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Department of Justice

ADDRESS

OF

THE HONORABLE EDWIN MEESE III
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE

NCJRS

APR 22 1986

ACQUISITIONS

EAST ASIA PACIFIC NARCOTICS COORDINATORS CONFERENCE

TUESDAY, 18, 1986
BANGKOK, THAILAND

NOTE: Because Mr. Meese often speaks from notes, the speech as delivered may vary from this text. However, he stands behind this text as printed.

Appearing before you today reminds me of the old maxim about preaching to the choir. You good men and women are doing invaluable work. You are the soldiers on the front lines of the battle against narcotics, waging an important war against an evil that unquestionably threatens the moral, physical, medical and spiritual well being of your fellow Americans, and may I add, America's security as well.

And so I'm not here to tell you how to do your jobs. You do them well. Instead I'm here to learn from you, to congratulate and encourage you. And, I suppose like a "general" from headquarters should, I want to report to you soldiers in the field about our overall strategy. I'm here to emphasize just how seriously Washington takes the problem of narcotics trafficking, and what we are doing about it.

At the outset, I want to dispel any hint that we are sounding retreat in this battle. Forget the talk about drugs being an unwinnable fight. Forget the talk about hopelessness in Washington. The President has asked that we make the war against drug abuse our top priority at the Department of Justice. As Attorney General, I can assure you that this is our number one priority.

We are putting more people, more money, more effort and more determination into this struggle than ever before in our history. The presence of all of you today is evidence of this commitment.

We are doing more, and will do more, overseas and domestically, than ever before. To borrow one of President Reagan's favorite expressions, "you ain't seen nothing yet."

We are attacking drugs at both the levels of supply and demand. For some years now the United States, through the efforts of people like you, has worked hard, trying to stem the inflow of drugs into America. But, as we've learned through sad experience, we can never shut down every drug producer everywhere in the world. And that is why we have begun a new effort to stem the demand for illegal drugs. We must, and we will, curb our nation's enormous and destructive appetite for drugs. When we approach the point where the American people won't buy drugs, we won't have to worry about who's willing to sell.

But I'll get to that in a moment. To begin, I want to compliment all of you, the representatives of the United States government, who have helped us make progress against drug trafficking in the East Asian area, particularly here in Southeast Asia.

The "Golden Triangle" has long been a major source of opiates and other narcotics. DEA's latest estimate is that 17 percent of the opium entering the United States came from southeast Asia. There are few places in the world where the challenge of controlling drugs is more compelling than in this region.

Both opium and marijuana are cultivated in huge quantities here. Thailand is both a source country and a key transit nation

for heroin and other opiates originating in Burma. Refineries on the Thai-Malaysian border convert the raw material into hard drugs. Opiates are smuggled out of Thailand in numerous ways -- via air, aboard ship, fishing trawlers, and by land transportation into Malaysia. In some areas cultivation and trafficking is under the control of political insurgents. Clearly, you face a monumental struggle in this region.

Yet with all these obstacles, we've demonstrated that the United States and the government of a producer country can work together successfully. Indeed, we've worked together with the Royal Thai government to make substantial progress in achieving our mutual goals.

Drug related arrests during 1985 totaled more than 37,000 up from 34,000 during 1984. Some 3.3 tons of opium, and two metric tons of heroin were seized by authorities. During the 1984-85 growing season the Royal Thai Army took 552 hectares out of opium cultivation, and manually eradicated 517 hectares. Most importantly, these control activities showed that crops could be controlled without serious political and social repercussions. The Army is now planning an expanded eradication operation for the 1985-86 season.

Together the Thai Border Patrol Police and the Provincial Police launched extensive manual marijuana eradication campaigns in the northeast, destroying more than 1,900 tons of fresh marijuana in the fields. Authorities seized another 101 metric tons.

Now, none of this is to suggest that the war against

narcotics in this area is won, or anything close to it. We all know that to date efforts have only put a dent in the overall problem. Nonetheless, these efforts are significant. They are important both because they are evidence of a tougher commitment to fighting drugs by the Thai government, and because they are typical of a new awareness of governments around the globe that drug abuse is an international crisis. Let's not forget that before 1958 opium cultivation was a legal activity in Thailand. Indeed, much of it was cultivated under license under a government controlled monopoly. For much of the hill tribe population of Thailand, opium cultivation is an occupation dating back hundreds of years. Against this backdrop, it is unreasonable to expect immediate, total, success.

But the Royal Thai government, like the governments of producer countries the world over, has come to understand the threat narcotics pose to its own population. The Thai government estimates the number of drug addicts in the country to be between 300,000 and 500,000. Studies indicate that about 35,000 hill tribe villagers smoke opium. Indeed, although Thailand is the source for opium products smuggled abroad, it ironically consumes more than it produces, and may thus be a net importer of opiates.

Accordingly, governments like that of Thailand have now largely put in place the legal and law enforcement measures necessary to wage a campaign against drug cultivation, distribution, and abuse. Moreover, they have begun to do something about curing the addicts themselves. There are now 65 approved treatment/rehabilitation programs operated by the

Ministries of Public Health.

In focusing so far on Thailand, I do not mean to imply that the problem of drug production in the Golden Triangle is limited to Thailand only. Quite the contrary. Burma, the largest country in the region, remains the largest producer of opiates destined for international markets. Indeed, Burma produces better than four-fifths of Southeast Asia's opium.

But Burma, too, has begun eradication programs. This year that country will begin an expanded eradication program to destroy poppy cultivation -- even in those areas controlled by insurgent armies.

