

**Special Conference on Afghanistan**  
**under the aegis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization**  
**Moscow, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

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

Distinguished delegates,

At the outset, I would like to thank the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation for organizing this important conference on Afghanistan. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Government of the Russian Federation for hosting this important Conference. Cooperation between the International Narcotics Control Board and the Russian Federation has been excellent and the Government has been very supportive of the Board's work.

This Conference is convened at a particularly significant time. About a month ago, the international community commemorated one hundred years of international drug control at a conference in Shanghai, China. And only last week, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the world's main drug policy body, met in Vienna to adopt a Political Declaration and Action Plan on how to tackle the world drug problem which continues to be a serious threat to the health, safety and well-being of all humanity. There is international consensus that the world drug problem undermines sustainable development, political stability, democratic institutions, efforts to eradicate poverty, and threatens national security and rule of law.

Distinguished delegates,

It is clear to all that the world drug problem can only be addressed effectively if the drug control situation in Afghanistan is resolved. In fact, were it not for Afghanistan, the global cultivation of opium poppy would be at an all-time low, as great progress has been achieved by countries in South-East Asia. Since 1998, the area of opium poppy cultivation in South-East Asia has dropped by an astounding eighty-one percent, from about 158,000 hectares in 1998 to the historically low level of 29,200 hectares in 2007, according to data collected by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

During the same time period, however, the area of cultivation of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has almost tripled, making that country the world's largest cultivator of opium poppy. In 2008, an estimated 157,000 hectares were devoted to the cultivation of opium poppy.

In addition, Afghanistan has become a significant manufacturer of heroin and other opiates which are trafficked on to neighboring states as well as to the Russian Federation. In fact, the beautiful city of Moscow has been hard hit by the Afghan opium epidemic: the overwhelming majority of heroin that is available on the streets of this city originates from Afghanistan.

Drugs have exacted a heavy human toll, in Afghanistan and beyond. Afghanistan has one of the highest opioid abuse rates in the world, affecting an estimated 1.4 per cent of the population. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, opioid abuse is even higher, estimated at 2.8 per cent. Drug abuse in the Central Asian countries continues to increase. The Russian Federation has also been affected and has one of the largest illicit markets for opiates in the world.

It is no exaggeration when I say that the magnitude of the drug problem is such that it poses not only a serious threat to the political, economic and social stability of Afghanistan itself but also to other countries in the region and the world.

The Board invoked article 14 of the 1961 Convention against Afghanistan in 2000, given the fact that the cultivation of opium poppy endangers the aims of the 1961 Convention. Over the past few years, the Board has made interventions vis-à-vis the Government and the international community. The Board has maintained close contact with the Government and has sent high-level missions to that country. The Board also provided technical assistance to Afghanistan, in the form of training for Afghan authorities in the implementation of the drug control treaties. In the area of precursor control, the Board has assisted Governments in their action to prevent acetic anhydride from being used in illicit heroin manufacture. Several hundreds tons of acetic anhydride have been seized in Europe and Asia by Governments participating in Project Cohesion, an international initiative supported by the Board. The Board commends the Government of Afghanistan on its recent decision not to authorize any importation of acetic anhydride into the country.

Efforts have been made by the international community and the Government of Afghanistan to address this difficult situation. The Security Council adopted resolution 1817 in June 2008, in which it called upon all Member States to increase international and regional cooperation to counter the illicit drug production and trafficking in Afghanistan. In addition, the international conference in support of Afghanistan which was held in Paris in June 2008 and in which I participated, resulted in a significant amount of funds being pledged for assistance of the Government of Afghanistan.

However, more needs to be done if the drug control situation in Afghanistan is to be improved. The prevention of the cultivation of illicit drug crops and their eventual eradication are crucial to the achievement of peace, security and economic development. Afghanistan also needs to address its growing drug abuse problem. More than any other illnesses, drug abuse tends to rob society of its future: young people at their most productive.

These measures can only be effective if the Afghan Government takes action against the widespread and deep-seated drug-related corruption. Success in addressing drug-related corruption requires strong political will and firm action and clear, measurable results are needed in this area. The Board urges the Government of Afghanistan to take effective measures against corrupt officials at any level of Government who are involved in illicit drug activities and to make public the outcome of any such measures.

The Board also reiterates its appeal to Governments to continue to provide support to Afghanistan in its fight against illicit trafficking in drugs and other form of organized crimes.

I wish this conference success.

Thank you for your attention.