



UNODC

Oficina de las Naciones Unidas
contra la Droga y el Delito

Opening Remarks

Mr. Francis Maertens,
UNODC Deputy Executive Director

MOU Ministerial Meeting
Vientiane, Lao PDR
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**“Nearly two decades of partnership to tackle the drug control
threats in the Greater Mekong Subregion”**

Your Excellency,
Mr. Tonksin Tammavong, Prime Minister of the LAO PDR
Excellencies of the Member countries of the MOU
Distinguished Senior Officials and Representatives of funding partners
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. On behalf of the Executive Director of UNODC, Mr. Yury Fedotov, I am honoured to attend this Ministerial meeting and to witness – personally – the continued commitment of the members of the MOU countries in supporting drug control in the region.
2. On behalf of all partner countries, I would like to thank the Government of Lao PDR for its warm welcome and excellent organization and especially our counterparts in LCDC (Laos Commission for Drug Control) who have gone to great lengths to make us feel so welcome.
3. Let me extend a special word of appreciation to you partners from the donor community. This is the very first time that partners from outside of the MOU membership have been invited to attend. And we are happy to see such strong – and senior – level of attendance from partners across the region and extending even to so far as Seoul.
4. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the keystone of the international drug control system: the 1961 Convention on Narcotic Drugs. Two years ago, the Ministerial session of our governing body, the CND issued a political declaration reaffirming the commitments of all nations to the multilateral effort to reduce the supply and demand for illicit drugs under a comprehensive and balanced approach.
5. 18 years ago, representatives of the governments of SE Asia met in Vienna – together with UNODC – to sign a Memorandum of Understanding on drug control.
6. The aim of this Memorandum was to deal more effectively with what was then the growing problem of drugs in SE Asia.
7. Little did they know at the time, that this historical signing ceremony would form the basis for a major body of drug control cooperation

which would span the Greater Mekong Sub region for the better part of two decades.

- I would like to commend all countries in the region for their remarkable achievements over the last two decades. Among the key areas of success, one can mention:
 - Poppy reduction in SE Asia
 - Establishment and consolidation of the Border Liaison Office (BLO) system
 - Precursor chemical control
 - Computer-based Training – for front line officers

- Action on the ground has been matched by financial contribution – in hard cash terms – not only by our traditional donors, but also by the MOU countries themselves.

- Nonetheless, the \$28 million funding which has been provided over the two-decade period since the start of the MOU has been – to say the least – extremely cost-effective. However major challenges still persist when one looks at the resurgence or growth of poppy cultivation, the dramatic spread of synthetic drugs, the influx of other drugs such as cocaine in East Asia and the increased level of addiction.

Later this morning, my colleague, Mr. Gary Lewis, the head of our regional operations in East Asia and the Pacific will provide a briefing which will highlight the nature of the threat we face and the extent of the work which is still to be done.

We will present to you certain proposals which have been jointly developed over the past several months, and which have the support of the senior officials during the past two days.

These are plans for action and plans for partnership. Our approach is clustered around three approaches:

- knowing the threat

- acting through technical capacity building
- cooperating across borders and among agencies

Drugs traffickers are entrepreneurs. They seize new opportunities for profit wherever they appear. If our plans are not coordinated, they will take advantage. If we fail to effectively implement our work, they profit.

Therefore, let our unity be our strength and our commitment to collective action be our aim.

- Under the MOU, the cornerstone has been the **Sub-regional Action Plan (SAP)**
 - The SAP is now in its 8th avatar.
 - Sets direction and vision for collaboration and programme implementation.
 - Belongs to all 7 members – of which UNODC is one.
 - During preceding two days, senior officials from all 7 members have recalibrated the SAP to respond to current needs.
 - SAP which we are being asked to endorse is now fully aligned with region's needs. This must now be a strong basis for the allocation of proper financial means and for implementation with measurable impact.

CONCLUSION

- I have reviewed the draft SAP and am happy that it does address regional needs in drug control.
- On our part, UNODC commits itself to remain an active and willing partner in its funding-raising and implementation.
- I look forward to its endorsement.

- I can commit the full energy and resources of our office in Bangkok as well as our other offices in the region – to support the work of the Sub-Regional Action Plan.
- Only by working together at the regional and national levels – as well as by forming solid partnerships between governments, including donor governments and aid/financial institutions– will we effectively deal with the problem of illicit drug use in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.