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**AT THE TWENTY-FOURTH ASIA/PACIFIC MEETING OF
HEADS OF NATIONAL DRUG LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES (HONLEA)
Yangon, Myanmar
14 – 17 November 2000**

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

It gives me great pleasure to address this, the Twenty-fourth Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and the Pacific , on behalf of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme and its Executive Director, Mr. Pino Arlacchi. On his behalf, I would like to express UNDCP's gratitude to the Government of the Union of Myanmar for hosting the Asia/Pacific HONLEA this year, and, to welcome you all to Yangon .

Over the following four days you will have the opportunity to examine matters of considerable urgency. They are matters of importance for the countries of the region and for many other countries around the world.

This urgency is reflected in the topics identified in your provisional agenda. Global production of illicit opium has risen sharply in the last two years. The principal contributor to this increase being Afghanistan, who doubled its production in 1999 compared with the previous year. (10% down for year 2000 compared with year 1999)

With this doubling of production, supply has become much greater than the traditional 'Western' and surrounding regional markets can absorb. We are starting to see the movement of 'Golden Crescent' heroin to south east Asia region, adding to the availability of heroin derived from local production in countries of this region, and compounding the difficulties faced by law enforcement and social services to suppress the trafficking and abuse of this addictive scourge . This situation merits the use of the word ' urgent'.

Additionally as a region you face a growing threat from the manufacture and abuse of amphetamine type stimulants that pose as great a threat to your communities as heroin abuse.

Last month in Bangkok Governments of ASEAN and China agreed to a Joint Regional Plan to Achieve a Drug-Free ASEAN by 2015

The ten ASEAN governments and the People's Republic of China endorsed a plan aiming at eliminating or drastically reducing the problems of illicit drug production, trafficking and abuse in the region by the year 2015. This decision has been supported by more than 30 governments and 15 International Organizations in a political declaration adopted by delegates to an International Congress held at the UN Conference Centre in Bangkok, which concluded today.

The International Congress entitled “In Pursuit of a Drug-Free ASEAN 2015 Sharing the Vision, Leading the Change” had been jointly convened by Royal Thai Government, ASEAN and the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (ODCCP). The Congress had been the result of rising concern of the ASEAN leaders about the drug problems of the region which had aggravated in recent years due to the rapid spread of newly emerging drugs including amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS).

In endorsing the Plan of Action, entitled *ACCORD – ASEAN and China Cooperative Operations in Response to Dangerous Drugs,*” the ASEAN Governments and China have agreed to strengthen coordination of their efforts in four major areas of activity:

- to promote public awareness of the dangers of drugs and adequate responses within their societies;
- to address drug abuse and related HIV problems among injecting drug users through improved data collection, preventive and treatment programmes and the sharing of information;
- to attack illicit production and trafficking through the strengthening of law enforcement efforts and international cooperation and the development of up-to-date legislation and other control measures; and
- to eliminate illicit drug crops through alternative development programmes and related community participation.

Key elements of the Plan of Action are intended to give China and the ASEAN states as well as other governments and organisations supporting the exercise full “ownership” of the process in pursuit of a Drug-Free ASEAN. These include target dates for specific actions and the establishment of a monitoring mechanism to measure the progress of all drug control activities in the region.

During a statement at the International Congress, UN Under-Secretary-General and ODCCP Executive Director Pino Arlacchi lauded the efforts to develop a Drug-Free ASEAN and pledged the full cooperation and support of his organization. International support will be crucial for the success of the Action Plan. It is, therefore, particularly significant that, in the Political Declaration, the governments participating in the International Congress committed themselves to consider contributing financial support through the existing mechanisms of grants to the United Nations and ASEAN which would report every year on the funds invested in the execution of the plan.

It is easy to limit our concern to the trafficking of the drugs themselves. But we also must look a little deeper to understand the full extent of the risk posed to the region.

The highest profits in the drug market are generated not at the production end and not at the level of the retail sales to the addict, but rather at the stage of trafficking. The traffickers will go to extreme measures to ensure these profits. In the eyes of the drug trafficker, a bribe to a law enforcement officer is a small price to pay for safe passage of the merchandise.

Bribery is a form of corruption. It is highly contagious once it takes root in a given country. Corruption impedes development. Basic services become available only to those who have the money to buy them. The gap between rich and poor increases. In extreme cases, even an entire national economy is threatened when corruption permeates every level of society.

ODCCP has launched a Global programme against Corruption aimed at providing participating governments the advice and assistance they need to set up effective anti-corruption institutions. It goes without saying that

countries which suffer from high volumes of drug traffic must be especially vigilant against corruption.

