

USA
Check against Delivery (a)

**Opening Statement of the Government of the United States of America
Before the 52nd UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs**

**Delivered by Edward Jurith, Acting Director,
Office of National Drug Control Policy, United States
March 11, 2009**

Thank you Mr. Chairman. It is my great honor to be with you here today, and to contribute to this important dialogue on how to advance the goals of the UN Drug Control Conventions. The United States takes its responsibilities under the Conventions very seriously, and my government is deeply committed to both reducing drug abuse within our own borders and cooperating with international partners to reduce the availability of illegal drugs globally. I have been listening carefully to the statements from my fellow delegates, and it is encouraging to hear so many governments share this important agenda. The United States looks forward to further discussions over the coming week on how the international community can best carry this collective challenge forward in the years ahead.

Personally speaking, it is gratifying to see these issues raised in such a senior diplomatic setting. Over twenty years ago, when I first began to work on the subject of drug control, it was difficult to generate senior-level attention of this kind in international settings. Many thought that the issue was peripheral to traditional diplomacy. The 1988 UN Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances was only just completed, and translating its goals into the practice of national governments still lay ahead. The 1998 UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs was the first significant attempt to identify specific steps for implementing fully the work of previous Conventions. The U.S. believes that the Action Plans from the 1998 Session remain relevant as strategic goals and continue to allow for new developments over the coming decade. With regard to the Political Declaration that will emerge tomorrow, the U.S. has offered specific suggestions on initiatives to foster our important work to reduce drug use and trafficking.

We have made much progress since the 1998 Special Session. Much more is known today about the science of addiction and how to effectively treat those addicted to drugs. Thankfully, as a result, many more people have access to evidence-based drug treatment and prevention programs. Successful efforts have been made to disrupt drug trafficking organizations, through heroic sacrifices in numerous countries. Enforcement and judicial systems have been strengthened through training, use of new law enforcement tools, and dedicated efforts by individual public servants. International law enforcement and judicial cooperation has expanded, with more information sharing, bilateral and multilateral investigations, and more extraditions.

Although our domestic policies share many commonalities – especially with regard to protecting young people from the consequences of drug abuse there have been disagreements among us. These modest disagreements tend to attract more attention than do the numerous areas where we agree. Let me emphasize that the United States is committed to pursuing policies that work to reduce drug abuse and drug trafficking. There is no dogma or litmus test beyond the basic goals of reducing illegal drug use and reducing the damage that drugs cause to society. The United States Government is

actively assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of our policies and will issue a new National Drug Control Strategy next year. This internal evaluation is a continuous process, and will incorporate a more comprehensive approach, including needle-exchange programs to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS among injection drug users.

We recognize some of the programs and initiatives which have proven effective within the United States may not always be appropriate for other nations. But because we fund 85% of the world's substance abuse-related research, including much research conducted outside the United States, we are eager to share our knowledge and experiences, with the hope that some of the lessons we have learned might be useful to others.

In particular, we are encouraged by the use of initiatives such as early detection of drug abuse, known in the United States as "Screening and Brief Intervention." The SBI initiative is a diagnostic approach introduced in a resolution at last year's Commission meeting. Under this model, patients receiving medical services in regular health facilities are screened for drug abuse and referred to treatment if necessary. In the United States, this program has demonstrated positive results in reducing substance abuse and related health consequences. Prevention is also a key component of any balanced drug control strategy. School-based prevention programs, as well as broad anti-drug media campaigns which use television, radio, the Internet, and magazines read by youth, can help reinforce accurate, health-based anti-drug messages provided by parents and other adult influencers. We also are encouraged by the widespread adoption in many countries of special drug treatment courts, which provide alternatives to incarceration for some drug offenders whose involvement in criminal activities was principally driven by drug addiction. In addition, we have seen value in integrating drug treatment services into the mainstream of our health care system.

Of course, we understand our responsibilities go well beyond the borders of the United States. We recognize some countries face unique burdens and heavy responsibilities in combating drug abuse. Let me briefly mention the challenges in Mexico, Colombia, Afghanistan, and in a number of countries in Africa, and outline the actions being taken by the United States to support the ongoing counternarcotics efforts in those nations.

The progress made by Mexico's dedicated military and police forces in the face of personal threats is tremendous. We understand the problems created by criminal organizations are shared across our borders. We also understand that reducing the demand for these drugs in the United States is vital to the long term success of our bi-national efforts against the violent drug cartels. My government is committed to working together on all facets of this effort. Because these drug cartels represent a direct threat to both Mexico and the United States, we are providing \$1.4 billion to assist Mexico in its counternarcotics efforts. Strengthening law enforcement and judicial institutions in partner countries will enable us to act cooperatively, responding with greater agility, confidence, and speed to the changing tactics of organized crime.

Colombia has also continued to show tremendous commitment to fighting drug trafficking. Under President Uribe's tireless leadership and his country's relentless attack on the coca cultivation which fuels illegal armed groups, Colombia is a nation remarkably transformed from just a few years ago. All countries owe a debt to Colombia for the sacrifices it has made in this transformation, which has resulted in less cocaine available to poison and corrupt the people of the world.

In Southwest Asia, we face a different challenge. Afghanistan is the source of over 90% of the world's supply of illegal opiates and is a hub of both drug trafficking and terrorism. Narcotics traffickers provide revenue and arms to the insurgency, while insurgents provide protection to growers and traffickers, to prevent the government from interfering with their activities. This challenge directly threatens the interests of the broader international community, and the Government of Afghanistan will need sustained support from the UN and its member states for years to come. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has played a positive role in assisting counterdrug efforts, both in Afghanistan and in neighboring states, as have many nations represented here at this Commission. We owe it to ourselves and to the people of Afghanistan to put forth our best effort in meeting this formidable challenge.

We also must pay careful attention to the damage done to countries located along major drug trafficking routes. Africa, in particular, has become a much more frequent route for both cocaine and precursor chemical shipments. This surge in drug trafficking can cause a cascading series of negative consequences, to include: an increase in drug consumption as traffickers establish local drug markets; a growth in need for treatment services; and a greater risk for corruption of democratic institutions. The United States remains committed to working with African nations, in partnership with other Member States, to combat these risks.

I would like to thank the UNODC and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) for their critical work in meeting the threats posed by methamphetamine and the smuggling of and diversion of precursor chemicals from legitimate commerce. This Commission has been active over recent years on this issue, and the resolutions that have been passed by this body have provided a significant boost to global precursor chemical control efforts. In 2006, the Commission adopted a resolution that requested all members provide estimates of licit commercial needs for methamphetamine chemical precursors, including pharmaceutical preparations, to the INCB. This data remains vital to countries when evaluating the legitimacy of proposed authorizations to export or import. The United States is pleased to note that over 100 countries and jurisdictions have provided these voluntary estimates to date, and for those members which have not yet done so, we again ask you to provide these estimates.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to close by emphasizing how important and beneficial the work of this Commission is to all of our efforts to protect our citizens from the terrible consequences of drugs. It is clear that efforts to combat drugs in isolation or unilaterally are doomed for failure. Progress is only possible when all nations work together. We have much to be proud of over the past ten years, and much more to accomplish over the next ten. The United States will seek to both meet our responsibilities to reduce our drug consumption at home, and to collaborate with partners around the globe in this vital fight against illegal drugs.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.