



For information only—not an official document.

EMBARGO:

1 March 2006

0001 hours GMT

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

For years, international drug control has been based on a model that presumes a simplistic relationship between the supply of drugs and demand for them. Today, it has become apparent that the problems of international drug control are among the most complex facing the world today and that they are not amenable to superficial measures.

As the Board demonstrated in its report last year, the fundamental interaction between the supply of and demand for drugs is anything but straightforward. The same applies to alternative development which the Board has chosen to examine in its first chapter of the report this year.

Alternative development started 30 years ago as “crop substitution”. It was based on the premise that illegal drug crops, particularly opium poppy and coca leaf, could be substituted by legal cash crops which would provide growers with similar or even higher incomes. According to this simple model, cultivation of illegal drug crops would then become undesirable, which would reduce supply of the raw materials and, ultimately, reduce drug abuse.

Unfortunately, experience has shown that this somewhat narrow and mechanical approach has not been very effective, although there have been examples of successful, albeit somewhat isolated alternative development.

In practice, attempts at crop substitution have demonstrated that it is much more complex than initially anticipated to halt the illicit cultivation of crops from which drugs are extracted and to encourage the growth of others. We now know that such programmes can only be successful if the people who grow these crops have an economically viable alternative to illicit cultivation and that this must be combined with law enforcement and drug prevention activities. Furthermore these measures will only be viable if they are conceived and implemented as long-term processes. They can never be a “quick fix”.

Today therefore, alternative development is viewed as a continuing process, in which the involvement of the target communities, the growers of illicit crops, is key to success. The objective of preventing and, eventually, eliminating the illicit cultivation of plants from which drugs are extracted can only be achieved in the context of sustainable development efforts and within the framework of a comprehensive and permanent solution to the problem of illicit drugs. Alternative development is thus about providing holistic legitimate alternatives to people whose only choice for livelihood so far has been the illicit drugs business. It is worth noting that, until now, alternative development has mostly focused on the growers of opium poppy and coca leaf, neglecting the fact that many growers of cannabis plants around the world are in similar situations. Like opioid and cocaine abuse, the increasing abuse of cannabis cannot be resolved without also addressing the supply side of the equation and this too will require sustained alternative development programmes.

However, in my view, the concept of alternative development needs to be expanded still further, beyond the bounds of rural communities who cultivate illicit crops. Indeed, it seems likely that we will





For information only—not an official document.

EMBARGO:

1 March 2006

0001 hours GMT

only make a significant difference to the world drug problem if alternative development becomes much more inclusive, addressing the needs of the many other groups who are involved in drug abuse. For example, there are many communities, particularly in the cities and mega-cities of this world, which are so mired in the drug problem that they deserve our immediate attention and action. Although these communities are not in remote, mountainous areas, they are isolated nonetheless and sometimes even more marginalized than the communities where illicit crops are grown.

The links between drug abuse, deprivation, unemployment and certain types of criminal behaviour are well known. None of these, individually or collectively, cause drug abuse any more than drug abuse is the sole cause of crime, poverty and unemployment. However, these adverse conditions and behaviours often co-exist and reinforce each other. In such an environment, and with a readily available supply of drugs, the criminal lifestyle that accompanies drug abuse may be much easier and more attractive than legitimate activities. It is proposed therefore that the principles of alternative development, in its widest sense, should be applied in socially marginalized urban environments as well as in the remote rural areas where earlier efforts have been focused. This will require sustained and comprehensive efforts to tackle social deprivation and to develop alternative legitimate occupations and lifestyles.

A much broader application of alternative development in both rural and urban societies will reap greater dividends than if it is practised in either of these societies alone because of the symbiotic nature of the relationship between supply and demand. Both rural farmers and socially marginalized city dwellers need and are entitled to the opportunity of a legitimate livelihood and we should make renewed efforts to reach all of them, striving to create environments less conducive to the production and abuse of drugs. These are not simple solutions. However, the simple truth is that there are no simple solutions in international drug control.

Hamid Ghodse

President of the Board