



OPENING REMARKS FROM THE SECRETARY FOR SECURITY

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, let me extend a warm welcome to you all, especially those who have come from overseas, the Mainland and Macao. We are delighted that you have chosen to take part in this important event.

According to the World Drug Report 2004¹, it is estimated that in 2001-03, there were about 185 million people abusing drugs², accounting for about 4.7% of the global population aged 15 to 64. Illicit drug markets know no borders, and the transnational nature of drug manufacturing and trafficking sometimes puts criminals beyond the reach of any single government, rich or poor. Drug abusers sometimes become drug peddlers in order to make money to satisfy their craving. Needle-sharing among drug addicts is one of the common causes for HIV/AIDS infection. Proceeds from drugs in turn finance other criminal activities.

To break this vicious cycle and tackle this global menace, cooperation among jurisdictions, whether in the form of joint law enforcement efforts, or sharing of information and experience, is essential. It is precisely with this in mind that the theme of this Conference is to explore and share information on “Recent Advances in Anti-substance Abuse Initiatives in the Global Context”.

To tackle the problem of drug, Hong Kong has been adopting a five-pronged approach, namely legislation and law enforcement, treatment and rehabilitation, preventive education and publicity, research, and international cooperation.

We adopt a ‘zero tolerance’ policy towards drug-related crimes. On legislation and law enforcement, possessing or trafficking dangerous or controlled drugs is a serious criminal offence and offenders are liable to severe penalty. The Hong Kong Police Force and the Customs and Excise Department have been working hard to ensure that criminals are brought to justice.

On treatment and rehabilitation, our philosophy is that drug abusers should be given a chance to cut their ties with drugs and become productive and law-abiding citizens. To do this, we need the

¹ The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) publishes The World Drug Report every year to report on the global trend of drug production, abuse and trafficking situations.

² 185 million refers to the number of people who had consumed an illicit drug at least once in the 12 month-period preceding the assessment.

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support from the community. Our government has been working closely with voluntary organizations in providing treatment and rehabilitation services.

Education is the most powerful weapon in tackling drug abuse, especially amongst young people. We work hand in hand with schools, parents and the community to alert them to the harms of drugs. In 2004, our educational effort received a big boost with the establishment of the Hong Kong Drug InfoCentre, the first-ever exhibition centre on anti-drug education set up by the government.

International cooperation is as one of the key ingredients of our effort against transnational drug syndicates. Hong Kong has maintained and will continue to develop close cooperation with external agencies on various fronts covering collection and analysis of intelligence, law enforcement, judicial cooperation, experience sharing and information exchange on drug abuse and trafficking trends.

In Hong Kong, we devise our anti-drug strategy based on evidence collected through meticulous and scientific research. We are fortunate to have the support from academics and researchers who have contributed to our understanding of the drug problem, and the effectiveness of various modalities. The findings from these studies further sharpen our work in respect of education, treatment and rehabilitation.

Our sustained effort has indeed borne fruit. The number of reported drug abusers in Hong Kong has been on the downward trend since 2001. In 2003, the figures are the lowest in the past ten years. However, as drug trends and patterns change, we will have to respond quickly on all fronts to prevent the problem from getting out of hand, and to tackle new problems such as the increasing prominence of psychotropic substances arise, and the trend of poly-drug abuse, especially among the young. I am optimistic that we can keep the problem of drug abuse under control given the firm commitment of the government, the professionalism of our law enforcement officers and the dedication of social service workers.

Lastly, I would like to congratulate the Action Committee Against Narcotics and the organising committee for putting together this significant event. I wish all of you a productive Conference, and our overseas visitors an enjoyable stay in Hong Kong – Asia's world city.

Thank you very much.

Mr Ambrose Lee Siu-kwong, IDSM, JP