



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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Opening Speech of Mr. Yury Fedotov, UNODC Executive Director, at the 55th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

12 March 2012

Excellencies,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 55th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

I am glad to see so many delegates from Member States at such a high political level, as well as representatives of civil society and NGOs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your yearly meetings are vital for empowering UNODC, and strengthening our mandate to address the global challenge of drugs and crime.

Indeed, we face a transnational threat of extraordinary proportions that amounts to US\$320 billion or some 0.5 per cent of global GDP.

A threat that, every year, kills around 250,000 people across the globe, while destroying the lives of families and weakening community ties.

A threat that jeopardises good governance and the rule of law, and encourages crime and corruption.

A threat that feeds violence, fuels terrorism and undermines stability and security of states and entire regions.

Its name is illicit drugs. Two words, that, when combined, evoke fear, denial, and anger.

UNODC has placed the response to these two words at the centre of its activities.

Have we achieved results? Yes, but only in some areas.

Over the last decade, coca cultivation has decreased by one third, opium poppy cultivation has also declined by 15 per cent, while overall opium production is still increasing.

The amount of drugs seized is also staggering. In 2010, it was reported to UNODC that 67 thousand tons of drugs were seized around the world.

To put this in another way, the seized drugs for just one year would fit into 3,100 standard shipping containers.

By the end of 2010, seizures had prevented more than 240 tons and millions of litres of controlled chemicals being used in the illicit manufacture of substances.

However, while we congratulate Member States on these seizures, often supported by the work of UNODC, they are also an indication of the size of the challenge.

UNODC's overall response on the supply side includes a focus on data sharing and information gathering, as well as the creation of intelligent transnational networks mirroring those of the drug traffickers.

In West and Central Asia, examples of such cooperation include the Triangular Initiative, CARICC, and Operation Tarcet.

The recent ministerial meeting of the Paris Pact in Vienna has added strong political commitment to these regional activities.

Having already launched the Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring countries, we will soon launch a new Regional Programme for South Eastern Europe.

This programme complements our work on Afghanistan and the surrounding region by focusing on the so-called "Balkan Route" of heroin.

Countries in Central America especially in the Northern Triangle face dramatic challenges.

States have called for a strong UNODC presence in the region. I have listened.

This is why we have created a Regional hub for Central America and the Caribbean in Panama to link with a re-profiled office in Mexico and other countries in the region.

At the tactical level, UNODC is establishing centres of excellence in Mexico and Dominican Republic on drug demand reduction.

We are also ready to help establish specialized prosecuting bodies in Honduras and El Salvador to investigate organized crime networks and traffickers in the region.

In South East Asia there is a growth in illegal drug trafficking. UNODC's approach is threefold: we are analyzing the threat, helping to build technical capacities, and cooperating across borders and among agencies.

We are encouraging a greater openness and new practical commitments. Myanmar is just one such example of this trend that offers a fresh opportunity to reach the previously unreachable and to reduce opium poppy cultivation.

In West and Central Africa, which has become a route for cocaine into Europe, the global Container Control Programme, AIRCOP and Transnational Crime Units are starting to deliver initial results.

Later, I anticipate that these networks operate together with our Central American initiatives in an excellent example of South-South Cooperation.

Law enforcement also cannot succeed, if it is not supported by meaningful efforts to promote alternative livelihood programmes.

Alternative development is not a fiction. It is a reality. It work in some regions, but not in others. Our objective is to make it work everywhere.

Alternative development also helps to address food security and poverty reduction, and even climate change.

However, only around a quarter of all farmers involved in the cultivation of illicit drugs receive development assistance.

It is, therefore, clear that alternative livelihood programmes have not always been successful.

I invite all Member States to increase their assistance to such programmes where needed.

Can we afford to be satisfied with our achievements so far? Not at all.

There is much to be done, if we are to save the lives of millions of people from the threat of drugs.

And, we must hurry, the social costs are increasing. Indeed, it is no longer possible to distinguish between origin, transit or destination countries.

We are seeing growing social problems along the main drug supply routes. For example, in West and Central Africa, there are now an estimated 2.5 million drug users.

And, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan have the highest prevalence rates for drug dependency.

Let me be clear: there can be no reduction in drug supply, without a reduction in drug demand.

At present, the balance between our work on the supply and demand sides stays firmly in favour of the supply side.

We must restore the balance. Prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, reintegration and health have to be recognized as key elements in our strategy.

Crucially, the international community must protect children. Young people need to live a rewarding life that offers numerous ways of obtaining enjoyment without the need for drugs.

UNODC's own work on behalf of children exposed to drugs has started in Afghanistan and will extend soon to West Africa and East Asia.

Our family-based prevention methods have trained more than 3 thousand social workers and counsellors in 2 years. We are also working in poor communities to improve the quality of parenting in 13 low income countries.

Our treatment programmes, in cooperation with WHO, have trained more than 11 thousand health professionals in more than 30 countries.

As a result, the quality of treatment services was improved for an estimated number of 800 thousand drug dependent patients.

UNODC also stands ready to work with governments to improve access to drugs for medical purposes--particularly pain medications--while also countering diversion and drug abuse.

Overall, our work on the treatment side must be considered as part of the normal clinical work undertaken when responding to any other disease in the health system.

Our commitment is founded on the drug conventions. They form part of a continuum based on human rights and the rule of law that flows directly from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international standards and norms to our delivery of practical actions.

In all our activities on both the supply and demand side, UNODC is continuing to mainstream human rights into its policies and programme designs.

One hundred years ago, the Hague Opium Convention formed the basis for drug control, but we have followed a longer road since then.

Today, in 2012, we recognize that progress has been made, but there is still a need to strengthen action and cooperation at the national, regional and international levels.

To help achieve this, UNODC is realigning itself to ensure that the delivery of our activities is more efficient, and more effective.

UNODC is streamlining its work, while also building a strong independent evaluation culture that balances accountability and transparency in line with my vision for the organization.

More will be said on this in Item 3 of the CND agenda.

In terms of our global strategy we are heavily focused on an inter-agency, inter-regional approach that uses regional programmes as the integrated tools for the delivery of targeted assistance.

At the international level, we are promoting this multi-dimensional approach through our relationships with UN agencies and other partners.

The UN Task Force on Transnational Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking is a key element in this.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have no lessons to deliver today. My voice is merely part of a choir containing many different voices. All are welcome, none can be excluded; however, like any choir, we must sing in harmony. We cannot be out of tune.

To ensure this, a commitment is required from us all to acknowledge the importance of the Convention songbook.

We must also remember that our audience is composed of the victims in every country, in every region who look to us to help end their suffering. They rightfully expect unity, not disunity.

Our collective promise to these victims must be to deliver on their expectations for a world where successive generations are safer from crime, safer from drugs.

Thank you.