore expected that there are other facilities in the DR but even more in Haiti with facilities in Jamaica being a distinct possibility.

### Italian Organised Crime

The DR1 Daily News of 28 April 2014 reported the arrest of Nicola Pignatelli in Juan Dolio on the 27 April 2014. Pignatelli a fugitive from Italian justice was sentenced to 15 years in prison for drug trafficking in Italy is a member of the Ndrangheta and linked to Roberto Pannunzi an apex trafficker. The DR1 Daily News of 24 November 2014 reported that a person carrying the name of Italian citizen Lucas Finocchiaro was refused entry into the DR on the grounds that he was prohibited from entry since May 2010. It was discovered that in spite of the prohibition on the grounds that he is a suspected drug dealer Finocchiaro made several entries into the DR since May 2010 with the compliance of immigration officials. The DR1 Daily News of 14 November 2016 reported that two Italian fugitives were arrested in the DR on 10 November 2016 Giovanni Ponticello was arrested at Calle Altagracia in La Romana and Nazzareno Di Stefano at Guerra in Santo Domingo east. Di Stefano is wanted for illegal association and drug

trafficking in Italy and Ponticello for robbery. The continued presence in the DR of Italian organised crime personnel indicate that Italian organised crime especially the Ndrangheta have operationalised a long term presence in the DR. Proof of this came with the DR1 Daily News report of 11 January 2017 which reported that the Italian Police in conjunction with the Spanish National Police had dismantled a drug trafficking organisation that moved cocaine to Italy via the DR. Members of the Ndrangheta Morabito Bruzzanti-Palamara clan were among those arrested. The organisation operated between Italy, Colombia, Peru, Dominican Republic and Spain.

### Drug Trafficking

What is now revealed in the public domain is the scale of the cash smuggling operations in the DR as the drug traffickers move the cash generated by drug sales into the DR with a flow out of the DR. Drug trafficking then begets the need to smuggle then wash cash. The issue is not primarily having a sink but creating sustainable cash pipelines to and from the sink. The DR1 Daily News of 15 March 2013 reports on the dismantling of a cash smuggling operation that moved between USD 2.5-12 million per month to Venezuela, Colombia and Panama. This operation comprised Venezuelans, Colombians and citizens of the DR (Dominicans). A key player in the organisation was detained in Haiti indicating that Haiti is also in the play. This key player is said to be a front for the Colombian Buitrago brothers. The DEA was part of the operation to dismantle this organisation. The DR1 Daily News of 11 April 2013 reported on the raid of an apartment and a money exchange bureau used as a sink that resulted in the seizure of USD 417,998 with three persons arrested whilst in the US USD 2.5 million was seized. The DR1 Daily News of 16 April 2013 reported that USD 3, 332, 645 was seized in the Casa de Campo complex in La Romana. With at least seven persons arrested including a member of the National Investigation Department (DNI) who was the logistics coordinator for the trafficking enterprise. The USDs were moved from Puerto Rico to the DR via a yacht where it was transferred at sea off La Romana to a DR catamaran who then made the run to shore at the marina at Casa de Campo. The cash was removed from the vessel in two coolers and a duffel bag and placed in a SUV which then transported the cash to the villa at Casa de Campo where it was interdicted in the operation that involved the DEA. The DR1 Daily News of 27 October 2014 reported the arrest of a cash

mule/swallower interdicted at the Punta Cana international airport after her arrival from Brussels. In her stomach was 16 bundles of cash amounting to Euro 55,000.00 and in her luggage EUR 54,602 was found hidden. The cash mule was followed from Brussels on the grounds that she was a cash mule. This was the first cash mule interdicted in the DR. The DR1 Daily News of 28 July 2015 reported the dismantling of a transnational drug trafficking, money trafficking and laundering operation where 8 persons were arrested; four Dominicans, three Colombians and a Haitian. USD 1.7 million, RD\$ 1.9 million, firearms, 1.3 kilos of cocaine and 8 vehicles were seized in the operation. The illicit enterprise moved money, firearms and drugs hidden in secret compartments of vehicles which crossed from Haiti to the DR via various border crossings. Once in the DR the money was taken to various luxury apartments in the National District where it was prepared for shipment to Colombia utilising cash mules via air travel. The DR1 Daily News of 3 August 2015 reported the arrest of five Colombians who arrived on a flight from the DR at the El Dorado international airport of Bogota, Colombia. The arrested five persons were found to have together more than USD 1 million hidden in their luggage. One of the arrested five persons had travelled four times to the DR for the year to date and was under surveillance by the Colombian authorities. The DR1 Daily News report of 11 July 2016 reported that two citizens of the US of Dominican origin who travelled to Miami from Puerto Plata, DR were arrested in Miami for attempting to smuggle into the US USD 2,467,000.00 in their luggage. This is the fifth case at the time of persons of Dominican origin charged with smuggling millions of USD from the DR to the US in Miami, New York and Boston. The report stated that money is being smuggled from the DR to Panama, Colombia and Europe and a cash mule is paid between USD 15,000 to USD 18,000 per smuggling run from the DR.

