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Check against delivery

Drug crime is a threat to development and security

Time for policy change against crime, not in favour of drugs

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Madame Chairperson,
Your Majesty, Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs coincides with the centenary of the Shanghai International Opium Commission (1909). It is also the opportunity to review progress made since the Special Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGASS in 1998) on drugs.

The question in everybody's mind is simple: *have these multiple efforts reduced the world drug problem?* Up front, let me report what the statistics say: if we look at the physical dimensions of the problem (tons of production and numbers of addicts), we can state that humanity has made measurable progress. If we look however at the bigger picture, namely at the impact of drugs on security and development, the assessment is more complex -- and not benign. Let me explain how I see the situation and what can be done.

Measurably lower drug supply

Look first at supply. More than 40,000 tons of opium were produced a century ago. They are now down by three quarters, to 10,000 tons concentrated in Southern Afghanistan. Coca cultivation in the Andes is down by almost a fifth since 10 years ago (1999). In both regions illicit crops take place in areas infested by armed groups who protect, even promote the drug trade.

Above all, in the past 10 years, we have learned what has to be done to curtail drug cultivation: (i) re-establish government control over the territory, so as to bring security ; and (ii) promote development, so as to eradicate poverty and not only drugs. The steep drop in opium cultivation in the Golden Triangle over the past decade (from 190 to 30,000 ha) was indeed based on two pillars: growth and stability.

Yet, containing a problem is not the same thing as solving it. Every year world markets are still supplied with about 1,000 tons of heroin (equivalent), another 1,000 tons of cocaine and untold volumes of marijuana, cannabis resin and synthetic drugs. So there is still much more to be done.

Reducing demand from a health perspective

What about demand for drugs? Our statistics are as robust as they could possibly be, and I challenge our critics to provide better ones. They confirm that worldwide addiction to illicit drugs has stabilized since a few years. It is falling for some types of drugs, and/or in some parts of the world, but rising in others. International controls have limited the number of people who take illicit drugs to a small fraction of the world's adult population, much smaller than the number of people who use, and are killed by, other addictive substances like tobacco and alcohol. The roaring drug markets recorded at the beginning, as well as at the end of the 20th century have been tamed, but are certainly not bankrupt.

UNGASS must have played a role in this. Most importantly, UNGASS has increased awareness that drug dependence is an illness. UNODC works with governments to place health at the centre of drug control, so as to put addicts in the hands of doctors rather than policemen.

In the period ahead, a greater commitment is needed to prevention, treatment, and harm reduction – in an integrated, rather than mutually exclusive way. For this, UNODC has teamed up with WHO to scale-up programs around the world, and with UNAIDS to reduce the risk of HIV.

A disturbing consequence of drug control

The UNGASS experience taught us that the drug problem has to be tackled at both ends: (i) more development assistance to reduce supply, and (ii) more attention on health to lower demand. Further progress in these two areas would affect the intermediate stage: (iii) it would curtail the drug trade. Let's face it. While the drug regime has kept under control the otherwise enormous health threat posed by drugs, it has also had a dramatic unintended consequence: a criminal market of macroeconomic size. According to our estimates, the illicit global drug trade is valued at over \$300 billion/y. If it were a country, its GNP would be listed as 21st in the world – right after Sweden.

The drug economy is more than just mafia cartels buying estates, businesses and aircrafts. They also buy officials, elections and parties. In a word, they buy power. Here is where the drug industry threatens security and development, in countries already stricken by poverty, unemployment and the HIV pandemic. This happens both where illicit crops are grown (in West Asia and the Andes), and where they are trafficked through (West Africa, Central America, the Caribbean and South-east Europe).

What to do? Avoid extreme positions

The crime crisis generates emotional responses. On one extreme, and perhaps out of frustration, ordinary people call for retribution – *an eye for an eye*, they say. This misunderstands the nature of addiction, abdicates the state's duty to protect its citizens, and violates human rights. *Although drugs and crime kill, governments should not kill because of them.*

On the other extreme, a vocal pro-drug lobby argues that the damage done by drug control is greater than the harm caused by drugs. *Legalize drugs*, they say, to eliminate crime – namely, toss the proverbial baby out with the bath water!

I suggest an approach that is not ideological, or emotional. *Drugs are not harmful because they are controlled – they are controlled because they are harmful*. The fact that certain unlawful transactions are hard to control doesn't mean that they should be made legal. Should humanity accept paedophilia, human trafficking, or arms smuggling out of a naïve sense of market inevitability or intractability? Lifting the controls on drugs would reveal a state's impotence to fight organized crime or protect the health of its citizens.

It is incumbent on governments to achieve both objectives: to protect a public good (health), and contain one of the world's foremost public bads (crime). It is rewarding to know that no country in this Commission disagrees with this view. Recent referenda in Europe are another bellwether, with the majority of public opinion stating loud and clear that: *a policy change is needed against crime, not in favour of drugs.*

We should invest in the solid middle ground between: (i) criminalization of drug users and (ii) legalization of its use, by framing our collective efforts against drugs less like a war, and more like an effort to cure a social disease. By way of metaphor, let us say that the world is

afflicted with drug addiction (the disease), and the drug control system (the cure) has had a dramatic side effect (a huge criminal market). The blue-print I propose is detailed in our recent paper: *Organized Crime and its Threat to Security*. Here, I will only sketch the arguments.

