

**Twentieth Special Session of the General Assembly
on the World Drug Problem
8 -10 June 1998**

**Statement of Professor Hamid Ghodse
President of the International Narcotics Control Board**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

The impressive gathering of Heads of State or Government and high-ranking Government officials at this Special Session on the World Drug Problem shows the determination of the international community to rid the world of the global scourge of drug abuse and drug trafficking. The Board congratulates Governments on the draft political declaration which sends a clear and unequivocal message against drug abuse and trafficking to Governments, the media and the general public.

The Board also welcomes the renewed commitment demonstrated by Governments adopting action plans for a number of areas where progress is necessary. Full implementation of those action plans by Governments will be decisive for future progress in drug control. The Board has reflected on all the subjects addressed in the action plans during the past couple of years, and has prepared special documents summarizing its views and recommendations on those issues. Our documents were circulated to all Governments and the general public, also via our Internet homepage.

On the occasion of the Special Session, I have written an open letter to all Heads of State or Government outlining the perspectives of this session and the impact that it will have on drug control efforts for the twenty-first century. Copies of the letter should have reached your capitals by this time.

The Board is satisfied that the action plans widely reflect its own thoughts and ideas, and is proud that consensus has been reached on what has to be done and where energies need to be focused. The action plans complement the international drug control treaties and will guide Governments in their endeavours to translate the provisions of the treaties into practical and decisive action. Their implementation must be monitored to ensure that they reach their ambitious goals. Let me reconfirm that the Board will do this within the mandate given to it under international conventions.

The Board is also pleased that the international community is working on the adoption of the declaration on the guiding principles of demand reduction. The Board first highlighted the importance of this issue in its Annual Report for 1993 and urged Governments to give a higher priority to reducing demand for illicit drugs. The

declaration responds to the need for an international instrument for effective demand reduction measures at all levels and will guide Governments in their efforts to prevent and treat drug abuse and rehabilitate drug abusers. In order to bring about a lasting reduction of the demand for illicit drugs, such programmes have to be sustainable, have a long-term view and be adequately funded. In addition, one must also remember that drug abusers are greatly influenced by their environment. Governments should therefore make efforts to counter campaigns which portray drug abuse as normal or even glamorous. At the same time, school-based and community based programmes should inform young people about the dangers of drugs and teach them the skills they need to resist using drugs for non-medical purposes. If that substantial change in attitudes and, thus a cultural change, can be achieved, success in this field is not far off.

This Special Session has focused on six drug control issues which are particularly pertinent. Concentration on these issues, however, should not lead us to neglect other activities which are equally necessary in addressing the world drug problem such as regulatory controls which are the core provisions of the international drug control treaties. The implementation of regulatory controls ensures that drugs are available for the relief of pain and suffering but also that their use is limited to authorized medical and scientific purposes only. To achieve this essential goal, Governments have to establish or fine-tune existing mechanisms so that they are flexible and effective. Equally important is international cooperation. International drug trafficking organizations have never respected nor accepted national boundaries. Neither should we. It may sound paradoxical but if the international community can adopt some of the global thinking, the flexibility and the speed of drug traffickers, traffickers can be defeated. The long list of achievements in preventing the diversion of psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals into illicit traffic in recent years is a living testimony of my words.

Mr. Chairman,

This Special Session is being held ten years after the adoption of the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in 1988. The year 1998 also marks an anniversary for the International Narcotics Control Board which was established in 1968, following the entry into force of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. The Board is pleased to note that in the course of the past thirty years, a very large number of States have adhered to the international drug control treaties and that Governments have started implementing their provisions. Yet the Board remains concerned that some States have entered reservations to the 1988 and other Conventions which touch on their essential principles. On this special occasion, it would be a good stimulus if those Government could decide to withdraw reservations that weaken international drug control.

Mr. Chairman,

The Board fully shares the optimism of the States assembled at this gathering and is impressed by the strong showing of top political leaders which will give an impetus to

drug control efforts. Nevertheless we should not forget that there are challenges to be faced -- challenges whose importance should neither be over- nor underrated.

One such challenge is exemplified by the small groups of people who have been demonstrating outside the Secretariat building for the legalization of the non-medical use of drugs. Those groups have limited public support and do not represent public opinion on drugs. On the contrary, national opinion polls in many countries consistently show that a broad majority of citizens oppose all forms of legalization of illicit drugs. In the interest of the general public and the majority, it is therefore a duty for Governments and the international community to counter the spurious arguments and half-truths of proponents of legalization.

In this context the contention that the restriction of drug use to authorized medical and scientific purposes is a limitation of human rights is preposterous, to say the least. Of course human rights and freedoms must be respected and protected, they are the foundations of modern and ancient democracies. But it is also a human right to be free of drug abuse and a human right to be protected from drug abuse. This protection extends particularly to the most vulnerable of our society, our young people. This is clearly stated in article 33 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which requires States to undertake measures to protect children from drug abuse and from being involved in their production or distribution. As you all know, this Convention has been ratified by all States, except two and it is thus the most widely ratified international human rights treaty. Therefore, although it may be difficult, it is clear that, in a world where personal freedom, democracy and openness are highly valued, policies against drug abuse will have to find the right balance between the extremes of outright repression and permissiveness. It is also worth emphasizing that drug abuse can hardly be called a "victimless" crime and those fail to acknowledge this are ignoring the serious damage drug abuse causes to both individuals and society.

Mr. Chairman,

Drugs represent a threat to our societies and action against this threat is the collective responsibility of all nations. Only concerted efforts and genuine international partnership will lead to tangible and sustained success. Together, we can meet the drug challenge. Together, we can work towards a safer twenty-first century.

Thank you for your attention.