

Speech by Gary Lewis
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On the occasion of the visit of the UN Secretary General
To the UNODC project site in Hopong
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Secretary-General, Mrs. Ban, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Friends,

There has never been a gathering quite like this – in this place – in Shan state.

Today, we stand on the western edge of poppy production in Myanmar. To the east of here lies one-quarter of all land on the planet under poppy cultivation. To the east of here lies one-tenth of the world's opium production.

I believe that today we can show the people of Shan and the people of Myanmar that the international community will support their efforts to move away from a past of insecurity, armed conflict and drug production. Together we can build a future of hope, security, and, ultimately, peace for the people of Shan state and for Myanmar.

Long years of experience tell us that in order for the cultivation of illicit drugs to end, a number of things need to happen. The Government has demonstrated its willingness to eradicate poppy. You have just heard from the Government of Myanmar an account of what I have seen for myself when I was here in recent months. It is an accurate account.

But eradication alone is not sustainable. It is by no means enough. For the farmers on whose lands you stand for these few moments need help to find a poppy-free means of surviving long after you have left this place.

Such help will need to cover both the short-term and the medium-term.

In the short-term, we need to fill stomachs. For the money which was to have come from the sale of opium is gone. To help fix this – in an admittedly small part of the overall affected area – the UN has arranged to supply rice to farmers whose poppy has been destroyed. Here I must thank my colleagues in WFP for responding so quickly and with so little bureaucracy. We have done this in full cooperation with the local communities and the Government in Nay Pyi Taw.

This is the UN at work. This is the UN “Delivering as One”

In the medium-term, we must empower the people of Shan to stay away from growing illicit crops. We can do this:

- By giving them seeds and better irrigation to make this land bountiful.
- By building roads to get the crops to market.
- By providing loans and credit to farmers to help them get started.
- By educating the youth and giving them prospects and choices.

This is what UNODC does. This is the UN at work.

But we have not been working alone. With some funding from the EU and Germany, we are doing what we can through three small projects covering a tiny portion of the problem. We receive assistance from Japan to monitor the poppy situation.

Given the scale of need, however, this assistance – though welcome and appreciated – is only a drop in the bucket. The UN needs more money to get more things done. This is what we ask from our donors. Focus on Shan. Let your funds help to build a sustainable peace for the people of Shan.

From the Government in Nay Pyi Taw we ask the following – allow us greater access – now that the ceasefires are in place – so that we can expand our work. Let us help you move people away from dependence on an illicit economy to embrace the licit economy. Let us help you transform environments of insecurity into those of security. Together, let us move Shan from its opium-dependent past into the future – a future based on peace and hope.

Let us remember that ceasefires mean only that weapons have been laid down. The weapons need to be put away.

In every country where I have worked on poppy, I have encountered a toxic mix of poverty, guns, drugs, drug money and conflict.

I believe – from what I have seen during the past year in Myanmar – that we have a real prospect at this point to move towards peace and security in this township and others like it across the length and breadth of Shan State.

But to support the development of peace and security in Shan we must banish the illicit drug economy on which so much insecurity rests. It is possible to achieve. I have seen it happen elsewhere. Let's let it happen here as well.

Thank you.