

International Conference on Alternative Development II

18 -24 November 2015, Bangkok

Opening remarks of Aldo Lale-Demoz, Deputy Executive Director of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Your Royal Highness, Princess Bajrakitiyabha Mahidol,
Your Excellency, General Prayut Chan-o-Cha, Prime Minister of Thailand,
Your Excellency, Ms. Marlene Mortler, Federal Drug Commissioner of the Federal Republic of Germany

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kingdom of Thailand is a very active member of the *Commission on Narcotic Drugs*, which is the central policy-making body of the United Nations system dealing with international drug control. Thailand, for example, is often at the forefront of global calls for action in drug education and prevention, with a particular focus on children, youth, families and communities. Thailand is equally committed to forging international partnerships and cooperation, not least in the greater Mekong subregion or in the ASEAN context.

But in the field of Alternative Development, Thailand's leadership, commitment and perseverance is truly legendary. Thailand is not only the birthplace of Alternative Development. For many years, under the patronage of the Royal Family, successive government officials and foundations, this country has been advocating tirelessly for Alternative Development as the main tool capable of helping farmers and communities to reduce their dependence on illicit crops and other illicit markets in a sustainable manner.

Selflessly, Thailand has been sharing its knowledge and optimism with other countries in South East Asia, and in other parts of the world. Thailand has led the way in providing evidence that you can transform conflict and poverty into social and economic opportunities and prosperity, and in advocating that with time, trust and support entire rural communities can evolve and thrive.

What worked in Thailand today is also working in other countries. Alternative Development has already improved the lives of tens of thousands of farm families in several countries where it has been promoted, and it offers the potential to yield similar positive results in new locations.

In Myanmar, the initial objective of food security is now being complemented with the production of commercially-viable cash crops, and the role of alternative development is recognized as a critical component of the national peace dialogue. In Peru, only specialists would recognize that the farm enterprises currently sourcing several European chocolate factories with cacao were, not so long ago, illicit crop

farmers who, with the support of the international community, organized themselves into successful business people, leaving illicit markets, poverty and violence behind. In Colombia, Alternative Development is so important that it is currently an essential and integral part of an unprecedented peace process which this country has been working so hard to achieve over many years. In other countries, such as Afghanistan, Alternative Development still needs to become more prevalent. Supporting Afghanistan has never been more critical than today. The country's 19% decline in opium poppy cultivation surface reported in 2015, and the related 48% reduction in potential opium production -- the best results in 6 years-- can only be sustained if the international community actively helps Afghanistan in the implementation of much broader alternative development schemes.

The UN Guiding Principles on Alternative Development were adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2013. Thailand, and in particular Her Royal Highness Princess Bajrakitiyabha, as well as Germany and other countries, worked very hard to equip Alternative Development with a normative framework. The UN Guiding Principles have two main advantages:

First, they offer the sufficient flexibility so countries and communities can adapt them to the prevailing socio-economic, cultural and legal circumstances. This is extremely important, as each country faces the challenges arising from illicit crops in a different manner. Second, the Guiding Principles are perfectly compatible with the new 2030 Global Sustainable Development Agenda.

Although it is true that each of the 17 SDGs is equally important to achieving the social, economic and environmental objectives of the global agenda, some SDGs are more relevant in the field of alternative development. With an emphasis on poverty reduction, sustainable agriculture, environmental protection, peaceful and inclusive communities and good governance, the SDGs offer a perfect platform for Alternative Development to deliver the intended results. But I believe that the credibility and effectiveness of Alternative Development will also be contingent on the implementation of SDGs addressing gender equality (SDG 5), reduction in inequalities (SDG 10), and partnerships for sustainable development (SDG 17).

It is essential that Member States, international organizations, civil society and the private sector unite around lessons learned and best practices, and leverage resources and expertise to achieve peace, security and prosperity in rural areas affected by illicit crops and related illicit markets.

The International Conference on Alternative Development could not be more important and timely. Member States are currently in the process of drafting the outcome document for adoption at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs, which will be held in New York from 19 to 21 April 2016.

Member states have committed to producing a short, concise, substantive and action-oriented document, including operational recommendations. The document will assess progress made, including achievements and challenges in the field of drug control, focusing on drugs and health, drugs and crime, as well as cross-cutting issues, such as human rights, women, youth, emerging threats and shared responsibility.

But there is little doubt that the UNGASS 2016 will also deal with drugs and development, and it is here that alternative development will feature prominently. Conferences such as ICAD, bringing together some 110 practitioners from 27 countries, will provide further evidence to Member States that alternative development remains a necessary and effective international drug control strategy to reduce illicit crops, and improve the socio-economic situation of small farmer communities in a sustainable manner.

I should like to thank Her Royal Highness and the Government of Thailand for their long-standing leadership in this important field of drug control, and for their gracious hospitality throughout the ICAD workshops and the conference. Our recognition also goes to the many Member States who over the years have provided substantive, political and financial support to alternative development, and in particular to Germany, who is supporting the organization of this conference.

Let us continue working together to promote safe, healthy and prosperous rural communities devoted to the culture of lawfulness