

**Remarks of the UNODC Executive Director
Opening of the High-level of the Implementation
of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on
International Cooperation towards an Integrated
and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World
Drug Problem**

Vienna, 13 March 2014

**Mr. Chairperson,
Your Majesty, Deputy Secretary-General,
Distinguished participants,**

We are here today to take stock; to reflect on the successes and setbacks in addressing the global drug problem; and to do better.

Because we must do more. The cultivation, manufacture, trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs continue to pose a major threat to the health of people everywhere; and to the stability and sustainable development of a number of countries and entire regions.

It is my hope that this high level debate will help you to find common ground and come up with a powerful message that will enable us to strengthen our cooperation, to address the world drug problem in a balanced, humane and effective way, based on the international conventions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is no simple answer to the question of whether we have succeeded or failed in the implementation of the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action.

There have been successes. The global cocaine market has shrunk, with the total area under coca bush cultivation down by 26 percent between 2007 and 2011.

Sustainable reductions have been achieved through successful alternative development programmes.

We have seen welcome improvements in treatment delivery.

We have strengthened international cooperation, including through UNODC-led regional and inter-regional initiatives promoting information sharing and closer coordination among law enforcement agencies.

At the same time, reductions in supply or demand for some drugs in one part of the world have been partly offset by increases in other parts. The overall magnitude of drug demand has not substantially changed at the global level.

And yet there have been serious setbacks, foremost among these the increase in opium poppy cultivation, which reached record levels in Afghanistan in 2013. Drugs from Afghanistan continue to undermine the future of the country and creat serious challenges in the region and beyond.

We continue to struggle with an expanding illicit market for synthetic stimulants and challenges in controlling precursors.

We face an alarming increase in new psychoactive substances, and cyber technologies are being more broadly used in drug trafficking and related money-laundering activities.

We are strongly concerned about the vulnerability of some regions, notably West Africa and East Africa, to illicit drug trafficking, and as a spillover effect, increased drug use, as well as to other serious crimes.

Drug trafficking has triggered a dramatic surge of violence in Central America, at terrible cost in human life, and we must do what we can to address this urgent problem.

Evidence-based, health-centred approaches to address illicit drug use and dependence have not been sufficiently implemented in all countries.

The UN response to these formidable challenges is rooted in the implementation of the three international drug control conventions, as well as the UN conventions on transnational organized crime and against corruption, as informed by the foundational human rights standards and norms.

We have learned that sustainable success requires a balanced, cooperative, comprehensive and integrated approach, addressing both supply and demand.

Cooperation, as enabled by the conventions, is indispensable in confronting drug trafficking networks. The key to success, as we have learned, is to integrate and connect drug control efforts within and between regions, as well as internationally. This approach is fully reflected in UNODC's current regional and global programmes.

International cooperation includes joint action to stop money laundering and corruption, which is a vital part of the fight against drug trafficking.

It also includes the sharing of data and analysis, which can help us to better understand the drug problem and related issues of violence and insecurity.

A balanced approach relies on evidence-based responses, with an emphasis on public health.

Science plays a key role in this, and UNODC aims to help bridge the gap between science and practice through such initiatives as the Scientific Consultation held this week ahead of the High-Level Review.

A balanced approach relies on partnerships, in particular with civil society. In 2013, 382 NGOs from around world worked in partnership with UNODC to deliver technical assistance in the field.

A balanced approach includes measures focusing on prevention, treatment, and social rehabilitation and integration. Countries which have adequately invested in evidence-informed risk reduction have remarkably reduced HIV transmission among injecting drug users.

It also includes access to controlled medicines for medical purposes, while preventing diversion and abuse.

When fighting illicit drugs, fundamental human rights must be respected. UNODC, for its part, is implementing human rights risk assessment as part of its programme planning process.

A public health response to the drug use problem should consider alternatives to penalization and incarceration of people with use disorders.

The application of the death penalty for drug-related offences has never been in the spirit of the conventions; furthermore, it can impede international cooperation in fighting drug trafficking.

Discrimination continues to hinder access to HIV prevention, treatment and care services, particularly for people who use drugs and for those in prisons. As chair of the UNAIDS Co-sponsoring Organizations this year, UNODC is working to ensure evidence-informed HIV interventions for all key populations.

A balanced approach seeks sustainable reductions in illicit crop cultivation, not only through eradication but through alternative development initiatives aimed at supporting impoverished farmers and creating licit jobs and markets, as well as social welfare services. This can only be achieved within broader development frameworks.

There remain challenges in the implementation of the conventions that should be recognized and discussed.

But it can be noted that dismantling the provisions of the conventions would be unlikely to achieve the ultimate goal of international drug control cooperation: protecting the health and welfare of people.

What is important is to reaffirm the original spirit of the conventions, focusing on health.

The debate on the world drug problem is taking place in many fora, notably here in Vienna at the CND, but also within countries and regions, and in the media and online. It involves governments and international organizations but also civil society, scientists and the medical community.

There are many voices, and illicit drugs represent a challenge with many dimensions.

We need a balanced approach in considering diverse views and experiences, and, most importantly, in finding joint solutions.

In closing, I would like to offer my warm thanks to Ambassador Shamaa for his dedication and leadership.

We are in your hands. I can assure Member States that you can rely on the continued support of UNODC in your endeavours here, at the session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs next week, and on the road to the 2016 UNGASS.

Thank you.