

**STATEMENT BY PROFESSOR HAMID GHODSE, PRESIDENT
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**at the high-level segment of the 52nd session of the
Commission on Narcotic Drugs
on 11 March 2009, Vienna-Austria**

AGENDA ITEM 2:

**GENERAL DEBATE OF THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT: REVIEW OF THE
PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY
MEMBER STATES IN MEETING THE GOALS AND TARGETS SET OUT IN THE
POLITICAL DECLARATION ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS
TWENTIETH SPECIAL SESSION: CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Dr. Libertina Amathila, Deputy Prime Minister of Namibia, on your election as Chairperson of this very important high-level segment of the fifty-second session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Your experience as a medical doctor and your diplomatic skills will be invaluable in achieving a successful result of the high-level segment of this session.

Madam Chairperson,

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to speak at this august gathering which will review the progress made since the 1998 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the world drug problem.

I had the privilege of participating in the 1998 Special Session of the General Assembly. That session was a landmark event with an impressive number of Heads of State or Government who reaffirmed their political will to fight against drug abuse and illicit trafficking. The Political Declaration and Action Plans that emerged from that event were founded on consensus and commitment at the highest level.

More than a decade has passed, enough time to examine how much progress has been made. To assist the international community in this important task, the Board has prepared and published a special report on the follow-up to the Special Session. The report is based on more than 100 responses from Governments and explores all areas of implementation of the international drug control treaties.

The report shows that Governments have increased their efforts to deal more effectively with the world drug problem. Accession to the international drug control treaties has further increased and become more universal. About 95 per cent of Member States, covering 99 per cent of the world's population, are parties to the treaties, including all major drug manufacturing, importing and exporting countries. Governments have also increased their national capacity for drug control and adopted legislation to strengthen control over internationally controlled substances. For example, 80 States have laws to control precursors.

However, the challenges that remain are daunting. The cultivation of illicit drug crops continues at high levels. Cannabis is cultivated in almost every country in the world.

The global cultivation area of coca leaf has only declined by about 5 per cent since the time of the Special Session. The reduction of opium poppy cultivation could be a success story if one limited the view to South-East Asia. In the ten years since the Special Session, the area of opium poppy cultivation in South-East Asia has dropped by eighty-one percent, from about 158,000 hectares in 1998 to the historically low level of 29,200 hectares in 2007, according to data collected by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

During the same time period, however, the area of cultivation of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has almost tripled, making that country the world's largest cultivator of opium poppy. Indeed, over the last decade, the drug control situation in Afghanistan has worsened significantly. Afghanistan has one of the highest opioid abuse rates in the world and drug abuse by injection is increasing. Despite efforts by the international community and the Government of Afghanistan, the drug control situation in Afghanistan has not improved significantly.

Madam Chairperson,

Another challenge is the abuse of amphetamine-type stimulants and pharmaceutical preparations which contain internationally controlled substances. Indeed, drug abuse continues to afflict people in many parts of the world. The Board notes that over 37 per cent of States and territories responding to the 2007 survey have yet to establish a monitoring system. However, without a proper assessment of the extent, patterns and trends of the drug abuse problem, any efforts to reduce the illicit demand for drugs are likely to fail. Governments should increase their demand reduction interventions in a comprehensive manner, on the basis of reliable information on drug abuse and paying due attention to the requirements of specific age and gender groups.

Drug abuse prevention programmes should receive more attention. Governments must heed the adage that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". Compared to the cost of treating and rehabilitating drug abusers, the cost of implementing primary prevention programmes is minute.

In addition, many Governments continue to give higher priority and more resources to supply reduction than to demand reduction, even though supply reduction activities have been shown not to produce sustainable results if they are not coordinated with demand reduction interventions. Governments should recognize that reducing illicit drug demand and reducing illicit drug supply are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

Madam Chairperson,

The fact that the cultivation, trafficking and abuse of drugs have not ceased entirely is taken by some to be a manifestation of failure and is often followed by proposals that standards should be relaxed.

The Board disagrees with such suggestions. The principles outlined in the international drug control treaties represent an internationally recognized standard that Governments aspire to achieve. Abandonment of these standards would signify denial of significant achievements of the past century.

Madam Chairperson,

Two weeks ago, the international community commemorated in Shanghai, China, one hundred years of international drug control and I would like to use this occasion to thank the Government of China for hosting that important event. On that occasion, the participants reaffirmed their commitment to uphold the implementation of the Conventions through a Political Declaration.

Madam Chairperson,

At the Special Session in 1998, I underlined the importance of respecting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Controlling drugs and protecting human rights are not opposites but go hand in hand. In its report for 2007, the Board emphasized that due respect for universal human rights, human duties and the rule of law is important for effective implementation of the international drug control conventions. Drug control policies cannot be successful in the long term if they are carried out at the expense of human rights and respect for the rule of law.

The principle that all human beings are equal in dignity and rights, which is enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights, should guide all Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations in their actions against the drug problem.

However, the exercise of the individuals' rights and freedoms does not include the right to abuse drugs. Drug abuse is neither harmless nor victimless and causes serious damage to both individuals and society. In addition, drug abuse is often in conflict with the due recognition of the rights and freedoms of others and in meeting the requirements of health, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

Children deserve special protection from drug abuse and from being involved in the production and distribution of drugs, as outlined in article 33 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This treaty obligation should be respected at all times.

Madam Chairperson,

Governments should continue to work against the world drug problem in a comprehensive, sustained and concerted manner. International drug control can be effective and must therefore continue to be vigorously implemented.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.