(I) Integrated, instead of disjointed, actions

First prong: measures to control drugs must be conceived as part of an integrated strategy. At present, drug control is a patch-work, with disjointed actions that address only some aspects of supply (eradicating crops, rather than poverty); displace the drug trade problem (from one country, or substance to another); or use a hammer instead of a chisel (criminalizing demand, rather than treating it).

This compartmentalization doesn't work. Drug markets (and their mafias) are integrated in their logistics, financing, marketing and bribery power. They do not stop at borders. Governments need to do the same. UNODC has been pro-active in this respect. We have brokered the Paris Pact as well as regional intelligence centres in Central Asia (CARICC) and the Gulf (GCCCI) to stem the flow of Afghan heroin. We are promoting similar regional cooperation in the Balkans, West Africa, the Caribbean and Central America. Why not do the same in the Andean region and in Southeast Asia?

Legal instruments to make these multi-tier arrangements work already exist. The UN Convention against organized crime, and especially its Protocol on Firearms, provides the platform for joint, rapid-impact action. Yet, this Protocol is not being implemented: look at the situation in Central America, where the flows of drugs to the North and of guns to the South undermine the security of nations. I urge all countries – especially the arms producers – to ratify and implement the Firearms Protocol.

(II) Community resistance

Now, the second prong. Drugs infect societies through open wounds. Similarly, crime cartels rule out-of-control regions (where there is supply), vulnerable areas (along trade routes), and derelict ghettos (where there is demand). Violence, instability, even terrorism are their direct cause, and consequence. Yet, like addiction, crime can be prevented and cured. The challenge is to re-integrate marginalized segments of society and draw them into, rather than push them out, of the law.

Socio-economic measures, in addition to law enforcement, have proven effective at the beginning of the drug cycle (with development assistance offered to farmers) as well as at the end of the cycle (with health measures offered to addicts). Urban populations, caught in the midst of drug wars deserve the same help.

Indeed, the largest share of the world's drug trade and abuse can be traced to a few blocks, in a few neighbourhoods of a few big cities. The key to regaining control of these areas is for law enforcement, combined with social reintegration, to create viable alternatives for young people who are lost to addiction, or who have become urban child soldiers of crime syndicates. In a rapidly urbanizing world, drug control will be won, or lost, in the cities.

(III) Use existing legal instruments

The drug trade not only infects people: it also corrupts governments, together with business and finance. Nations need to improve governance so as to bolster resistance to drug cartels armed with war-chests worth billions of dollars. This leads me to the third prong: strengthening resistance mechanisms among nations by using existing instruments: the UN Conventions against crime and corruption.

These instruments were designed to deal with the world mafias that traffic drugs, arms, and people. Yet, many governments are not taking them seriously. While ghettos burn, West Africa is under attack, drug cartels threaten Central America, and drug money penetrates bankrupt financial institutions, there are large gaps in the implementation of the Palermo and the Merida Conventions. Their rules of engagement are not yet agreed upon, years after their entry into force. As a result, a number of countries now face *a crime situation largely caused by their own choice*. This is bad enough. Worse is the fact that, quite often, vulnerable neighbours pay an even greater price.

Beyond containment

Ladies and gentlemen, the nations gathered in this historic session of the CND unanimously support the UN treaties against drugs. The Political Declaration confirms this. Yet the drug conventions are under attack due to the emergence of drug cartels powerful enough to affect politics and business – and to cause a panic reaction in public opinion. The cartels undermine security and development, causing some people to make a dangerous wager in favour of legalization. This malaise is not the fault of the founding fathers of drug control. It is an inescapable result of inadequate implementation of existing crime control agreements, and the unwillingness to examine stronger measures against money-laundering and cyber-crime. History will judge us severely unless we protect more effectively health, security and development.

However, UNODC effectiveness is compromised by a flawed funding model. UNODC core budget is: first inadequate, second comes from a handful of donors, and third has decreased over time. This has forced us into ever accelerating rounds of downsizing. We are no longer trimming fat, but cutting into the bone. Let me repeat what so many of you already know: UNODC needs adequate, predictable and sustainable resources, as a way of promoting partnership, ownership and common purpose with Member States.

Put otherwise, UNODC has to count on a minuscule budget while facing ever rising expectations. Our budget is smaller than New York's sanitation department, yet we are expected to collect the garbage of the world. Or considered another way: here is an Office with a \$300 million budget facing a \$300 billion Goliath – namely a crime monster 1000 times our size.

In closing, Madame Chair, let me thank Ambassador Ashipala for her most effective and gracious leadership over many months. She actually even tried to improve our budget situation, to no avail. May I call for a round of applause in honour of Ambassador Ashipala. Thank you for your attention.