The scale of cash trafficking into and out of the DR potently illustrates the apex position the DR continues to occupy in drug trafficking operations from the Caribbean island chain to the US and Europe. But this scale is also the product of the operational controls that the MTTOs exercise over the movement of their illicit products to consumer markets of the North Atlantic and over the movement of the cash proceeds of illicit drug sales. At the wholesale and retail levels the proceeds of the sale of MTTO product remain firmly under the control of the MTTO. Cash management discourse of the MTTOs demand that cash is

repatriated to the central dominant control less the costs of operation incurred in the market of operation as approved by central dominant control. This net cash flow is repatriated to the central hegemonic core which then institutes the next round of cash smuggling for various strategic reasons with the movement of cash to/into the licit financial system for laundering being one of them. All investments towards maintenance and expansion of the illicit trading superstructure and infrastructure doesn't need washed money. When you pay for state services, purchase other services, maintain your personal militia to name a few you don't need washed money. The underworld thrives on dirty money. The volume of cash moved into and out of the DR distorts the economy as the volume demands investment in front operations to mask the cash smuggling and more important the purchase of impunity from state agents. Cash smuggling is in itself an illicit enterprise that impacts sectors of the licit economy where the illicit economy exercises hegemony over these sectors creating bubbles. The volume of illicit drugs entering and leaving the DR coupled with the volume of dirty money entering and leaving the DR requires that the MTTOs and their affiliates invest in the DR economy to ensure their presence and activity towards a sustainable trafficking environment. The stock exchange, real estate development and the financial sector all reflect this reality with the most potent indicator being the impunity that pervades the operation of the state and the politicians in control of the state. What must be noted is the pivotal role of Haiti in drug trafficking in the Caribbean island chain especially in relation to the DR. Given the weak institutional case of the Haitian state it's expected that illicit activity in Haiti will exploit this operational reality making Haiti's role in the Caribbean illicit drug trade the best kept secret of the war on drugs in the Caribbean basin.

The DR1 Daily News of 19 October 2016 reported that the then US Ambassador to the DR indicated that the DR was becoming the dominant transit country for illicit drugs moving from South America to the US and Europe. This growth in the volume of illicit drugs transiting the DR was taking place in spite of US support to the agencies of the state charged with engaging with the illicit drug trade. In addition, it was stated in a meeting with President Danilo Medina of the DR that a number of drug cartels were now operating in the DR moving illicit drugs to the US.

A news report dated 24 February 2014 in dominicantoday.com reported that the Sinaloa Federation of Mexico was involved in drug smuggling in the DR in partnership with the Valle Norte cartel of Colombia which is now defunct. Which means that the Sinaloa Federation was operating in the DR during the decade of the 1990s. In keeping with the operational structures of the Federation personal representatives of the Federation have been in the DR since the 1990s and the DR has been impacted by actions of the Federation taken to protect its interests. A DR1 Daily News report of 24 April 2014 reported the arrest in international waters off Barahona, DR of Andres Berroa who served three years in prison for his role in the Paya drug case 2008 in the DR. Berroa was interdicted on a go fast boat with 600 kilos of cocaine on board. In August 2008 in Paya, DR 600 kilos of cocaine were interdicted from a drug trafficking operation subsequently seven persons were gunned down presumably in retaliation for loss of the shipment of cocaine. The DR1 report indicated that the seized 600 kilos of cocaine belonged to Los Urabenos of Colombia and this organisation continues to traffick cocaine to the DR from Peru as revealed with the seizure of the containers containing cocaine at the port of Caucedo, DR. Berroa and the 600 kilos of cocaine were landed at Tampa, Florida. The DR1 Daily News of 13 May 2013 reported that the arrest of Dairo Antonio Usuga reputed leader of the drug trafficking organisation the Usuga Clan that operates in the DR has raised concerns of the activities of the Clan in the DR. Martha Cecilia Madrid arrested by Colombian authorities is believed to have used Clan drug funds to purchase luxury goods and exclusive properties in the DR. Madrid it's believed used a Dominican protestant church to launder drug funds where humanitarian donations were used to purchase homes, luxury vehicle and beach apartments. There is also the case of Pastor Jorge a church leader from the DR who moved to Colombia to lead a religious community used as a cover for buying goods in Colombia with funds supplied by Clan Usuga. Transnational trafficking organisations who are at the apex of trafficking to the US and Europe from South and Central America are in the public domain of the DR operating their trafficking enterprises in the DR. The threat is then potent and palpable and is growing in potency and expanse. The war is lost!

