

SRI LANKA

THUPM ④

**High Level Segment of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs  
Vienna: 12<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

***Statement by D.P. Mendis, P.C., Chairman of the National Dangerous Drugs Control Board of Sri Lanka***

Madame Chair,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies & Gentleman,

Narcotic Drugs / Heroin is not produced in Sri Lanka. Abuse of Cannabis was not a social problem although it was used in Indigenous medicine after the narcotic content (THC) had been taken out. Use of heroin came to Sri Lanka in the late 70s. By the Mid 80s it was so prevalent that it has grown to the level of a major social problem leading to an increase in criminal activity with its attendant social issues. This made the Government at the time to pass legislation to establish the National Dangerous Drugs Control Board (NDDCB). Of course the help and guidance received from the international community and specifically the UNODC has to be appreciated with gratitude.

The international drug control had just completed a century of activity since its inception in 1909. Opium wars were the thing of the past and today it is the war against poppy in Afghanistan and it is still the "Opium War" with a different geographical location and different emphasis and different connotation, as it has given rise to Narco-terrorism.

Since the establishment of the NDDCB 25 years ago, we have marched a remarkable distance in drug control widening its scope to include treatment and preventive education and coordinating the law enforcement in this field. It is significant to note that the subcommittee of Law enforcement comprising the Police Narcotic Bureau, the Customs, the Excise Department, Immigration and Emigration, Navy, Air force and the Army, is under the umbrella of the NDDCB.

With the new government of President Rajapakse, the political will and the commitment to combat the drug menace was expressed in local language as "mathata titha" This is

very important policy divide. It is based on complete abstinence. In the year 2006, the NDDCB launched the national policy for Drug Control and adopted their coordinated approach with several stakeholders essential for the prevention of drug abuse. The NDDCB was instrumental in establishing the basic principle in relation to drug abuses that they are not criminals, but only offenders and also recognized the fact that drug addiction is a palliative disease for which medical treatment will not answer. Therefore from the very beginning we accepted the theory that addiction is psychological dependence and any treatment policy should address this aspect. The present government that was set up in 2005, recognized the need for decriminalization of drug abuses and their right to treatment and rehabilitation – which is the basis of the law related to Compulsory treatment Act no 57 of 2007. This act also has streamlined and regulated drug abuse treatment. In this regard it must be stated that the UNODC commenced the programme of Prison diversion scheme within the Prisons where drug abusers were incarcerated before this Act came into force and in this programme the NDDCB used the psycho- social method and counseling among the prisoners who were jailed for drug abuse. The latest scourge of drugs are the synthetic drugs based on precursor chemicals. IN this regard the law and enforcement arm is in place in Sri Lanka, but we need international cooperation and support in implementing it as all the precursors are coming into the country from outside.

It is widely held and as stated in the statement of Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the UNODC – that drugs and crime are linked to violence and terrorism.

Similarly, money laundering, human trafficking, drug couriers and organized crime all co-exist and are inter-linked in this drug cycle environment.

Sri Lanka has been fighting against terrorism for three decades, perpetuated by the ruthless LTTE – the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a proscribed organization in the European Union, the USA, Canada, India and several other countries. In this environment, Sri Lanka seeks to dismantle the links between the LTTE terrorist group and drug and organized crime networks through international cooperation.

Thank you.