

Opening Statement

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Eighth National Drug Control System

Users' Group Meeting

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It is my great pleasure to open – and participate in - the eighth National Drug Control System (NDS) users' group meeting. I would also like to thank the Government of Mexico for its generosity in hosting this meeting and, thus, for so tangibly demonstrating its support for NDS. This year, the government of Mexico is graciously hosting the meeting for the third time. I would also like to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for providing us with the conference facilities for this meeting.

2009 has been our last user group meeting; also in Mexico a special year for UNODC – this year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Vienna International Centre (VIC), the seat of UNODC headquarters. In August 1979, the VIC was officially handed over by the Austrian authorities to the United Nations, making Vienna the third United Nations Secretariat duty station after New York and Geneva.

Since the first international conference on drug control was held in Shanghai 100 years ago, the issue of drugs has been a matter of global concern. In 1970, the international community agreed that prompt and decisive action by the United Nations family was imperative, a decision that led to the creation of the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control.

In 1990, the General Assembly set up the United Nations International Drug Control Programme to coordinate international action in the field of drug control and, the following year, established the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme.

In 1997, the drug and crime programmes were brought together under the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, which in 2002 became UNODC. In addition to implementing the United Nations' drug and crime programmes in an integrated manner, UNODC was established to ensure that the interrelated issues of drug control, crime prevention and international terrorism could be more effectively addressed in the context of sustainable development and human security.

Today, UNODC has about 500 staff members working at its Vienna headquarters and operates in all regions of the world through an extensive network of field offices. UNODC works with Member States in their struggle against illicit drugs, crime and terrorism through field-based technical cooperation projects, research and analysis, as well as normative work, to assist States in the ratification and implementation of relevant international treaties.

I wanted to give you a brief overview of UNODC's history, not only because there have been several anniversaries, but also to demonstrate that NDS has been around for quite some years; actually since shortly after the General Assembly decision to establish the drug control program headquarter in Vienna.

It will be recalled that, in 1994 when NDS was initiated, its main goal was to facilitate the reporting by governments of statistics to the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) by electronic means. Today, it has become a management tool, based on a widely accepted standard, which automates the reporting on all licit drug control activities, nationally as well as internationally.

Even though the computer revolution has been underway for well over two decades now, information technology (IT) is still becoming ever more complex, indispensable and expensive. Innovations are no longer a choice,

but largely imposed by technological advances. Yet, unfortunately, IT issues were in the past not seen as a high priority for the United Nations, which meant small budgets, absence of high-level attention and, resultantly, of well-conceived, sustainable strategies.

However, there has been a change. The most significant indicator is that NDS has been awarded with the United Nations 'UN21 award'. The UN21 award is given to staff members in recognition for innovation, efficiency and excellence in the delivery of the UN's programmes and services.

The former Secretary-General Kofi Annan (since 1st January 2007 Mr. Ban Ki-moon), noted in his Millenium Report that the

digital revolution has unleashed an unprecedented wave of technological change. Used responsibly, it can greatly improve our chances of defeating poverty and better meeting our other priority objectives. If this is to happen, we in the United Nations need to embrace the new technologies more wholeheartedly than we have in the past.

NDS is an initiative, which attempts to use information technology for the benefit of all Member States, rich or poor, large or small, North or South. Furthermore, it represents an effort to develop and provide a common good to all, to facilitate international cooperation and to obviate the need to for individual Member States to replicate the efforts of others. Obviously, managing an initiative like NDS – and sustaining it over the long haul – is very challenging. UNODC's response to this challenge has been an approach of partnership between Member States and UNODC. This partnership between Member States and the United Nations, their Organization, and their joint ownership of NDS, is promisingly evident at today's meeting.

If you allow me to recapitulate NDS's evolution during the past decade: When the idea for NDS was first launched in 1994, UNODC had just established its first website - one of the first in the entire United Nations system and I would be surprised if more than a handful of governments

around the world had begun to utilize internet-based technologies. It was indeed a different age.

Today, the web has a central place in all our lives and is used by millions of people daily in a multitude of endeavors. Having had an early start, we must now run to keep up with technology and to ensure that we apply the highest possible standards to drug control. Actually, we are doing our best to keep up with standards, which is demonstrated by NDSWEB, a complimentary product to NDS, part of the NDS Program Suite and NDS SPA (Statistics Processing & Analysis). Both products are an extremely useful set of tools about which I will tell you more over the course of this meeting.

There is also the PEN Online web based system hosted in Vienna, Austria providing services to member states for online data exchange on pre export notification for precursor chemicals.

Last not least, the latest amendment, currently in testing and scheduled for launch next year at the CND (Commission on Narcotic Drugs) conference in Vienna, the I2ES (International Import Export System).

In the beginning, NDS had a fairly narrow focus, namely the electronic reporting to the INCB. It was then broadened to serve also as the basis for national data management systems, online data collection, data exchange from the industry and as a means of interaction between developing and industrialized countries. In 1999, the General Assembly described NDS as

*an important development in building national capacities,
particularly in developing countries*

This is probably still too narrow a focus for the needs – and possibilities - of today, which are a system which remains at the cutting edge in our shrinking global system, in which all players - producers, importers, wholesalers, retailers and consumers - rely on electronic communication. Care must be taken to ensure that the technology and skills deployed in the area of drug control are appropriate to this globalized environment. Care must also be taken to ensure that the resources devoted to these tasks are sufficient.

In this Users' Group meeting, representatives of governments which use the system already and those from governments, which plan to use it in the near

future are all assembled. You are the driving force behind the success of the system and your contributions will steer the system's implementation in the coming years. We are engaged in an exciting experiment of international cooperation and it is in all our hands to make it a success.

I would like to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs once more for bringing us together in this beautiful city, which I have the pleasure of visiting again. In conclusion, I wish us all a very constructive meeting.

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