The DR 1 Daily News of 3 June 2015 reported on a drug bust in which the DEA was involved in the Santo Domingo city centre. The target was a transnational trafficking group moving drugs from South America to the US and Canada via the

DR. Seven members of the organisation were arrested including a Colombian, a Belgian and a Serb. The arrest of a Belgian and especially a Serb involved in drug trafficking illustrates potently the depth and scale of transnational trafficking out of the DR and the operational presence of a variety of transnational organised crime groups in the DR.

The DR1 Daily News of 21 August 2014 reported the dismantling of a transnational trafficking organisation utilising swallowers to move illicit drugs to the DR and from the DR to the US and Europe. This organisation utilised multiple trafficking strategies as persons from Colombia, Venezuela and Peru were used to transport illicit drugs to the DR where it was excreted, then swallowed by a national of the DR for the trip to the US and Europe. Nationals of the DR with US visas or with US residency were the preferred couriers to the US. Nationals of the DR were also recruited to travel to Colombia to swallow and transport illicit drugs to the DR. Both cocaine and heroin were the drugs of choice transported by swallowers out of the DR especially for the eastern seaboard of the US. Swallowers were paid USD 700 to USD 1,000 per trip plus travel and accommodation expenses. The DR1 Daily News report of 6 July 2016 reported that the Civil Guard of Spain arrested 10 persons including Dominican and Spanish nationals involved in cocaine trafficking using couples as swallowers. From the Spanish airports of Madrid, Barcelona and Malaga swallowers would transport between 250 to 500 grams of cocaine each in their stomachs to London, Basle and Geneva, Nantes, Stuttgart and Tel Aviv with each swallower having made at least twenty trafficking runs. The cash from drug sales was then remitted to the DR in small quantities. The depth of the transnational trafficking enterprises centred on the DR is illustrated by the use of swallowers to move cocaine and heroin into and out of the DR and then to deepen the distribution of cocaine in Europe and Israel sourced and trafficked to Spain from the DR. The very volume of cocaine and heroin being trafficked into and out of the DR is the basis of the momentum to exploit the trafficking opportunities offered by this illicit trafficking apex of the Caribbean island chain. The same reality applies to the eastern seaboard of the US illustrated by the affiliate status Dominican organised crime groups now possess with the MTTOs and their dominance in the retail and wholesale drug markets of the north-eastern USA. This hegemony is directly linked to the apex position of the DR in the trafficking of illicit drugs from the Caribbean island chain to the US.

## Air Cocaine

The DR1 daily News of 22 March 2013 reported on the arrest of 35 persons involved in the trafficking of 26 suitcases containing 682 kilos of cocaine via a private aircraft bound for France from the Punta Cana international airport, DR. Three crew members and a passenger of the private aircraft all French nationals were arrested namely: Pascal Jean Fauret, Bruno Armand Victor Odos, Alain Marc Paul Marie Castany and Nicolas Christopher Pisapia. The others arrested were dominated by state agents enabling and facilitating the trafficking organisation utilising the Punta Cana international airport to move illicit drugs to Europe especially the Netherlands and France. This case is a most potent indicator of the corruption that pervades the state agencies of the DR charged with engaging the illicit drug trade. The DR1 Daily News report of 25 March 2013 reported on the details released by the Justice Department of the DR on the operation of the state agents in facilitating trafficking at the Punta Cana international airport. All the agents of the National Drug Control Agency (DNCD), Specialised Airport Security Corps (CESA) and Immigration Officers posted at the airport were on the payroll of the trafficking organisation. They received sums ranging from RD\$ 70,000 to RD\$ 6000,000 for enabling large shipments of cocaine to depart the airport for Europe. A shipment of 145 kilos of cocaine that left for Brussels was guarded by Police Captains and Army, Air Force and Naval personnel were also paid for their services. Two warehouse officials were also paid off. The DR1 Daily News report of 28 October 2015 reported on the escape of two French pilots from the DR who were out on bail awaiting their appeal to be heard on their 20-year prison sentence for cocaine trafficking. News of their escape from DR justice was placed in the public domain when one of the escaped pilots Pascal Jean Fauret held a press conference in Paris, France on the 27 October 2015 announcing his freedom from the DR criminal justice system. The other convicted pilot Bruno Odos was not present at the press conference. The two pilots left Punta Cana via a tourist sea-borne excursion where they were picked up by a speed boat which transported them to St Martin. From St Martin they travelled to Martinique where they boarded a flight to Paris, France. This journey was made without their passports. Both pilots were allowed their freedom with only an exit ban placed on them pending the hearing of their appeal despite the drug trafficking charge they were found guilty of. The other two French nationals arrested on the drug plane

