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EVENT: THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT TRAFFICKING

VENUE: VIENNA, AUSTRIA

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TIME:

Mr. Secretary-General;
Excellencies;
Distinguished delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you Mr. Secretary-General for having officiated the occasion. I remain indebted to you for your kind sentiments. Your commitment to the fight against drug abuse and illicit trafficking is well known. It was your address at the Economic and Social Council on 24 May, 1985 calling for a global concerted and comprehensive undertaking that has brought about this Conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. I am very grateful for the honour you have conferred on me, to preside over this Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. I can only promise that I shall do my utmost to ensure the success of this Conference. I accept this heavy responsibility with some trepidation but I am confident that I shall be guided by your collective wisdom and the unswerving unity of purpose on an issue, a scourge, that spares neither individual nor institution. We have before us an important task, a fateful one. In the next several days we must harness all our determination and our expertise to chart a clear programme to rid us and the society we live in of the cancer within our midst; drugs and the peddlers that make profit of human misery. Let us therefore work towards ensuring that we accomplish this task to the best of our abilities in order that the world will benefit from it.

3. Time and effort move on a continuum. It is a truism that major achievements of Man have been the result of hard work in a continuing process -- of responses to changes and challenges in dynamic situations. It is equally true that major achievements have been possible when we pause along the way to take stock of the situation, to make critical adjustments before we continue on a course.

4. Our meeting today has this significance -- this opportunity to look critically at our work, at what we have done in the past, that will help us improve and take timely decisions for the future.

5. Today we bring to fruition more than two years of

painstaking preparations. But we are also setting out on a new beginning. The start of an important quest -- that of seeking and galvanising the political will of all nations to act in concert against the plague that has afflicted the international community -- the pervasive spread of drug abuse and illicit trafficking.

6. It is not true that the United Nations lacked a programme against drug abuse. On the contrary, the United Nations had continued the work of drug control functions formerly carried out by the League of Nations. It was under UN auspices that the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs was adopted. This represents a significant effort by the international community to bring together various decisions and agreements into a coherent and effective entity. The 1961 convention was subsequently amended by the 1972 protocol. Additionally in 1971, following a clear realisation of inherent inadequacies in the 1961 convention, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances was adopted. In 1981, the UN General Assembly adopted the international drug abuse control strategy aimed at combatting drug abuse and illegal trafficking. This evolved into a 5 year programme of action in 1982. In 1984, the Assembly by its declaration on the control of drug trafficking and drug abuse, declared that trafficking in narcotic drugs, and drug abuse had become an 'international criminal activity', demanding the most urgent attention and maximum priority of the international community, and that eradication of illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs was the collective responsibility of all states.

7. Clearly, therefore, there was no lack of intention or programme on the part of the UN; rather it had been the inadequate commitment, the insufficient manifestation of the political will in many producing, transit and consuming countries to act in concert against this common problem that has allowed the rapid spread of drug abuse and illicit trafficking. One unofficial estimate put the size of the global trade in illicit drugs at US\$300 billion, a mind boggling figure, but to counter this, the United Nations system as a whole can only mobilise a budget of several hundreds million dollars. This is but one measure of the inadequacy of our response.

8. Our inadequate response is perhaps symptomatic of our different perceptions. For some Governments in consuming countries, drug abuse and addiction is held to be a social aberration, akin and on the same level as cigarette smoking and alcoholism; for many in the producing countries, the dilemma is more fundamental. Social restructuring becomes a major and sensitive problem as production has historical and cultural roots. Finding an alternative to what many hill tribesmen and villagers have come to consider as a primary source of income will be a challenge for Governments in these producing countries. For transit countries, the frustration is how to stem the flood caused by the enormous

profits that trafficking generates and equally important is how to prevent drug addiction and to rehabilitate those who have become addicted either as a result of the availability of drugs left unsold because of interdiction in consuming countries or as a result of demand from a home-grown addict population.

9. A most serious manifestation, for a growing number of countries in Latin America, North America and South East Asia is that the drug problem has become a security problem with implications for the country's continued viability and the maintenance of its national sovereignty.

10. Against this background, it is my view that this Conference is not only to work out or negotiate specific programme proposals for implementation. This will be largely the task of the competent technical bodies such as the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the International Narcotics Control Board, the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control, in the first instance and many other UN agencies such as the World Health Organisation, the International Labour Organisation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, and the relevant chapters of non-governmental organisations. The two sessions of the Preparatory Body for this Conference had established valuable guidelines to the Conference Secretariat to produce the Comprehensive Multidisciplinary Outline (CMO) of future activities on drug abuse control which is being examined and finalised for adoption as possible guidelines for specific project development and for implementation at national, regional and international levels. What this Conference should focus upon is the manifestation of the political will to act in concert against the drug menace. The significance of this cannot be over emphasised.

11. How this manifestation should be expressed is for this Conference to formulate. Its major significance lies in that Governments, henceforth, will be reminded of their commitment expressed at this Conference to act together to effectively combat drug abuse and trafficking as a global problem. For the international drug problem has assumed such scope and extent that an effective campaign against it cannot be mounted without international cooperation.

12. The expression of commitment that must emanate from this Conference is important not only as a reference and reminder of a Government's moral obligation, it must also be a powerful message to the drug traffickers that their activities cannot continue with impunity -- that henceforth, there will be a heavy price for them to pay.

