

Vienna International Centre, P.O. Box 500, A-1400 Vienna, Austria
Telephone: +43-1-26060, Fax: +43-1-26060-5867 / 5868
E-Mail: secretariat@incb.org Internet Address: <http://www.incb.org/>

Check against delivery

**STATEMENT BY DR. VIROJ SUMYAI,
BOARD MEMBER,
INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD**

**International Conference on Alternative Development:
'The Implementation of United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative
Development'
23 November 2015, Thailand**

Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address you here today on behalf of the International Narcotics Control Board at this important conference on alternative development.

As we move towards the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the world drug problem next year, our efforts in the field of Alternative Development present a new era of hope for humanity.

Alternative Development efforts should also be seen within the framework of the recent unanimous adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Sustainable Development Goals. Alternative development programmes relate to a good many of the development goals. Let me name just some of them:

- Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Thus, alternative development, as we move towards the Special Session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, must be seen both in the context of drug control and as contributing towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

About INCB

Before I move on, let me say a few words about the International Narcotics Control Board, or INCB for short.

INCB was established under the drug control treaties (1961 Convention) and is mandated to monitor, promote and assist Governments with the implementation of the three international drug control treaties, the 1961 Convention (narcotics), the 1971 Convention (psychotropics) and the 1988 Convention (tackling drug trafficking and abuse).

The treaties are founded on the principle of shared responsibility; they are a road map, so to speak, and remain the foundation of the global response to the world drug problem. Indeed, it is shared responsibility that brings us to this conference today.

The conventions and international drug control system have a two-fold objective;

- (a) to ensure the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific use,
- (b) whilst preventing their diversion to illicit channels, trafficking and abuse.

Since its establishment in 1968, INCB has drawn the attention of Governments to the importance of ensuring the availability of internationally controlled drugs for medical purposes. We will continue doing so next year in particular, when we publish a special report on this subject, just months before the Special Session of the General Assembly.

Let me now turn to the subject of Alternative Development

INCB has over the years repeatedly drawn the attention of governments to the importance of alternative development programmes, for example in the thematic chapter of our Annual Report for 2005.

As I noted, alternative development is essential to tackling the world drug problem, a contribution to humanity's wellbeing, and part of efforts to fulfil the Sustainable Development goals.

In March this year, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs adopted its [resolution 58/4](#) on 'Promoting the implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development'. This resolution reiterates the central role of alternative development; the guiding principles themselves are the very focus of this conference.

The resolution reaffirms the framework for the implementation of alternative development programmes and calls on Member States to pay due attention to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development when designing, implementing and evaluating alternative development programmes and projects. As you know, these principles were developed at the innovative initiative of the Governments of Thailand and Peru, which brought their enormous and successful

experience in this field and were adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 68/196. It is fitting therefore, that this conference is taking place here in Thailand.

Achieving decent work, licit income and integrity are at the heart of alternative development programmes. But the reality still is that only a small fraction of communities affected by illicit drug crop cultivation have access to viable licit alternatives.

The objective of alternative development programmes is to provide some of the world's most vulnerable populations, the rural poor, with the capacity to improve their standard of living, transitioning from illicit drug crop cultivation to sustainable livelihoods with access to a comprehensive range of social, health, educational and other programmes.

At the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem next year, the international community needs to give alternative development its proper place in the list of priority interventions. Member States need to promote the implementation of alternative development programmes, which are well-designed, well targeted and well resourced. These programmes must provide the opportunity for some of the poorest or marginalized members of society to emerge from poverty with dignity.

Alternative Development - a treaty perspective

In some quarters, the drug control treaties have been misunderstood or misrepresented as being overly focussed on law enforcement or control measures or lacking a humanist perspective.

A good reading of the treaties demonstrates the exact opposite.

Let me explain this in relation to Alternative Development.

The concept of alternative development is enshrined in the *1988 UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances*.

Governments are called upon, in Article 14, paragraph 3, subparagraph (a) of the 1988 Convention, to cooperate to increase the effectiveness of eradication efforts. To this end, Governments are encouraged to provide economically viable alternative livelihoods to facilitate the transition from illicit drug crop cultivation to licit economic alternatives. The Convention notes the importance of taking into account factors such as access to markets, the availability of resources and prevailing socio-economic conditions.

The implementation of alternative development programmes in regions affected by illicit drug crop cultivation was identified by States in negotiating and agreeing upon the Conventions as an essential component of a balanced and integrated approach to addressing the world drug problem.

Alternative development serves the dual objective of enabling the rural poor to emerge from poverty and insecurity both physical and material, including in many

cases food insecurity, while at the same time raising standards of living for those affected by illicit crop cultivation and facilitating the reduction and ultimate elimination of the illicit cultivation of drug crops.

The attainment of these goals provides individuals and their families with the opportunity to escape from what is often a vicious cycle of poverty and illicit drug cultivation, which in many cases also entails oppression and violence.