are also out on bail awaiting their appeal in the DR. Another instance of the mixed messages the judiciary of the DR has sent and keeps sending on treating with drug traffickers in the DR. The DR1 Daily News report of 29 October 2015 reported that Christopher Naudin stated that he coordinated the operation to free and return the two pilots to France and the operation cost under EUR 100,000 which raises the question of the source of funds for this operation and what made these two pilots worthy of this operation? The DR1 Daily News report of 5 November 2015 reported that a National Front of France deputy of the European Parliament Aymeric Chauprade, admitted in France that he took part in the operation to free the two pilots. For three days until the 18 October 2015 when they fled the DR the pilots stayed at a resort in Punta Cana where they met with Chauprade to plan the escape. Chauprade flew out of the DR two days after the day of the escape of the pilots. Pierre Malinowski a personal assistant of Marie Le Pen of the National Front of France is reportedly the third person in a photo distributed of the two escaped pilots. The report also stated that the two pilots left Punta Cana on a boat then transferred to a sail boat with Naudin on board on the high seas which took them to Martinique. The DR1 Daily News of 13 November 2015 reported that the two pilots had acquired cars, pickups, cell phones, UASD and UAPA university identity cards, credit cards issued by Dominican banks and other items uncovered when they announced their escape from the DR. A most potent illustration of the nature of the social order of the DR where licit and illicit realms have merged.

### Human Smuggling

The DR1 Daily news of 23 May 2013 reported on the dismantling of a human smuggling ring in Sosua that brought Indian nationals and persons from the Middle East illicitly into the DR and then to other countries. The DR was connected to Cuba, France, Spain, Sri Lanka and Haiti by this human smuggling organisation. Canadian passports were tampered with and sold to Indian nationals who entered the DR via Haiti. Persons were smuggled into the DR from the Middle East and their whereabouts are uncertain. The leader of the group is said to be a Canadian of Sri Lankan origin. The DR1 Daily News of 23 September 2015 reported that 15 Indian nationals were arrested by the Dominican Navy in Samana as they attempted an illegal crossing from the DR to Puerto Rico. The DR1 Daily News of 15 October 2015 reported the arrest of 14 Indian nationals

attempting to illegally travel to Puerto Rico. The Dominican Today of 21 October 2015 reported that Indian nationals are second only to Haitians as the nationality most interdicted in the DR attempting to illegally cross to Puerto Rico having displaced the Cubans.

