

Memorandum of Understanding

Senior Officials Committee Meeting

Phnom Penh 18 – 19 May 2000

OPENING REMARKS

by Sandro Calvani

UNDCP Representative

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues and Friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

I would like to start by thanking the Government of Cambodia for hosting the Senior Officials Committee Meeting of the MOU in Phnom Penh this year.

We all appreciate very much the arrangements made and the generous hospitality shown to all of us.

We are confident that the meeting will result in important steps forward in our regional cooperation in the fight against drug abuse. We are also very glad to take this opportunity to enjoy the beautiful city of Phnom Penh and to conclude this year's Meeting with the visit to the historical site of Angkor Wat, unique in the world for its magnificence and beauty.

With the signing of the MOU, you created a political platform for subregional cooperation in drug control that was the first of its kind in the world. We have reason to feel proud about this pivotal role and about the achievements made so far.

The subregional cooperation forms an important platform for international support as well as for extended bilateral cooperation. Bilateral agreements serve as an important complement to multilateral cooperation. We are very happy to see that these agreements usually include mutual support and concrete actions. We think it is extremely important that the Governments – at all levels – help each other in order to share experiences and resources.

UNDCP is pleased to facilitate those meetings and will continue to do so in its capacity building efforts.

During this two days, we will review the progress of the Subregional Action Plan and discuss together the ways in which it can be improved to better reflect the overall changing drug situation. Rapid changes with regards to production, trafficking and

abuse of drugs continuously challenge our policies and practical efforts to jointly address the drug problems of this region.

You have done a lot since the signing of the MOU; however, we are still far from what we want to achieve. “A lot”, therefore, is not enough. This is why renewed cooperation, sharing of information, of experiences and of best practices is today more essential than ever if we want to succeed *together* in getting results.

Illicit drugs move across the borders.

People are exploited and get poorer while the value of drugs increases at every step. Profits from this illicit market benefit only a few while the vast majority are damaged. Heroin is spreading in this region along side a dangerous increase in the production and abuse of amphetamine-type stimulants and methamphetamines.

Drug criminals are building increasingly sophisticated infrastructures for drug production and a growing number of people are reported to be employed in illicit activities. The result is the strengthening of the networks between national and foreign drug traffickers and local drug criminals; these networks are now developing the potential to attack national stability and erode the basis on which it rests.

The main challenge lies in addressing the damage done by drug trafficking and by drug abuse itself. This is what we should work on together today, tomorrow and in the future to come.

I have said earlier that illicit drugs move across the border. Let us not forget that they do not move by themselves. Transnational crime and “uncivil forces” are accompanying them.

Thus cooperation and joint efforts are even more necessary in front of the growing threats from these “uncivil forces”. When we talk about them, we refer to those illicit forces which rape the efforts and the gains of civil society for their own advantage. Global predators - namely crime that travels across borders - seek ways to enhance their illicit business opportunities by any means necessary, legal or illegal. We should not underestimate the power of these forces because they pose a great risk to the integrity and stability of public order at all levels.

They represent a very active “dark side of globalisation” increasingly taking advantage of the new global reach made possible by the revolutions in communication, transportation and commerce, which are penetrating Asia at a dangerously fast speed.

Every form of transnational crime represents a distinct threat to the security of the people. Transnational crime can destabilize the political systems, the administration, the economy, the society, the unity of a country and of its people. The transnational networks which pursue illicit activities attack the territorial integrity not only of single states but of their borders and of their neighbors.

Corruption is another threat. Particularly worrisome are the findings about the corruption of government officials and of the criminal justice system itself. “ If the very institutions which exist to prevent corruption are themselves corrupt, we must

indeed go back to the very basic.”¹ The impact of corruption is becoming increasingly felt and so are its ramifications. Drugs fuel corruption and crime while in turn corruption and crime fuel the illicit drug markets.

The recent years have witnessed an increase in the volume of trafficking in human beings within the Southeast Asia and the countries of the Mekong Region. Trafficking criminal networks operate where control is weak, where the laws do not exist and/or where the laws exist but are not adequately enforced. These new forms of slavery are sacrificing a growing number of women and children and are denying your countries of their future generations. Allowing this phenomenon to continue without acting to stop it immediately is in itself a crime.

Another cross-cutting issue in transnational crime is money laundering. Those who make money from various forms of illicit activities need to “clean” their dirty money. Money laundering is by no means a new crime; however it now affects all countries because it exploits technological changes and the new opportunities offered by globalisation.

There are clear indications of smuggling and counterfeiting taking place in this Region and reliable information warns that organized criminal elements are using some of your countries as a kind of refuge for all sorts of illicit activities. There is a real danger of the Region becoming a refuge for criminal elements, because they believe that enforcement is either totally ineffective or that it can be bought out.

We at the UNDCP Regional Centre are re-engineering our strategies and our approach.

We have received a new mandate to facilitate UN activities to counter transnational crime and are committed to working hard in order to achieve substantive results. First, we shall increase our emphasis on strengthening the capacity of your governments agencies and your civil society institutions by implementing regional and national programmes that build upon best drug awareness practices as well as effective monitoring of drug control and transnational crime developments.

We shall facilitate the cooperation among the countries of the region to control the production, trafficking and abuse of illicit drugs and drug-related crimes and corruption by strengthening international, regional and bilateral cooperation.

Second, we are committed to assist you in the development and implementation of joint policies, strategies and programmes and in particular the Subregional Action Plan. However, the old fashioned approach of UNDCP full funding of our cooperative endeavours needs to be seriously revisited.

I appeal to you and call upon the Governments of the Region to contribute to the funding of our joint initiatives. Only more budget sharing in subregional priority programmes can guarantee their future sustainability.

¹Statement by Mr. Pino Arlacchi, UN/ODCCP Executive Director, at the Opening Session of the Tenth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, 10 April 2000, Vienna .

In a nutshell, we all have to contribute to our common mission.

This brings me to my final appeal to you as leaders of your countries. We have seen success stories in this area built by visionary leadership, cooperative partnership and sound investment.

But now, when the need is greatest, a visionary leadership, an inclusive unity towards a common goal and strong international funding are harder to find.

At the local level, it means listening to people and taking responsible action that will address crime in all its aspects. We have to work hard to guarantee a life free of violence and intimidation, the right to basic services, the right to freedom and dignity to all our people.

At the national level, it means enhanced support for initiatives and efforts to combat drug abuse and crime.

At the regional level, it means greater resources for measures aimed at implementing international cooperation, in particular the Subregional Action Plan.

UNDCP is very pleased with the development of the MOU and we believe that this meeting will further strengthen cooperation and encourage the MOU Governments to give high priority to actions on drug control and against transnational crime.

We also hope that you will contribute to the successful implementation of the Subregional Action Plan.

Above all, we are optimistic that East Asian countries will learn a lot from the Mekong experience of integrated multisectoral cooperation in strengthening human security. We hope that our collaborative efforts will serve to strengthen our beliefs, to forge our strategies and to put our ideas into actions.

Together, we can make a difference.

Thank you