

General Debate at the High-Level Segment of the 52nd Session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs

Statement by the Hon Bob McMullan, MP, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance

2:55 pm, 11 March 2009

Madam Chair, your Excellencies, distinguished delegates.

This High-Level Segment marks a crossroads in global efforts to address the world drug problem.

It is an opportunity for us to look back – to recognise the progress achieved in meeting the goals and targets set out in the Political Declaration adopted by the General Assembly at its twentieth special session in 1998. It is also an opportunity for us to look forward and to decide on priorities for the future.

Active engagement with the multilateral system is a key pillar of Australia's foreign policy. Australia's long-standing membership of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs reflects our commitment to addressing the illicit drug challenge collectively.

Madam Chair, Australia is pleased that the Political Declaration, before this High-Level Segment for adoption, recognises the need for a balanced and integrated approach to addressing the world drug problem. Domestically, we promote this same approach.

Australia's *National Drug Strategy* aims to improve health, social and economic outcomes for all Australians, by preventing the uptake of harmful drug use and reducing the harmful effects. It is based on a balance of supply, demand and harm reduction strategies.

Our Strategy is achieving results. The use of illicit drugs by persons aged 14 years or over has decreased from 22% in 1998 to 13.4% in 2007.* Usage of cannabis and methamphetamines, in particular, is declining.

* Based on data from the *National Drug Strategy 2007 Household Survey*, for use of any illicit drug in the twelve months prior to survey

Evidence is central to Australia's approach. National research centres and population scale surveys are an integral part of this approach.

The Australian strategy has three pillars.

The first is demand reduction.

Prevention is a priority for Australia. Multi-media drug campaigns targeting young Australians and their parents are part of this approach. Our campaigns alert young people to the dangers of drugs and encourage avoidance or treatment when needed.

Australia maintains a multi-faceted approach to drug treatment, using both government and non-government providers. Approaches include pharmacotherapy, withdrawal management, counselling and rehabilitation.

The second pillar of our strategy is harm reduction.

Australia has been successful in reducing the harm associated with illicit drug use, with a decreasing number of people dying from drug overdoses.

Injecting drug use is a major driver of new HIV/AIDS infections globally. Domestically, we tackle this problem through needle and syringe programs, and public health campaigns.

Through our aid program, Australia is working with partners across health and public security sectors in East and South Asia to reduce HIV transmission and promote harm reduction measures for injecting drug users. We have currently invested \$59 million in the Asia regional program, HAARP, and a further \$9.5 million in a South Asia-focused program, the 'H13 Project'.

We also recognise the vulnerability of particular populations to illicit drug use, including Indigenous people, young Australians and women with children, and people with mental health problems.

In particular through community partnership and capacity building with initiatives Indigenous communities, we are also working to ‘close the gap’ between the life expectancy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The third pillar of the strategy is supply reduction.

Australia has made concerted efforts to reduce the supply of drugs. A growing network of law enforcement officers work alongside their counterparts across the region, including in source countries. To detect the movements of illicit drugs and precursors we have also developed ‘intelligence based screening’ of all cargo, supported by border detection measures and technology.

In response to the amphetamine-type stimulants problem, Australia has focused on preventing the diversion of precursor chemicals into illicit drug manufacture.

Our strategy also emphasises collaborative partnerships and regional engagement.

Australia is also working to improve regional dialogue and responses to precursor diversion through raising awareness of trafficking and building cooperation and capacity, both bilaterally and through our support to the UN Office of Drugs and Crime. For example, we are contributing to the development of national data collection systems in Asia through our funding contribution to the UNODC’s Global SMART programme.

Through Australia’s aid program, we are supporting a range of alternative income-earning options for vulnerable communities. We recognise that for alternative development measures to be successful, they need to be integrated into broader country development programs.

Australia has contributed to the counter-narcotics effort of the Government of Afghanistan, in conjunction with the international community.

Madam Chair, in conclusion, Australia joins others in welcoming progress made over the last decade in countering the world drug problem. We recognise that this is an enduring challenge and one to which we all can – and must – contribute.

With approaches driven by sound evidence and effective cooperation across national borders, Australia believes that we can better control supply, reduce demand and lessen the harm caused by illicit drugs.

Australia looks forward to the adoption of a Political Declaration at this High-Level Segment. We trust it will provide an important blueprint for action and a framework for maintaining global momentum to tackle the world drug problem.

Thank you.