### The Courts and Drug Traffickers

In December 2012 the Buitrago brothers of Colombia were arrested for asset laundering and drug trafficking and placed in preventive custody by the Court. The DR1 Daily News report of 6 September 2013 reported that the brothers in the hearing of the appeal at the Court of Appeal of the National District were granted bail in the sum of RD\$ 6 million each with a 2 to 1 majority in their favour. The DR1 Daily News of 20 September 2013 reported that the prosecutor of the National District charged the Buitrago brothers with ID document forgery and was now requesting preventive detention from the Court as they were entering and leaving the DR on fake Venezuelan passports. The DR1 Daily News of 25 September 2013 reported that National District judge Jose Alejandro Vargas refused to grant preventive custody and ordered the release of the Buitrago brothers. At 7 am on the 24 September 2013 the Prison Police took custody of the Buitrago brothers and transported them to Najayo prison where they remained until their trial in spite of two court decisions to the contrary. The DEA was an integral part of the dismantling of the Buitrago crime family in the DR hence the special treatment afforded them. Clearly members of the judiciary in the DR continue to dance to the music of the drug traffickers and they are in no way bothered by their subservience. The DR1 Daily News of 27 June 2016 reported that the Buitrago brothers were found guilty of drug trafficking, asset laundering, forgery, illegal possession of firearms and double identity and sentenced to 10 years in prison. The brothers pleaded guilty and made a deal with the Anti-Money Laundering Office. The power relations of the state agencies of the DR state charged with engaging with the drug traffickers are then clear. The DEA enters the fray with their allies in the DR state to bring down a target of interest to the US. If there is a successful interdiction and dismantling operation the battle moves to the criminal justice system: the courts and the prisons especially. When all fails then you make a deal. But this is the play for soft targets who are not extradited to the US so much for the power struggles of the war on drugs in the DR as the upper tier level remain untouched as they are not resident in the DR.

The DR1 Daily News of 11 March 2014 reported that National District judge Elka Reyes released from preventive custody 10 persons charged with drug trafficking from Central America to the DR then to the US placing a bail of RD\$ 30,000 each with an exit ban and periodic visits to the court. The group comprised Dominicans, Colombians, Venezuelans, Puerto Ricans, US citizens, Jamaicans and Bahamians and the president of Caribair Rafael Senen Rosado Fermin clearly constituting a transnational drug trafficking organisation.

The DR1 Daily News of 28 March 2016 reported that five Venezuelans arrested at the La Romana international airport on the 24 March 2016 in possession of 359 kilos of cocaine were freed by the La Romana judge Aristida Mercedes on the 26 March 2016. The 359 kilos of cocaine were transported via a Cessna C404 aircraft from Barquisimeto, Venezuela. The DR1 Daily News of 29 March 2016 reported that the judge threw out the charges against the five Venezuelans on the grounds that the search warrant was faulty hence the search of the plane was illegal. The Venezuelans were still in custody according to this DR report. The DR1 Daily news of 31 March 2016 reported that the lawyers of the five Venezuelans had a hearing of their habeas corpus petition seeking the release of their incarcerated clients in spite of the release order of judge Mercedes. The DR1 Daily News of 12 September 2016 reported that judge Mercedes was dismissed from her judicial post by the Judicial Branch Council (CPJ) for serious offences committed with the release of the Venezuelans. The DR1 Daily News of 25 July 2016 reported that three judges of the Penal Court of the Court of Appeal of Santo Domingo were dismissed by the Judicial Branch Council (CPJ) for serious misconduct in the exercise of their functions. The DR1 Daily News of 24 February 2017 reported that in response to the decision of the Court of Appeals of the district of Santo Domingo to quash the conviction of Winston Rizik who was found guilty of drug trafficking and asset laundering and sentenced to 10 years in prison and the 5-year sentence placed on Nelson Rizik Delgado his brother to cancel the US visa of the three judges who voted to quash the convictions. Winston Rizik is a fugitive from US Justice who escaped from a Florida jail where he was serving an 8-year sentence for drug trafficking and fled to the DR. In 2009 the Supreme Court of the DR refused to extradite Rizik to the US. The DR1 Daily News of 24 March 2017 reported that the National Commission of Human Rights had denounced the complicity of the judiciary and the police with drug traffickers in Constanza

making these agencies enablers of drug trafficking. The Dr1 Daily News of 5 May 2017 reported that judge Awilda Ines Reyes Beltre of the National District was dismissed by the CPJ for making a number of decisions on the bench that benefitted individuals charged with drug trafficking and murder amongst other charges.