Alternative development in practice

Successful alternative development interventions require long-term commitment from all stakeholders. Governments must make the long-term commitment in terms of policies and investment as well as in the social mobilization of affected communities. Effective community participation in the planning, development and implementation of alternative development programmes are essential to their success and sustainability.

Alternative development and alternative livelihood measures are not simple, nor straight-forward. They are not “crop substitution” programmes but complex multidisciplinary programmes, encompassing all aspects of social and community life. They involve the planning and implementation of comprehensive socio-economic activities, the active engagement of farmers, their families, local authorities and other actors, often in remote and underdeveloped regions. Affected populations are often minority groups who have been marginalized and who have lacked the benefit of the protection and services that States should provide to their citizens. These communities have often not benefited from socio-economic development initiatives and/or the presence and protection of the state.

Successful programmes require:

- Sustained political will
- Full participation of the beneficiaries, and
- Systemic development efforts.

The range of interventions that need to be catered for includes:

- Provision of basic infrastructure networks
- Access to transport, health care, education and other services.

A moment ago I mentioned access to health and education. It is the sad reality that in some of the communities where illicit crop cultivation had taken hold, drug abuse had also followed. In these situations, alternative development programmes must also develop and implement drug abuse prevention, treatment and aftercare services as important components. And in some cases, where injecting drug use is prevalent, drug abuse prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and recovery need to be fully integrated into programmes to treat HIV/AIDS infection and prevent its spread. Such initiatives need to be seen as an essential complement to alternative development programmes.

Illicit crop cultivation and illicit drug production are also contributors to environmental damage and food insecurity through deforestation, the disposal of chemicals in rivers and on land, use of arable land and so on. Illicit cultivation of drug

crops can reduce the amount of arable land available for food crops, impacting negatively on food security, biodiversity and soil degradation. Alternative development programmes must factor in actions to prevent and reduce environmental degradation, to protect biodiversity and to ensure food security.

One important area which I have not yet elaborated on is the need to ensure the adequate presence of state authority in areas affected by illicit crop cultivation. Criminal groups tend to thrive where the presence of state authority is weak. The legitimate authority of the State is needed to ensure sustained peace and security and provision of services, foster trust with local communities and provide a just and well-functioning legal order.

The development of trust between the local community at large and the authorities in a secure environment is critical to cultivators' commitment to engage in long-term alternative development programmes. Many illicit drug crop producing areas and urban areas have suffered from prolonged social erosion.

Let me conclude by drawing attention to successes and some recommendations

Alternative development has seen much success here in Asia and in the Americas. One prime example has taken place right here in Thailand. In 2013, illicit crop cultivation was estimated at some 265 hectares¹ whereas some fifty years ago illicit opium poppy cultivation amounted to 17,900 hectares, representing a reduction of 98 per cent. This has been the result of a mix of interventions including progressive and sustained alternative livelihoods programmes.

This is an example of a development-oriented approach to be emulated. In order to continue achieving success, the authorities of a number of countries, including Thailand, have committed to sharing their knowledge and best practices in this field.

There has been, and continues to be, success in the reduction of illicit coca bush and opium poppy growing areas across the globe due to the implementation of alternative development and other measures. Alternative development programmes have been particularly successful in areas where sustained security has been provided by Government authorities, such as here in Thailand.

Let me conclude by emphasizing some of the Board's recommendations in the field of '[Alternative development and legitimate livelihoods](#)'. In addition to promoting the engagement of Governments, the United Nations and other organizations of the United Nations system, and international financial institutions in the promotion and integration of alternative development into their broader development programmes, on behalf of INCB I would like to draw your attention to some focus areas in preparing for UNGASS 2016:

- (a) Governments should integrate alternative development into their broader development programmes. It is essential that commitments

¹ UNODC, Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2014, p. 11

towards strategies for the provision of legitimate alternative livelihoods are long-term;

- (b) Governments should ensure that law enforcement activities in illicit crop cultivation areas contribute to the building of trust between the local communities and the State. The authorities should promote the greater involvement of communities in the formulation of policies to deal with the various aspects of alternative development;
- (c) As part of alternative development strategies, Governments should ensure that adequate public services, such as schooling, health care and basic infrastructure, are provided to local communities. In rural areas, the farming population should be assisted and protected in the areas of land security and sustainable land development;
- (d) Governments should formulate their domestic and international trade policies, in particular policies regarding access to markets for products and services from alternative development areas, with a view to helping to reduce the illicit drug economy, wherever it exists;
- (e) Finally, Governments should promote the greater involvement of local women and men, as well as nongovernmental organizations and other members of civil society, in developing alternative development programmes.

To conclude, through carrying out these actions, humanity may provide a disempowered, vulnerable and marginalised section of our global community with the power and means to attain a better tomorrow through the legitimate means of alternative livelihoods.

Your Highness, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, in closing, let me again thank you for the opportunity to participate and say that I look forward to the deliberations in the coming days.

Thank you.

* * * * *