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REMARKS

OF

THE HONORABLE EDWIN MEESE III
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

AT THE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT TRAFFICKING

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

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Ladies and gentlemen: Today we are joined, government officials and private citizens, in our struggle against the evil which has preyed upon young people, devastated families and threatened the well-being of nations worldwide. Drug abuse has plagued millions of people and threatens to enslave millions more. It is the great equalizer, victimizing rich and poor alike, male and female, making no distinction on the basis of skin color, language, or custom, or even age. In fact, it is almost like the Massacre of the Innocents, in that haunting painting by Bruegel in this great city's Museum of Fine Arts.

But this international conference marks a turning point in the world battle against illicit drugs. For the first time, important leaders from around the world are expressing united commitment through international cooperation in the field. This timely conference gives the lie to the predictions of those who say that the world community of diverse nations cannot pursue common goals.

Our task is not easy. Drug traffickers have vast networks, profits and arms at their disposal. They have no need to advertise their products, and they are able to gain access to villages, schoolyards, workplaces, and locker rooms. Even so, the drug lords do not have right on their side. They will inhabit the dark part of this earth, but one day, the light of justice will flush them out.

You have only to speak to the widow of Colombia's National Police Director, Jaime Ramirez, to know the burden of justice that some must bear in the fight against drug trafficking. The fact that Ambassador Parejo from Colombia is here with us is a testament to his courage and conviction in the face of evil. And the hundreds of wives and children of slain policemen and soldiers in Mexico, Thailand, Burma, Italy, the United States and other countries can tell us in human terms about the high price the just must pay.

We are called upon today to commit ourselves to a higher good. At this historic conference, called in 1985 by Secretary General Perez de Cuellar, we have come together as the family of man to share our knowledge, our resources and our will in the fight against drugs. This is a truly unifying cause which speaks to the best in all of us -- to "the better angels of our nature," as one of our Presidents, Abraham Lincoln, put it.

We meet at a moment when the resources committed to the cause of combatting drugs are growing at a steep rate. The resources include indefinable but vital agreements -- political will. Let me express my country's particular respect for those nations that are being exploited economically and politically by the drug traffickers and nonetheless are fighting back. They know the meaning of "political will."

Our nations must work shoulder to shoulder to make certain

that drug traffickers are welcome nowhere, that they have no hiding place -- on land or sea.

At the same time, we must work to ensure that our children are strong enough to "Say no to drugs, and yes to life." This message must begin early, when children are starting to make choices and learning the difference between right and wrong. This message has been translated into the six U.N. languages. It is a timeless and wise message.

I recently read an account of a young woman's journey into the world of drug abuse and back. In her own words she tells of what she had lost to drugs -- her adolescence, her money, her job, independence and dignity. She writes:

"(After trying drugs) I thought a door had opened in my mind, a secret passage to the freedom of my imagination. In reality, an escape hatch had become affixed to my psyche -- I would use it to avoid the pains and pressures I encountered in adolescence and throughout life.

My private world of altered perceptions was an enjoyable playground for many years. But in the end, its allure cost me more than I wanted to pay, cost me far more than the million dollars I spent through drug use: It cost me my ability to concentrate, to communicate, and to confront my feelings honestly. In time, I created a wasteland of lies out of the rich soil in which my values had been rooted. All that had been given to me in good faith, from material goods to trust and love, I eventually traded for drugs."¹

Those words by one of my countrymen have been echoed all over the world by addicts trying to explain the mysterious pull

¹ Nancy Dudley, "A Million Dollar Habit," Washingtonian, June, 1987.

that drugs have had on them. The drugs may be different, the circumstances varied, but the results are always the same: broken promises, broken families, broken lives -- even death itself.