The drug abuse problem here mirrors that in other parts of Asia, the Near East, and Latin America. Drug abuse is no longer viewed simply as a problem of the United States in particular, or of the West generally. It is a worldwide threat. And it is in the interest of every nation to do something about it.

All around the world we are seeing the problem of illegal drugs treated with new seriousness and new resolve.

The Secretary General of the United Nations has provided leadership in this area. Indeed, the United Nations is considering a new convention against drug trafficking, and the General Assembly has set into motion the process for planning the United Nations world conference on narcotics and drug abuse, called for June, 1987 in Vienna.

In 1985, during the United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, held in Milan, the issue of the need for concerted action on narcotics

control received major attention. This is in clear contrast to the convention five years before when the problem was paid scant attention. But in 1985 the Congress unanimously adopted a resolution which endorses the measures being undertaken by the United Nations toward the drafting of a new convention.

Last May, at the Bonn Economic Summit, President Reagan and the heads of the seven economic summit nations agreed on the need for a higher priority for narcotic control measures. This call for action was followed by a meeting of narcotics experts from all seven nations, and the subsequent approval of the report these experts generated by the foreign ministries of their respective nations.

And, of course, First Lady Nancy Reagan's efforts, including her two First Ladies' Conferences, have done much to bring the crises of drug abuse among the young directly to the attention to the First Families of the world.

As Attorney General, I've met with the heads of state, cabinet ministers, and law enforcement officials from many countries, including such nations as Spain, Great Britain, Italy, Switzerland, Austria and Mexico during the last year. Based on these discussions I know that international cooperation has never been stronger. Through diplomatic initiatives, bilateral assistance and multilateral assistance, participation in international organizations, and better communications, we are working with governments around the globe. A variety of departments and agencies within our government are playing a part. The State Department, through the Bureau of International

Narcotics Matters, is cooperating with DEA, AID, the Customs Service and Coast Guard to halt the flow of drugs into the U.S.

Around the world, but particularly in Latin America, Southwest and Southeast Asia, the INM and the DEA are working with host government law enforcement agencies to plan and implement anti-drug strategies. And we are getting results.

But these international efforts would be superfluous were we not similarly committed in our domestic enforcement efforts. Domestically, the battle against narcotics has been characterized by unprecedented cooperation and teamwork among federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. Interdiction, investigations, and eradication programs have emphasized joint and coordinated operations involving all levels of government.

This administration has emphasized interagency as well as intergovernmental cooperation. We have brought together the U.S. attorneys, the FBI, the DEA, the Coast Guard, Customs Service and the Criminal Investigation Division of the IRS. Together we have compiled an outstanding enforcement record. Statistics as of January of this year show that the work of the regional organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Forces has resulted in the indictment of over 7700 major traffickers during the three years these groups have been in existence.

One of the most effective new techniques against narcotics barons is taking the profit out of their illicit businesses through the asset forfeiture process. In 1985 our task forces seized 164.5 million dollars in non drug assets: 49.5 million in cash and 115 million in property. Thanks to the Comprehensive

Crime Control Act of 1984, we are now able to share the proceeds of these asset forfeitures with local law enforcement agencies.

Clearly, these tough enforcement policies are getting results. During 1985 federal drug arrests increased about 20 percent. Arrests of major traffickers increased 40 percent.

However, as we have learned through sad experience, the war against drug abuse will never be won until we reduce the demand for illegal drugs.

Prevention and education campaigns are starting to reach more and more of our citizens, particularly young people. Again, our nation has had great leadership in this area, particularly through the efforts of First Lady Nancy Reagan. The National Partnership Against Drug and Alcohol Abuse and the Sports Drug Awareness Program are just two examples of over 8000 organizations and activities devoted to this purpose.

To combat all forms of drug addiction, our best weapon is the truth. And so we are finding creative new ways for bringing the truth about drugs to young people.

Recently, New York Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward and I visited a group of sixth-graders at P.S. 335 in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. There we observed a classroom demonstration of the city's new "School Program to Educate and Control Drug Abuse," or SPECDA. The program includes a film and a specially designed "team teaching" curriculum taught by police officers and Board of Education drug counselors.

We are taking the profits out of drugs through forfeiture, and using them to profit our children through education.

I'm convinced that through the combined approach of strong enforcement and effective education, we can make major progress against drug trafficking and drug abuse.

All around us there is evidence that America is at last waking up to this problem. Last week both major weekly news magazines ran cover stories on the drug problem. National newscasts devoted significant time to exploring the magnitude of this crises. The Commissioner of Baseball came down hard on drug abusers. He fined a number of players 10 percent of their salaries and directed the money -- not an insignificant amount, since, as we know, athletes make a lot more than government employees -- to drug education and rehabilitation programs. Indeed, a number of professional athletes are now coming forward and volunteering to have drug testing clauses put into their contracts. And I understand that in a few weeks a number of rock artists will do a major benefit for drug prevention.

Everything going on in the United States and around the world indicates that we are at a critical turning point in the war against drugs. The next few years, indeed, the coming year, may well be the time we make or break this struggle. I know how hard you work. I know how dedicated you truly are. But I am asking that in the coming year we spare no effort, no sacrifice, in really trying to stop the production, distribution, and use of illegal drugs. The extra mile to victory is now before us.

American parents and children may not get the chance to thank you all personally. Allow me to speak on their behalf. Every child saved from drugs, every family spared the pain of

addiction, every crime left uncommitted, is a victory of incalculable worth. For all the saved children, whole families, and better communities your work has already made possible, I say thank you. For all the lives that will be saved by the work we are about to do, let us carry on our missions with zeal of crusaders.

Thank you very much.