13. Equally important is the message to the international community, to public opinion, the ordinary man in the street, that their Governments are now agreed to act in concert against those traffickers who have brought misery

and havoc to their communities. Let us show that we are indeed doing so by ensuring the early adoption of the new convention against illicit traffic in narcotics and psychotropic substances.

14. For all these messages to get through, for their objectives to be understood and to be realised, it is important that this Conference approaches the drafting of its decisions clearly so that there can be no ambiguity about the determination to eliminate illicit drug trafficking is unequivocal and their resolve to help those already given to addiction to enable them to return as useful members of society is unquestioned. These, ladies and gentlemen, should be our primary and rightful focus.

15. In the context of national efforts, many countries are already compelled to exert the required political will to act against the drug threat because of dire necessity. The experiences of many have also taught us an important lesson; that to effectively counter the drug problem, action must be undertaken in a coordinated manner and directed by the highest political level working in tandem with the administrative and judicial system in the country. No means can be spared. The struggle against drug abuse and illicit trafficking must also be undertaken at the social and economic level.

16. Internationally, regional collaboration in the fight against drug abuse and illicit trafficking has been relatively well developed. This is evident in Latin America, in Europe, the Middle East and in ASEAN -- but there is room to increase these regional efforts particularly among states that have become staging posts for the transit of illicit drug consignments. Perhaps a major weakness which this Conference can address is the inter-regional cooperation which is still in its early stages of development. While there has been cooperation between the European Economic community and ASEAN there is strong potential for developing such cooperation between the sub-regions of Asia, Africa, Western Europe and the Americas.

17. Another major focus is to strengthen the role of international institutions to supplement the national, regional and inter-regional efforts. Here I must commend the 40 years of good work done by the United Nations' system in the global effort to combat the drug problem. Of the implementing agencies, impact has been made by the United Nations Fund For Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC) whose projects cover the entire range of narcotic control activities including integrating rural development and crop substitution, treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts, preventive education and information, law enforcement assistance, and training and research.

18. We welcome the role played by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The WHO has the difficult task of

carrying out the responsibilities assigned to it by the international drug control treaties. It plays a pivotal role in helping to determine which substances should be placed under international control in accordance with the provisions of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

19. The contribution made by the International Labour Organisation is also significant. Its work focuses on drug abuse in the workplace and on vocational rehabilitation and social reintegration of drug dependent persons.

20. Of equal importance is the prevention of drug abuse through public education and awareness and this has been a primary preoccupation of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The integration of preventive education concerning drug use into school curricula and out-of-school education is one of the most effective measures for averting the serious consequences of drug abuse among young people and adults.

21. There are of course many other institutions and organisations. Strengthening these international institutions and their programmes of work will contribute to national, inter-regional, regional and global efforts in accelerated programmes to counter the growing drug menace.

22. For this Conference, extensive groundworks have been prepared by the two sessions of the Preparatory Body held here in Vienna in February 1986 and February 1987. It is my hope that all these groundwork, the result of collaborative and cooperative action by all participating delegations, will develop into an agenda for the 1990s for the United Nations system in the continuing campaign against drug abuse and illicit trafficking.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

23. The drug problem that confront us is of such magnitude, such complexity that an effective counter would require our fullest commitment, cooperation and sustained action. Our efforts cannot end here at this Conference. The campaign should rightly form a part of the main agenda of the United Nations programme for the 1990s.

24. I personally envisage the usefulness of follow-up meetings, in particular the convening of inter-regional gatherings of experts and policy makers to be assisted by the United Nations where appropriate, to examine in greater detail every aspect of the drug problem. This meeting should be an inspiration for us to follow through at regional and national levels the suggested ways and means of fighting the drug war. We must return from this Conference with steely resolve to win the war at home. The Conference is only a success if the joint-efforts and cooperation it generates are translated into genuine and sustained actions

domestically. The global war against drug will never be successful if nations continue to maintain passive resistance even after this Conference.

25. The struggle that we are engaged in today is a struggle for the minds and hearts of every individual in every country in every part of the globe. The reason for the rapid spread of the international drug problem has been our failure to reach the minds of our people -- to alert them to the real dangers that drug abuse portends and the havoc it can create. The tide of the battle cannot be turned around until we have raised that level of awareness that drug kills and that drug destroys. We have to correct the fallacy that drug addiction happens only to someone else's child but never ours, that the source of the problem lies in some far-away land but never at home. The battlefield is in each individual household, each community, each country.

26. Today, the genius of our scientific achievements are creating tremendous changes in the relationship between man and his environment. They are also putting to test various norms and values. Man, clear and steadfast in his commitment to progress, can bring about bountiful advancement to all humanity. We can today mine the oceans and the moon, direct electronic signals and laser beams through the atmosphere and travel in outerspace. The genius of man by the grace of God seems to be boundless. Let us then not destroy this promise of a better future by succumbing to the ravages of drugs abuse.

27. Our work here is therefore of utmost importance and priority. Let me conclude by extending to all my good wishes for success in your deliberations. There will be many days and nights of hard work but for what the Conference will accomplish, these efforts will be well worth our while.
Thank you.