The toll that drugs exact on our societies extends beyond the individual victim. In a sense, all of us become victims, for our health and safety is at stake when others use drugs. We become victims of the crimes their addicts commit to sustain their habit. Community values crumble. Institutions weaken, and our governments must divert resources and attention to those problems of crime and corruption that invariably accompany drug production, trafficking and abuse. Narcoterrorism flourishes as terrorists and traffickers enter conspiracies of convenience. Drug production and trafficking also have prevented social and economic development, corrupting even whole societies through the tawdry promises of wealth through drugs.

The United States has learned about drugs the hard way. Our experience has taught us many lessons. The first is that drug control must be one of our highest priorities both as a government and as a people. Last September, President Reagan and First Lady Nancy Reagan addressed the people of the United States and asked for their cooperation in the fight against illicit drugs.

Mrs. Reagan's international campaign against drugs has involved many First Ladies from around the world -- including

Mrs. Perez de Cuellar. She has said, "Each of us has to put our principles and consciences on the line -- whether in social settings or in the workplace -- to set forth solid standards and stick to them. There's no moral middle ground. Indifference is not an option. We [must] create an outspoken intolerance for drug use."

Led by the President and the First Lady, our nation is striving to create a drug-free country. Our federal, state, and local governments have joined together to work towards this goal, and the United States private sector has generously given its time and resources. Already there are signs of hope indicating that more and more of my fellow citizens are getting the message that drugs threaten health and safety, indeed that drugs can kill.

As the Chairman of our National Drug Policy Board, I have the responsibility and the privilege of overseeing the formulation and execution of a national policy that aims to reduce both the supply of and demand for drugs, and to do so with equal vigor. Through this Board, we have been able to mobilize additional resources and direct our efforts in an effective, coordinated attack on both the demand and supply of illicit drugs.

Last year our Congress enacted historic legislation to implement the President's drug policy. In order to reduce demand for drugs, the Congress increased funding for prevention efforts.

It created a National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Abuse Information and also an Office of Substance Abuse Prevention. It strengthened our drug abuse treatment and rehabilitative capabilities.

At the same time, the Congress strengthened our hand against the drug supply. Specifically, it stiffened legal penalties for narcotics trafficking and closed legal loopholes that had been used by the drug traffickers to circumvent the law. Congress also outlawed and severely penalized certain methods used to launder illicit drug profits, to manufacture controlled substance analogs, and to distribute drug paraphernalia. And our lawmakers ensured that it is more difficult for convicted drug traffickers to hide or retain their ill gotten profits.

Our forfeiture laws, which enable us to seize the property of drug merchants, represent one of our most effective weapons in fighting the illicit narcotics trade, for through their use we can separate the traffickers from their money -- their lifeline. We are vigorously pursuing drug traffickers and separating them from their profits through controls on money laundering and implementation of asset seizure.

The United States has pledged its help -- and we are renewing that pledge -- to work within the international community with other nations to eradicate the evil of drugs from our world. We seek to assist our friends and colleagues around the globe, to stop illicit trafficking worldwide, to eradicate

illicit narcotics crops, to help development programs that enable countries to break the habit of financial reliance on the drug trade, and to plan prevention and treatment programs.

The United Nations, under the leadership of Secretary General Perez de Cuellar, has taken important steps to make our world safer from illegal drugs.

This Conference began as a dream and has become a reality. Many people have worked hard to ensure that these sessions are a success, especially the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, and the UN Secretariat for ICDAIT, under the able leadership of Mrs. Tamar Oppenheimer.

We are called to action in this fight against narcotics. But words are not enough. Throughout these sessions, and in our bilateral and multilateral discussions, we must seek ways to work together practically and effectively against this menace that threatens ourselves and our posterity.

Before us is the comprehensive multidisciplinary outline -- called the CMO -- which represents the first-ever world plan of attack against drugs. It successfully incorporates the many essential elements of a balanced anti-drug approach and challenges governments to further develop their own programs in this area. The United States believes the CMO is a valuable addition to current international drug control doctrines, and we strongly support its adoption.

