

Opening Statement
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Fourth National Database System
User Group Meeting
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Good morning.

It is a great pleasure to open the fourth National Database System user group meeting. It is also a great pleasure to see that the number of Member State participants in these meetings is constantly increasing. This year we have also invited some of our ODCCP Field Offices as they are now actively involved in the NDS dissemination and support process.

It was the Member States that originally gave UNDCP the task of facilitating the reporting of statistics to the INCB Secretariat by use of electronic means. Since that time, we have entered a new century and a new millennium. More importantly, the way in which we all work has undergone rapid change. In today's world, information technology is more and more indispensable, more complex and certainly more expensive. The innovations are no longer a choice. They are to a large extent imposed upon us.. But in contrast to the private sector, over the past years the UN and its Member States have paid relatively little attention to the need for a comprehensive approach to information technology. Information technology issues were simply not seen as a high priority for UN organizations. This translated into limited capital investment and in some cases even a decrease in resources.

Secretary General Kofi Annan made the following remarks in this respect at the Millennium Summit:

“The digital revolution has unleashed an unprecedented wave of technological change. Used responsibly, it can greatly improve our chances of defeating poverty and better meeting our other priority objectives. If this is to happen, we in the United Nations need to embrace the new technologies more wholeheartedly than we have in the past.”

Managing an initiative like the National Database System, which is dependent on rapidly changing technology, is a challenge. Our response to this challenge has been an approach of partnership between you, the Member States, and UNDCP.

Please, allow me to go back to the recent history. When the idea of NDS was launched in 1994, UNDCP had just started its first website - one of the first in the UN system. Think back to where your Governments were at that same moment in the use of internet-based technologies. It was indeed a different age.

This type of technology is now commonplace and is used by millions of people daily in electronic commerce. We must now run to keep up with the technology and to ensure that we apply to drug control the highest possible standards.

At the beginning, NDS had a fairly narrow focus -- electronic reporting to the INCB. It was then broadened to serve as the basis for national data management systems and as a means of interaction between developing and industrialized countries. As late as 1999, the General Assembly described NDS as *“an important development in building national capacities, particularly in developing countries”*.

This is probably still too narrow a focus for the needs of today. We must now promote a system that functions in the globalized economy of the 21st century where all the players – producers, importers, consumers and so on – rely on electronic communication. We must ensure that the technology and skills we are advocating for drug control are appropriate to this changed and globalized environment.

The General Assembly recently approved 1.1 million US dollars in support of the NDS. What you will be seeing while you are here is the result of this

capital injection. It is also a result of your feedback during the years before this capital injection.

During the meeting you will also see that we have included a module for collection of data in connection with the UN Annual Reports Questionnaire. There is also now an interface to the Interpol-developed system for collection and reporting of national seizure information. Perhaps of greatest interest to you, there is now a module that manages all domestic transactions that in one way or another relate to the implementation of the drug Control conventions.

In this Users Group meeting, governments that use the system and governments that are going to use it in the near future are all here together. You are all the real driving force behind the success of the system to better serve you and the goals of drug control. Your contributions will steer the systems implementation in the coming two years. Once more, our approach to NDS is a form of partnership that we are keen to maintain.

I will leave the details of the operational side of NDS to my colleague, Mr. Quaglia.

I wish you a very constructive meeting.