



**Fifth Meeting of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA)
Fact-Finding Committee (AIFOCOM) to Combat the Drug Menace
Singapore, 22-25 June 2008**

**SPEECH BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR HO PENG KEE,
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AT THE OPENING CERENOMY OF THE 5TH ASEAN INTER-
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY FACT FINDING COMMITTEE
(AIFOCOM) TO COMBAT THE DRUG MENACE ON MONDAY, 23 JUNE 2008,
10.15 A.M. AT THE PARLIAMENT HOUSE**

President of AIPA and Speaker of Parliament Mr. Abdullah Tarmugi

Heads of AIFOCOM Member Delegations

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

I am happy to join you this morning for the opening of the “5th ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly Fact Finding Committee to Combat the Drug Menace”.

2. Singapore is widely recognized for its tough stance against illicit drugs, adopting a zero-tolerance approach which has resulted in a relatively drug-free society. It is hard to imagine that three decades ago, our country was at risk of being enveloped by the problem of heroin abuse. Shortly after the first few cases were detected, the number of heroin abusers began to climb at an alarming rate. Today, the drug situation in Singapore is stable and under control. However, such an achievement did not come easily.

Singapore’s Concerted anti-drug strategy

3. The progress we have made in combating the drug problem comes from our anti-drug strategy targeted at reducing both drug supply and demand. It comprises a multi-pronged strategy of tough enforcement complemented by preventive education and effective rehabilitative and aftercare programmes run by voluntary welfare organizations in Singapore.

4. More importantly, we have in place strong political will, committed and competent government agencies, as well as strong community support to ensure that the anti-drug strategy is carried out effectively and anti-drug efforts are sustained.

Monitoring trade of precursor chemicals

5. While we have achieved good progress, we must continue to remain vigilant against the drug threat. As the Speaker of Parliament, Mr. Abdullah Tarmugi, pointed out in his opening address, our determination to eradicate the drug problem must not waiver. As the drug threat evolves, we should continually survey the situation and fine-tune our strategies against it.

6. The emergence of ATS¹ as the drug of choice in many countries is a huge concern. Fuelling the supply of ATS is the availability of precursor chemical that are used in their manufacture. Though not a producer of precursor chemical, Singapore has one of the busiest seaports in the world. About 80 percent of the goods that enter our ports are transshipped². Determined to prevent any transshipment of precursor chemicals through our ports, Singapore has put in place measures to closely monitor the movement of listed precursor chemicals. These measures include regular site visits to companies dealing with controlled chemicals, as well as scrutinizing the movement of controlled chemicals through an online trade declaration system.

7. At the international level, we also work closely with other countries to prevent the illegal diversion of precursors by instituting procedures such as Pre-Export Notification, No Objection Letter and Import Authorization. In addition, Singapore has also implemented the recommendations made by the International Narcotics Control Board concerning the limited international special surveillance list of non-schedule substances.

Need for enhanced measures against precursors

8. While current international regulation on precursors has made an impact in hindering the production of ATS, more intensive efforts are needed in this region.

9. As pointed out in a study conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to evaluate ASEAN's progress towards being "Drug Free", many countries in this region lack a robust precursor control framework. Specifically, "in most cases, legislation exists but is inadequate to deal with current levels of diversion"³. It is therefore critical that countries in the region take steps to develop and strengthen their laws and monitoring mechanisms in line with the requirements under the 1988 UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

10. It is, however, not enough to curb the diversion of precursor chemicals. More needs to be done. According to the International Narcotics Control Board, there have been few cases involving the diversion of precursors of ATS, with the exception of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, in international trade. It is believed that as the monitoring of shipments of the relevant chemicals in international trade became tighter worldwide, traffickers turned to obtain these chemicals from domestic distribution channels, smuggling them thereafter to the illicit drug manufacturing areas⁴.

¹ Amphetamine-Type Stimulants include Ecstasy and Ice.

² "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report", Mar 2008

³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "Drug-Free ASEAN 2015: Status and Recommendations", pg 63

⁴ International Narcotics Control Board Annual Report 2007, Pg 28

11. To mitigate the situation, enhancing communication between the relevant authorities and the chemical or pharmaceutical companies is important, thereby enhancing the awareness of these companies. These companies could then act as an additional pair of “eyes” to monitor the movement of precursor chemicals and alert the authorities should there be any suspected diversion of chemicals to illicit use. At the same time, countries should also consider introducing tougher penalties to deter would-be perpetrators of precursor diversion and trafficking.

Sustaining alternative development efforts

12. As we battle against the threat of ATS and diversion of precursor chemicals, we should not forget to sustain the momentum against illicit crops cultivation. This is because many countries in the region continue to grapple with problems caused by plant-based drugs such as cannabis and opiates.

13. Today, the opium poppy production from Southeast Asia is a far cry from what it was back in the days when the Golden Triangle dominated the world’s opium poppy production. However, as Speaker Abdullah Tarmugi pointed earlier, the recent increase in opium poppy production, if not reversed, would undermine the region’s progress towards a Drug-Free ASEAN 2015.

14. We should also keep a tight rein on cannabis, which continues to be illicitly cultivated in the region⁵. Although efforts to eradicate the illicit crop have achieved some results, new cultivation areas continue to spring up in the region. Most of the time, it is difficult to accurately estimate the location and total hectares of cannabis, as unlike opium poppy which is grown in huge fields, cannabis is often grown in small plots by the users themselves.⁶

15. An important factor that has contributed to the decrease in opium poppy cultivation is the implementation of well-executed alternative development programmes, such as Thailand’s *Doi Tung⁷ Development Project*. These programmes that work towards eradicating illicit crop cultivation, also address the broader socio-economic situation of the farmers and their overall quality of life, thus keeping the farmers from going back to illicit crop cultivation.

16. All crop eradication programmes must be sustained by alternative development projects. This is perhaps the greatest challenge – to ensure sustainability and prevent farmers from going back to illicit crop cultivation. Besides the lack of financial resources and technological know-how, the lack of equipment and market access are also major obstacles to successful alternative development. For example, many illicit opium poppy cultivation areas in the region are found in remote mountainous border areas. This makes it difficult and more expensive to build up infrastructure in the area, which in turn makes it harder for farmers to secure markets for their produce. Unlike illicit drug crops where the “market” often goes to them, farmers have to go in search of new markets to sell the products intended to be “substitutes” for illicit drug crops.

⁵ International Narcotics Control Board Annual Report 2007, Pg 79

⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs Crime, “World Drug Report 2007”, Pg 7

⁷ Pronounced as *Doi Dtoong*

17. Support from the government to the farmers in the form of incentives and subsidies are important to ensure that farmers do not go back to illicit crop cultivation. More importantly, as illustrated by the *Doi Tung Development Project*, active participation by the private sector is crucial in sustaining alternative development efforts. There is therefore a need to move towards cultivating strategic partnerships with the private sector and civil society in order to support socio-economic development in areas where illicit drugs are produced.

Conclusion

18. The battle against drugs is an on-going one. As we can see, there is much for us to do in tackling the ever-evolving nature of the drug menace. But, let us not be disheartened. In this regard, I urge all of you to leverage on this useful platform to engage one another and to share experiences.

19. On this note, I wish all of you a fruitful meeting.

20. Thank you.