

**Opening Statement of the Government of the United States of America  
Before the 51<sup>st</sup> UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs**

**Delivered by Scott Burns, Deputy Director,  
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As this is the first opportunity for my delegation to take the floor, I would like to congratulate you on behalf of the Government of the United States of America on your election as chairperson of this 51<sup>st</sup> UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs. We look forward to a productive meeting, working together under your able leadership. I would also like to thank Executive Director Costa for his opening remarks, and for his leadership in promoting international cooperation on meeting the challenges that have brought us here today in this forum.

It is a privilege to address this 51st Commission as it devotes its time to take steps to review the United Nations General Assembly Special Session of 1998. This is an important opportunity to take stock of how far we have all come, and how much more work there is to be done. There is now a strong international consensus that the drug trade threatens all nations and it is the mutual responsibility of all states to combat drug cultivation, manufacture, trafficking and use. Thanks to the UNGASS goals and targets, more people around the world have access to effective drug treatment and prevention programs, and successful efforts have been made to disrupt drug trafficking organizations and reduce drug supplies. Stronger enforcement and justice systems make it more difficult for international drug syndicates to operate, and most UN members have enacted stronger anti-money laundering measures to prevent criminals from keeping their profits. International cooperation has increased measurably, with more joint investigations and mutual legal assistance and more drug kingpins being extradited to account for their crimes.

It is important to draw attention to the steady, sustained progress against the illegal drug trade and to recognize that the multifaceted threat of illegal drugs can be contained, and reduced. Unfortunately, the countless routine drug seizures, the illegal drug labs destroyed every day, the arrests of corrupt officials, and the successful drug treatment and demand reduction campaigns that have saved our citizens from lives of drug abuse, receive at best only fragmentary coverage in the world media. But these small steps add up to important and lasting gains.

The United States has learned a great deal about the nature of drug use and drug markets, and our supply and demand reduction initiatives have produced remarkable change. Demand reduction is an integral part of the comprehensive drug control strategy endorsed by the UNGASS Political Declaration, and the U.S. has seen real progress on this front. Today, approximately 860,000 fewer U.S. citizens under the age of 18 are using illegal drugs than in 2001. As the world's leader in drug-related research, the United States strongly supports demand reduction, however we oppose harm reduction initiatives which facilitate or encourage drug consumption.

Research indicates that those who initiate drug use at an early age are significantly more likely to develop substance abuse or dependence as an adult than those who initiate drug use later in life. In the U.S. we implement effective prevention campaigns, turning young people away from a life of drugs at moments when they are most vulnerable. Exposure to anti-drug advertising has helped improve youth anti-drug attitudes and intentions and increase perceptions of risk in drug use. We have supported non-punitive drug testing in schools, as a means of deterrence and to get help for those early in dependency.

In addition screening and brief interventions for substance abuse in all types of health care settings helps identify citizens at risk for substance abuse disorders, particularly those who are unaware of or reluctant to acknowledge the consequences of their drug use. In the U.S., screening is vital

because 94% of those with a drug dependence problem do not seek help. The United States has made targeted efforts to provide services to underserved populations and to increase the number of treatment slots, providers, modalities and recovery support services for those identified as needing help through screening programs. To help promote this approach, we ask you to support our resolution on Screening and Brief Intervention.

This resolution urges Member States to raise awareness of the importance of early intervention and to encourage the health and medical communities to implement screening for drugs with immediate intervention in all health care settings. Early screening and intervention when patients go to the doctor, the emergency room, a trauma center or any health clinic is a low cost means of identifying at-risk populations and can significantly reduce substance abuse and prevent addiction. These programs provide doctors with critical tools to help them identify a substance abuse problem, to teach patients about the medical and health consequences of their drug use, and to refer patients for a brief or more extensive treatment. These programs therefore are critical to effectively reducing the demand for illicit drugs.

Successful demand reduction is also contingent on the availability of drug supplies and we believe that effective supply reduction can play a key role in enabling effective demand reduction. We have learned much about the nature of drug use and drug markets, and have demonstrated that a balanced strategy, properly implemented, produces real, life-saving results. During the first three quarters of 2007, we saw unprecedented disruptions in the cocaine and methamphetamine markets within the U.S., with prices rising by 44 percent and 73 percent, and purities falling by 15 percent and 31 percent, respectively. The cocaine shortage impacted more areas of the United States for a longer period of time than any previously recorded disruption.

