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**HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE FIFTY-SECOND REGULAR SESSION OF THE COMMISSION
ON NARCOTIC DRUGS**

STATEMENT BY

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ON

**REVIEW OF THE PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY
MEMBER STATES IN MEETING THE GOALS AND TARGETS SET OUT IN THE POLITICAL
DECLARATION ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS TWENTIETH SPECIAL
SESSION; CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE**

11 – 12 MARCH 2009

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

Madame Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the early 1990s, the drug situation in Singapore was deteriorating. It became critical for Singapore to tackle the drug problem head on. This led to the birth of our multi-pronged anti-drug strategy.

Singapore's Multi-Pronged Anti-Drug Strategy

2. Our strategy is premised on preventing drug abuse from taking root in our society. We have in place tough laws to deal with traffickers and recalcitrant drug addicts; and these laws are upheld through vigorous enforcement efforts. Drug addicts go through a strict compulsory rehabilitation regime to kick their addiction

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and pick up useful skills; and with the help of their families and the community, reintegrate back into society. We also disseminate the anti-drug message through various preventive education initiatives.

3. This strategy has worked well for us. Over the decade since the Political Declaration was adopted, the number of addicts arrested in Singapore declined by 57% from 4,502 in 1998 to 1,925 last year. Today, Singapore registers one of the lowest prevalence of drug abuse worldwide.¹ Just 1 in 20 addicts released from our Drug Rehabilitation Centres in 2006 relapsed back into drugs within 2 years. In comparison, of those released in 1997, almost 1 in 2 did.

Harm Reduction vs Harm Prevention

4. We recognise that some countries choose to adopt harm reduction measures, whether as a means to avail proper medical treatment to drug addicts or for public health reasons. Our experience with harm reduction has, however, convinced us that it does not work in our context.

5. In 2002, doctors began prescribing Subutex to opiate-dependent drug abusers to aid them in their recovery. Instead of helping to “reduce” their addiction, Subutex fuelled it. Addicts abused Subutex intravenously by mixing it with sleeping pills and other drugs. The emergence of a needle culture, something which we did not see even at the height of the heroin abuse problem in the 1970s, was cause for public concern. Much remedial effort on the part of the Government and the community was expended to stamp out Subutex abuse, including sending Subutex-dependent addicts for compulsory rehabilitation. Subutex is now no longer a general prescription drug and appropriate actions have been taken by the Singapore Medical Council against the errant doctors who dispensed the drug irresponsibly.

6. Therefore, Singapore adopts a zero tolerance stance as we do not wish to allow drug abuse to take root and spread. We believe that the problem can be best tackled by preventing, and not reducing, the harm of drug abuse.

¹ UNODC World Drug Report 2008 - Drugs covered include opiates, cocaine, cannabis, amphetamines and ecstasy.

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Preventive Drug Education

7. While countries may differ in their approaches towards tackling their domestic drug problems, the prevalent nature of drug abuse makes it critical for countries to share experiences and develop more effective means to deal with it.

8. In this regard, I would like to take this opportunity to present our preventive drug education resource kit as a contribution to the international fight against drugs. Over the years, Singapore has embarked on a myriad of novel and engaging preventive education initiatives to educate the public, especially youths, on the perils of drug abuse, with the aim to encourage them to lead a drug-free lifestyle. We have launched anti-drug media campaigns in collaboration with the best advertising companies, organised visits for youths-at-risk to Drug Rehabilitation Centres, and initiated annual events such as the anti-drug dance competition. We wish to share with distinguished delegates our experience in the hope that you too will find these initiatives useful and practicable. I would like to offer each distinguished delegate a kit and warmly invite you to our exhibition booth to find out more about this project.

Conclusion

9. That we are gathered here today to discuss how to tackle the drug menace is testament to our common commitment toward combating the drug scourge. Our approaches may differ, but our goal is the same. Let us continue to strengthen our partnership in this global fight against drugs, with the hope that our citizens, especially the young, can lead healthy and drug-free lifestyles.

10. Thank you.

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