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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

For the first time, the impact of illicit drug cultivation, trade and abuse on overall economic development is examined in our Report. The focus on economic development is appropriate as it is a crucial component of sustainable and human development. Our Report shows that the overwhelming share of profits made from illicit drug trafficking does not occur in the countries where illicit drug crops are cultivated but in the countries where the finished products are illicitly sold and abused.

The Report also dispels the myth that drug trafficking might be a route to growth and prosperity when in fact illicit drug production prevents long-term economic growth. One example is Afghanistan, where massive increases in opium production in the early 1990s only helped to fuel civil wars. Drugs clearly failed to have any positive impact on the country's overall social and economic development. The same is true for other countries. The Board found no indications that the expansion of illicit crop cultivation leads to an overall improvement of any broader development indicator at the national level.

Drug control by Governments is therefore not only in the interest of health and security but also in the interest of building a viable and sustainable economy. To abandon drug control is like abandoning a commitment to social and economic progress of our States. Not taking drug control seriously or legalizing drugs can never be a policy option for Governments that put the welfare of their people at the core of their activities.

Advocates of drug legalization, particularly of cannabis, are vocal and have access to considerable funds that are used to misinform the public. Nevertheless, the general public has consistently rejected legalization of drugs. As an example voters in some states in the United States recently rejected measures which would have led to a relaxation of the laws, related to the abuse or cultivation of cannabis.

Cannabis is not a harmless drug as advocates of its legalization tend to portray. Cannabis use affects the functioning of the brain. Its illicit use is also associated with heart attacks in some young people and can cause lung disease and cancer. A recent study by the British Lung Foundation has shown that smoking three joints of cannabis causes the same damage to the lining of the airways as 20 cigarettes.

Cannabis is one of some 250 substances which are listed in the schedules and tables of the three international drug control treaties. The international community decided to control cannabis in the 1961 Convention because of its abuse potential and its ability to produce ill effects. These properties of cannabis have not changed since then. As at 1 January 2003, 179 States have agreed to be bound by the provisions of the 1961 Convention, including its provisions on cannabis. The Board supports the decision of these Governments and believes that until there is sufficient scientific evidence to reverse the current controls on cannabis, no further action is required.

It is important that consensus prevails in international drug control. No Government should take unilateral measures without considering the impact of its action on others and ultimately the consequences for an entire system that took Governments almost a century to establish.



Philip Emafo
President of the Board