Drug traffickers are looking for profit. That is their principal motive. The profits in many cases provide the cash needed for the purchase of arms by groups that seek to destabilise legitimate government. In today's world the greatest threat to peace and prosperity is no longer inter-state war. It comes instead from organised non-state sector actors who resort to violence, crime and terror to achieve their ends. The link between drug trafficking and overall security is a very real one.

Drug trafficking and other forms of organised crime depend upon money laundering to convert their profits to useable wealth. In this age of world wide electronic transfers, criminal use of banking systems has reached a level that defies comprehension. A single case last year involved the laundering of criminal proceeds in Russia through a New York bank involved as much as \$US 7 billion. A figure greater than the GDP of a third of the members of the United Nations.

Asia is vulnerable to money laundering. Legislation and regulation in a number of countries are inadequate to protect their banking systems from criminal misuse. There are off-shore banking centres within this region that do not yet meet the acceptable international regulatory standards.

Both official and public opinion are reacting to the unprecedented growth in the handling of dirty money. The threat to legitimate economic activity has become too large to tolerate. The ODCCP Global Programme against Money Laundering offers assistance to governments which want to improve their regulatory systems. A recently launched initiative called the Offshore Forum is specially designed to give an opportunity to offshore

banking centres to ensure that their banking sectors act fully within agreed international standards.

As I mentioned earlier, when we reflect upon the subject of drug trafficking we quickly arrive at issues like those I have just mentioned – corruption, organised crime, money laundering, terrorism and threats to peace and security. When we look back over twenty four years of HONLEA meetings, initiated to respond to the threat posed by drug trafficking, we see the issues that successive meetings have addressed, grow and diversify. Important issues such as the prevention of diversion of precursor chemicals have been added. Even traditional problems must be re-examined in the light of today's globalised society.

Yet one fact has not changed. The reason we meet here today, and why our colleagues have met similarly before us – the reason that national and international drug control exist – is ultimately the need to protect individual human beings from drug abuse. 24 years ago Asia was primarily associated with the production and trafficking of illicit drugs. There was little talk of drug abuse itself – of demand. That was seen as a problem of western countries.

As you know better than I, that situation has changed. Some of the highest rates of heroin use in the world are now found in a country within this region. The social or cultural protective systems which various countries thought would protect them from drug abuse have one by one crumbled. This is the final element of the alarm that is being sounded.

In sum, drug trafficking and abuse are now everyone's problem. This was the spirit which prevailed at the 1998 Special Session of the UN General assembly on drugs. This high degree of consensus enabled the Special

Session to take decisions on a wide range of drug related issues. Even more important, targets were established and deadlines were set.

Now two years on, this HONLEA will examine progress in the implementation of these decisions within this region.

Over the years, these meetings of HONLEA have established a pattern of work based upon mutual respect and cooperation. These principles will be the basis for success in meeting the objectives set by the Special Session.

The situation the Asia/Pacific region faces underlines the importance of cooperation. As we look to the future, it is encouraging to see the increase in cooperative ventures. The work being carried out within the Asean context, the Six Country MOU agreement of the Governments of the Mekong Region, the strengthening of bi-lateral cooperation between countries of the region through signed agreements of commitment, plus of course the positive and practical approach taken by the countries of the Asia and Pacific region. ODCCP is pleased to be associated with all these initiatives.

I will finish by taking the opportunity to inform you of an event that will take place next month in Palermo, Italy over 12 – 15 December, that will have a significant, and positive impact upon your efforts as law enforcement officers.

I refer to the high level conference that will precede the opening for signing of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

This new international instrument has two over-arching goals.

It will enhance international cooperation by providing the framework to overcome differences among legal systems, which in the past have blocked mutual assistance. And second, it will set the standards that domestic legislation must meet to effectively combat organized crime.

In support of the Convention are Protocols that address the the smuggling of migrants and the trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

A pillar of the new Convention will be its provisions on the confiscation of illegal assets, on the elimination of bank secrecy and on witness protection programmes. All are vital tools for a pro-active strategy against those who traffic in illicit drugs and would profit from the proceeds of organized crime.

I return to my opening words, the work of this HONLEA over the next four days is very important, both for your countries and the rest of the world. The situation you face is difficult. It is also complex. There are no easy solutions. The starting point for finding solutions is precisely the type of practical consultation and cooperation that has been the basis for the work of successive HONLEA's over the past years.

On behalf of ODCCP, its Executive Director and every member of the Programme, I wish this meeting every success and look forward to the comings days deliberations and recommendations.

Thank you all for your attention.