### State Corruption and Drug Trafficking

The DR1 Daily News of 7 January 2013 reported that in the sworn statement Sobeida Felix gave to the District Attorney she stated that the president of the PRD political party received campaign contributions from drug trafficker Jorge David Figueroa Agosto. In the said statement Felix also listed the members of the DR military and police who were also on the payroll of Figueroa Agosto in exchange for favours and information. The DR1 Daily News of 20 February 2014 reported that members of the National Police and the DNCD of San Cristobal province were protecting the drug organisation led by Cristian Pozo (El Matatan). The DR1 Daily News of 21 February 2014 reported that El Matatan maintained a monthly payroll of RD\$ 6 million for several years to purchase Police protection in San Cristobal province. The DR1 Daily News of 19 March 2015 reported that the District Attorney of the National District stated that in 90% of organised crime cases the military or police personnel were involved with crimes as large scale drug trafficking, murder for hire and organised crime. The DR1 Daily News of 9 January 2015 reported on the investigation into officers of the Police Anti-Narcotics Department (DICAN) who were not reporting drug seizures to the organisation thereby keeping seized drugs for themselves and then selling these drugs. Members of DICAN and prosecutors of the District Attorney's Office were involved in three seizures with evidence collected for: 250 kilos of cocaine in Miches which was distributed among themselves. The second was in Boca Chica where DICAN agents seized 33 kilos and distributed it amongst themselves and the third in Santo Domingo east where 950 kilos were seized and shared among themselves. These DICAN officers passed these cocaine seizures to drug dealers to place them for sale on retail drug markets. The prosecutors reported that no drugs were seized affirming the position of the DICAN agents

The DR1 Daily News of 10 February 2015 reported that Quirino Ernesto Paulino Castillo convicted in the US of drug trafficking and was released in January 2014 in

a phone call to the TV program “Hilando Fino” stated that he donated more than RD\$ 7 million to the Foundation for Global Democracy and Development (Funglobe) run by former president of the DR Leonel Fernandez. Castillo said that Fernandez received money from 2002 to 2004 on behalf of Funglobe and for his presidential campaign knowing fully well that Castillo’s funds came from the illicit drug trade. Castillo indicated that the electricity generator for Funglobe was a gift from him that cost him close to USD 200,000.00 and his contribution to Fernandez’s presidential campaign finances was around RD\$ 200 million.

### The Terrain of Criminality

The DR1 Daily News of 7 July 2015 reported for the year so far 57 foreigners wanted by Interpol and considered dangerous were arrested and extradited from the DR after residing in the DR as fugitives from justice. The fugitives were nationals of Cuba, Mexico, Russia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic. There are 120 Dominican fugitives from DR justice listed on Interpol at the date of the report. The DR1 daily News of 1 March 2017 reported that an estimated 71 fugitives from US justice were hiding out in the DR comprised of 33 Dominicans and 38 non Dominicans. The foreigners include American, Canadian, French, Spanish, Italians, US nationals of Cuban origin, Venezuelans and Colombians. The DR1 Daily News of 5 May 2017 reported that in April 2017 the DR deported 4,787 foreigners from 12 countries as follows: Germany, Cuba, Guyana, Haiti, India, Italy, Lithuania, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Russia, Serbia and Venezuela.

### The Reality

The impunity enjoyed by the drug traffickers who utilise the DR as a trafficking point is simply part of a wider reality of the compromised operational basis of the DR state and its key constitutive institutions. It was the strategy of Pablo Escobar to turn the DR into a drug traffickers safe haven and presently the MTTOs are well under way in the process of transforming drug trafficking in the DR into the operational mode demanded by their strategic vision. The apex position the DR presently occupies in Caribbean drug trafficking is the product of the ability of the drug trafficking organisations to purchase sustainable impunity in the DR. The agents of the DR state and its politicians have done all in their power to reap the benefits of selling this impunity over time. This willingness has created a social

order where drug traffickers enjoy and reap the benefits of impunity which sends a message to organised crime and ordinary criminals the world over that the DR is open for business and they flock to the DR in their numbers looking for sanctuary and the means to cash in on an illicit dream. The most telling development that potently illustrates the evolution of the criminal enterprise and the impact of the MTTOs on the social order of the DR is the flood of Indian nationals entering the DR seeking to eventually be smuggled into Puerto Rico. This trade has all the hallmarks of the Mexican coyote smuggling organisation including the kidnapping of Indian nationals in the DR with the demand that ransom be paid by the victim and/or their families (DR1 Daily News 4 November 2016). The journey through the Caribbean and Central America to Mexico then into the US is now buttressed with the choice of a much shorter journey to Puerto Rico via not only the DR but a range of other Caribbean jump off points. Then there is the run into the Us Virgin Islands. The threat becomes sophisticated and geographically diverse driven by a growing array of illicit trades which complement each other and the response is one dimensional, driven by politics and geopolitics and lynch pinned by the sustainable sale of impunity. Whilst the prisons and remand yards are filled with the expendables of the social order whose incarceration is testimony of the zero tolerance approach to crime of those who animate the state structures. The drug traffickers and the agents of the state are the greatest beneficiaries of the rewards of the war on drugs.