Colombia is a country that is emerging from decades of narco-trafficking and narco-terrorism. Thanks to the efforts of the Colombian Government and its people, we are seeing the expansion of the country's vigorous democracy and the rule of law, and improvements in human rights. Further, we are witnessing the economic revitalization of a nation that too long has been under the threat of drug organizations.

In Mexico, President Calderon is leading a similarly brave effort to regain control over his country's security and institutions from the threat of criminal organization that operate along the U.S. southern border. President Calderon has moved aggressively to strengthen police capabilities, and has pursued concrete actions that promise to give law enforcement officials and the judiciary the resources and authority they need to succeed. Because these criminal organizations represent such a direct threat to the United States, President Bush has requested \$1.1 billion from our Congress for Mexico and the governments of Central America to support their efforts to confront these organizations involved in the drug trafficking and other violent crimes. This initiative, born out of meetings held last year between President Bush and President Calderon in Merida, Mexico, will complement existing and initiatives of U.S. domestic law enforcement agencies engaged with counterparts in each participating country. Strengthening institutions and capacity in partner countries will enable us to act jointly, responding with greater agility, confidence, and speed to the changing tactics of organized crime.

In Southwest Asia we face a different challenge in Afghanistan. A growing body of evidence indicates that a symbiotic relationship exists between the narcotics trade and the anti-government insurgency, most commonly associated with the Taliban. Narcotics traffickers provide revenue and arms to the insurgency, while insurgents provide protection to growers and traffickers to prevent the government from interfering with their activities. This challenge directly threatens the interests of the broader international community and the Government of Afghanistan will need sustained

support from the UN and its member states for years to come. The Afghanistan Government's counter-narcotics strategy is a sound one. Some progress has been made in curtailing opium cultivation where there is security, in the northern and eastern provinces. The complexity of the drug problem in Afghanistan demands a balanced counternarcotics approach that melds enforcement and economic development assistance. Over the next year, we need to provide additional support to the Government of Afghanistan in creating both incentives for opium growers to participate in licit livelihoods through the provision of additional assistance, while simultaneously strengthening the disincentives to participation in the narcotics industry through increased interdiction, eradication, and other law enforcement efforts.

While it is appropriate to focus attention on the source countries we should also remember that the illegal drug trade extends around the globe, causing particular damage in countries along transit routes. In recent years, Africa has become a much more frequent route for drug shipments from both South America and Asia, to markets in Europe, North America and elsewhere. This surge in drug trafficking is increasing corruption, undermining legitimate economies and putting enormous pressure on the democratic institutions of some African governments, and additional technical assistance is needed to support the efforts of governments in the region to counter these threats. The U.S. strongly supports UNODC's efforts to coordinate institutional development in sub-Saharan Africa, and my government is committed to providing additional assistance in the years to come.

I would also like to thank UNODC and the International Narcotics Control Board for their critical work in meeting the threats of methamphetamine and illegal trafficking in precursor chemicals. This Commission's activity over recent years on this issue and the resolutions that this body has passed have provided a huge boost to global chemical control efforts. In 2006, a resolution passed that requested all members to provide annual estimates of licit commercial need for methamphetamine chemical precursors to the INCB. These systems are vital to competent authorities of exporting countries when evaluating the legitimacy of proposed authorizations to export. The U.S. is pleased to note that over 100 countries and jurisdictions have provided these voluntary estimates to date, and for those members that have not yet done so, we again ask that you consider providing these estimates as soon as possible.

We also remain extremely concerned by the continued worldwide use of cannabis. Though youth consumption is down within the U.S., rates of use are still unacceptably high and we are committed to driving our domestic consumption rates down further. One factor behind our alarm has been recent research from around the world on the association between cannabis use and mental health problems. This is of real concern and should serve as a reminder to us to tirelessly work to change outdated misperceptions of the dangers of cannabis. My government has introduced a resolution focusing on the health consequences of cannabis and we ask for your support.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to close by reemphasizing that we are on the right path. The UN Conventions provide a workable framework for international cooperation, and our UNGASS commitments provide the correct roadmap. We all have much to be proud of over the past ten years, and much more to accomplish over the next ten. The United States looks forward to collaborating with UNODC, the INCB, and our fellow Member States during this 51<sup>st</sup> Session towards preparing for the review of the United Nations Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS).

Thank you for your continued work against drugs and for the opportunity to address you today.