Mr Chairman

1. Congratulations on your appointment as the Chairman of the 59th Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

2. We would also like to thank the Chairman of the UNGASS Board, His Excellency Ambassador Shamaa, as well as his fellow board members, for their leadership and dedication throughout the UNGASS preparatory process.

3. We assure the CND of Singapore’s full support in carrying out its duties and functions.

4. The world drug situation remains challenging.

   - Every country is affected by the scourge of drugs.

   - Singapore is no exception.

   - As a transport hub and because of our close proximity to the Golden Triangle, we are frequently targeted by syndicates as a transit point as well as a market for illicit drugs.

5. It may surprise many to know that opium was once legal in Singapore.

   - This was in the early 1900s when we were a British colony.

   - It yielded large amounts of tax revenue.
• However, the social cost of legalised opium proved way too high.

• Opium consumption was linked to crime, violence and the breakdown of the family unit.

• In 1946, opium was banned.

• But the harm suffered by opium addicts and inflicted on their families persisted well past our independence in 1965, and into the 1970s.

6. We had to take firm action to address this situation.

• Singapore therefore made a deliberate decision to tackle the drug problem.

• Since the 1970s, we have adopted a comprehensive, consistent and sustained approach to tackling both drug supply and drug demand.

• This approach of harm prevention has allowed us to remain relatively drug-free over the past few decades.

• In 2015, the number of drug abusers arrested comprised less than 0.1% of our population.
7. All this would not have been possible without a robust international and regional framework to tackle this global threat.

- Singapore and ASEAN therefore support the centrality of the three international drug control conventions, which remain relevant as we tackle the challenges of drug control in the 21st century.

- Likewise, we pledge our support to the CND, which should remain the principal body for all anti-drug policies and issues at the United Nations.

8. Several countries have called for the drug problem to be re-interpreted as a public health problem.

- I do not think anyone disputes that there is an important public health element to tackling the drug problem.

- But we do not, and cannot see it purely as a public health or medical issue.

- In framing the drug problem, our concern is first and foremost about protecting Singaporeans, and keeping Singapore safe and secure.

- If we do not tackle drug abuse firmly, and allow it to take root, there will be serious consequences.
○ People who get tempted to try, and who become addicted to drugs are robbed of the opportunity to live life to the fullest.

○ Families lose their livelihood and relationships are destroyed.

○ Children suffer.

○ And the wider community pays a heavy price in terms of crime.

○ We have seen this in our city’s recent history.

○ And we continue to see it in many places around the world today.

9. This is why we persevere with our approach to maintain a drug-free Singapore for our people, and our children.

10. We are a city-state with no natural resources. But through the hard work and industry of our people, we have managed to achieve much over the past 50 years since our independence.

- I shared earlier about our tough start as a young nation and our battle with opium.

- Today, Singapore is top in Asia on the 2015 UN Human Development Index.
- Our students perform well in international achievement tests.

- And we have also been able to provide good-quality public housing and affordable healthcare to our citizens.

11. All this is possible because our top priority is providing a foundation of safety and security for our people.

- Everyone in Singapore has the right to feel safe in their homes.

- They should have freedom to go anywhere in Singapore, at any time of the day or night.

- This safety and security underpins the development of our society and allows our children to grow up in an environment safe from drugs.

- These are fundamental and precious rights that our people expect.

- Keeping Singapore free from the scourge of drugs is a critical aspect of that safety and security.

12. What is our approach to tackling drugs? It comprises of the following:

- Targeted prevention
• Tough laws

• Robust and effective enforcement

• Upstream intervention for young abusers

• Rehabilitation and supervision to prevent relapse, and

• Active engagement of families and the community to support reintegration of ex-abusers into society.

13. Our drug control policies are underpinned not just by our philosophy of taking a tough approach to tackling drugs, but supported by evidence and research.

14. The harm reduction approach, with programmes such as needle exchange or opiate substitution, is not relevant in Singapore’s context.

• Our drug abuse situation is well under control.

• We have little to no HIV infections from injecting drug users.

• And deaths from drug overdose are rare.

• A study of overseas jurisdictions by a leading sociologist in Singapore found that harm reduction
programmes do not address the collective harm to society caused by drug addiction.

- Such programmes also do not recognise that drug abuse impairs the individual’s ability to make rational choices.

- On the contrary, they risk enhancing the mental and physical harm that an abuser causes to himself.

- This is why Singapore has not adopted the harm reduction approach.

- Instead, we believe in harm prevention, and choose to focus our efforts upstream to ensure that drug abuse does not take root in our society, as well as focus on the rehabilitation and reintegration of those who do abuse drugs, to help them lead drug-free lives.

15. We also do not support calls for drug decriminalisation or legalisation.

- This is not applicable to us, as we are relatively drug-free.

- It is also contrary to the international drug conventions.
Other countries have, in recent years, decriminalised or legalised the use of cannabis, both for medical as well as recreational purposes.

Singapore will not do the same.

16. A literature review conducted by experts at Singapore’s Institute of Mental Health confirmed that cannabis is harmful and addictive.

- There is some evidence that cannabis can be used for certain conditions such as chronic pain as well chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting.

- Even so, information on its long-term safety and efficacy is scarce.

- This is not Singapore’s research; this is a scan of the international body of medical research.

- These findings support the view that cannabis should remain an illicit drug.

- Even if cannabis needs to be administered for medical purposes, there are carefully established frameworks for the clinical prescription of controlled drugs.

- There is therefore no need to decriminalise or legalise cannabis.
• Nor is there a need to legitimise a profitable industry and lobby for highly addictive drugs, which can only fuel demand.

• We will be happy to share the findings of these studies with members from other countries.

17. Ladies and Gentlemen, I am here today not to ask you to adopt our policies and make the same decisions we have made.

• While they have worked for us, we recognise that the same approach might not work for every country.

• There is no one-size-fits-all approach to tackling drugs.

• Each country must address its own drug problem taking into account the historical, political, economic, social and cultural contexts and norms of its society.

• And we respect every country’s sovereign right and responsibility to choose the approach to tackling drugs that is best for them and their citizens.

18. For Singapore, the choice is clear.

• We want a drug-free Singapore, not a drug-tolerant one.
• This approach has helped Singapore develop and prosper.

• It has kept our families and our children safe.

• We also stand in solidarity with our ASEAN counterparts in our commitment to the regional vision of a Drug-Free ASEAN, so as to provide our people and communities with a society free from drug abuse and its ill-effects.

19. The 59th CND and the upcoming UNGASS 2016 are key milestones for us to forge a global drug consensus.

• As representatives of our people, we should carefully consider what would be best for our communities and for our children’s future.

• I wish you a fruitful 59th CND and UNGASS ahead.

• Thank you.