It is absolutely essential that nations work together to strike down this increasingly global threat. Successes already are evident. International control and monitoring of precursor and essential chemicals have led to the arrest of many traffickers. Joint operations across national boundaries involving maritime and customs services regularly interdict illegal drugs. These operations also provide valuable information to law enforcement agencies for use in extended investigations. Effective extradition and mutual legal assistance treaties exemplify how nations can cooperate within established systems of law to combat drug trafficking. As the Colombian Government courageously showed with the extradition of Carlos Lehder, international legal cooperation can literally close the net on major drug traffickers.

On behalf of the United States, I today reaffirm our support for the draft convention against illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. This important document has the potential to usher in a new era of international legal cooperation. My government believes it is critically important that the intergovernmental expert drafting group achieve observable progress, so that a plenipotentiary conference can be convened in 1988 in order to adopt the convention.

My colleague, Secretary of State George Shultz, has said on a number of occasions that drug trafficking is "the modern day version of piracy." This is a fitting metaphor, since pirates

refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of states, pillaging, plundering and terrorizing the civilized world. It is also apt since piracy was eventually eliminated through the force of international law that showed the pirates for what they were: petty criminals whose greed clouded their sense of right and wrong.

The pirates of earlier history are no different from the drug traffickers of today who are attempting to disrupt daily life and undermine institutions. But, as nations join together, armed with sound international legal tools, drug traffickers will have nowhere to go -- but prison.

The United States would also like to take this opportunity to express its support for the activities of the United Nations drug control bodies -- the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC), the Division on Narcotic Drugs (DND) and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). Under the outstanding leadership of Giuseppe di Genaro, UNFDAC is an increasingly positive force in the field of international drug control. Its flexible approach in designing anti-drug projects consistent with local conditions assists in the development of different models and techniques. UNFDAC has successful programs in many of the drug-producing areas of the world, and presents the opportunity for farmers to engage in alternatives to narcotics.

These innovations are a valuable contribution to the international effort. My government urges all those represented here to continue to support the Fund and where feasible, to commit additional financial resources to ensure that the activities of the Fund are sustained.

The Division on Narcotic Drugs and the International Narcotics Control Board deserves praise for its fine work over the past months in the wake of severe financial constraints. The Division continues to support and design valuable programs and training in demand reduction, law enforcement techniques, and laboratory skills. Under the presidency of Betty Gough, the Board enjoys an excellent and well-earned reputation for its expertise and diplomacy in the monitoring of the international drug control treaties. The U.S. appreciates the fine work of the Board and its Secretariat.

In closing, I would like to urge all delegations here today to work together to achieve consensus on the issues before us during the conference. My delegation is firmly committed to it. We must show the traffickers our unity of purpose. We are being called upon to eliminate the scourge of drug trafficking from this earth, a task we cannot do separately, but one which we can and must do together.

As with the fight against terrorism, so it is with the battle against drugs. Success against these truly international problems depends upon political leadership, specifically upon the

willingness of political leaders to encourage their countries to take determined action. This Conference is important because it brings together officials of a high level who are ready to commit material resources and political will in the global drug battle. When the nations of the world have joined together in the past to address a particular problem, they have enjoyed success. In the cause for which we are gathered, we can do no less.

While we're here at this conference, let's remember to take a look around this city. Here you will find great monuments to all the noblest aspirations of mankind: the Stephansdom and other beautiful churches that testify to man's faith in God; the Hofburg, with all its great art; the Staatsoper, home of such great music. And think about this: drugs say no to these things and to everything like them throughout the world. The poor soul who turns to drugs turns in on himself, into an unreal world, implicitly despising other people and all that is best in himself. A culture plagued with drugs cannot produce the Stephansdom, the Hofburg, or the Staatsoper. Neither can it produce a Mozart, Strauss, or Schubert. The fight against drugs is the fight for civilization, as well as the fight for each individual who might otherwise get caught in the drug world.

Thank you very much.