

We have a chance of overcoming the challenges of human security that face us today

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"Globalisation offers the human race unprecedented opportunities. Unfortunately, it also enables many anti-social activities to become "problems without passports". Among these are drug abuse, which brings misery to millions of families around the world every year, and drug trafficking, which cynically promotes and exploits that misery for commercial gain. If the international community is to deserve its name, it must respond to this challenge. Happily, it is beginning to do so."

*Kofi Annan
World Drug Report 2000*

Drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organized crime, through the violence, corruption and other socially harmful consequences they entail, represent a direct menace to human security. Together with it, trafficking in human beings, HIV/AIDS, terrorism, child labor also threaten the integrity of social, economic, financial, and political institutions and of our communities and societies. They represent a tangible threat to human security and can rapidly defeat personal, social and economic development efforts.

The need to act on two different fronts to guarantee human security is now widely recognised: on the one hand, we need to guarantee freedom from fear to our people, and on the other we need to work towards the achievement of a global freedom from want. I recognize that religions have often been protagonist builders of both freedoms.

Within the regional scenario, three fundamental threats are endangering the achievement of human security: the AIDS epidemic, the increasing production, trafficking and abuse of illicit drugs and the growing trafficking of human beings.

- The Aids epidemic in Asia is continuing to spread. In 2001 about 2 people in Asia/Pacific became infected every minute. The growth of HIV prevalence in China and Vietnam suggest that even the worst scenario of growth of the epidemic as observed in Africa might be seen soon in our region. Common obstacles to an early response against HIV/AIDS in the Mekong Region are sense of security, stigma and denial, medical paradigm, competing priorities and limited resources. The enormous increase of community vulnerability to HIV/AIDS infection caused by injecting drug use, calls for an urgent review of national policies and for accelerated preventive action.

- The use of amphetamine type stimulants (ATS) is continuing to grow. ATS seizures in the GMS in 2001 have been far higher than other parts of the world. While politicians and free trade advocates discuss ways to better integrate all the peoples and the markets of the region in one borderless space, ATS has already reached all corners of our different societies. Amazing changes are happening in Asian life styles. Youth and younger generation of adults are unanimously and willingly participating in massive search for more freedom. No civil liberty experienced in other parts of the world appears unattainable to the new Asian generations. Drugs are aggressively marketed as a license to personal freedom, as a bold statement of autonomy from authority. But they

are instead the worst fraud and the heaviest chain ever to entrap new slaves to the new fashion of feeling good and feeling "high" through cheap, fast and poisonous chemical fixes.

- Trafficking in human beings has become a highly lucrative illegal business: Traffickers and criminal groups have responded quickly, effectively and efficiently to the emergence of global trading and international exchanges by re-adapting their organisational and operational structures to the challenges of globalisation. In our region, criminal organisations have learned to use the discrepancies that occur between different national legal and financial systems, and between different capacities and responses, to their best advantage. Overall, trafficking in people has become an increasingly appealing business for criminal organisations and Asia represents an expanding source of victims of trafficking.

To respond to these challenges, joining forces, increasing coordination of actions and a wider involvement and participation of all sectors of civil society are essential.

In the area of drug control, the ACCORD Plan of Action, which resulted from the International Congress "In pursuit of a drug-free ASEAN 2015", held in Bangkok in 2000, aims at coordinating all existing drug control efforts and initiatives in the region. Its novelty lies in the fact that it is an inclusive and regionally-driven Plan of Action with clear indications of time frames and progressive objectives aiming at achieving a drug free ASEAN through collective efforts in the area of advocacy, demand reduction, alternative development and law enforcement.

In order to tackle, among others, the growing problem of HIV/AIDS and of trafficking in human beings different agencies of the United Nations have entered into a partnership under the common umbrella of Human Security. UN organisations, the civil society, the business community are now working together to support activities in the area of human security, to share resources, experiences and expertise and are uniting in action to promote a more secure Asia-Pacific region. The religious community is invited to participate in these efforts; your involvement and outstanding contribution in the area of drug treatment and rehabilitation has been essential and it should be commended and further encouraged. Your actions and support in other areas of human security protection would be praiseworthy and strongly required.

I will conclude with another statement from the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, which is an encouragement to work together in the pursuit of our common goals.

"If we want to have a chance of overcoming the many challenges that face us today -- in the fields of peace and security, development, and the protection of our global environment -- we must think beyond our narrow, short-term self interests, and raise ourselves to a universal perspective from which the well-being of the broader human community appears as important as our own well-being. Each of us shares the hope of a more peaceful, equitable and sustainable future. Our actions - as individuals and as members of our communities -- must be guided by that common dream. Let us remember that whatever our origin, our race, our culture or our belief, we are not essentially different. Above all, we share the same home, a shrinking planet on which we are bound to live together. So, let us work together towards the common good and the harmonious and peaceful coexistence of all the world's people".

Kofi Annan
Buddhism's Day of Vesak
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Thank you.