



ASIA-PACIFIC FORUM AGAINST DRUGS

Working towards a “Drug Free Society for Our Children”

The National Council Against Drug Abuse (NCADA) of Singapore organised the Asia-Pacific Forum Against Drugs (APFAD) on 27 August 2015. The Forum brought together local and foreign participants from government agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs) and civil society groups, all with a common purpose of discussing how best to address the worrying global trend of drug liberalisation and the relentless lobbying of the pro-drug groups.

2 The upcoming United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS-WDP) in April 2016 will discuss the future of the global drug regime. NCADA is concerned with the weakening of global attitudes against drugs and the push for more liberal drug policies. To protect our children’s future, there is a need to strengthen the resilience of our society and youths against illicit drugs, and unite anti-drug advocates in the Asia-Pacific region to stand together to emphasise the relevance and importance of a drug-free society.

3 APFAD aims to rally people across the Asia-Pacific region against drugs and raise awareness of the lobbying efforts by pro-drug groups. Close to 200 participants from 18 countries mainly from the Asia Pacific region, attended the forum. Foreign and local speakers addressed various aspects of the drug abuse situation. Among them was Secretary General for the European Cities Against Drugs, Mr Erik Leijonmarck, who spoke about how anti-drug advocates could constructively engage in the global drug policy debate at UNGASS-WDP 2016. Dr Kevin Sabet, the Director of the Drug Policy Institute in Florida, elaborated on the challenges posed by efforts to regulate the use and production of cannabis.

4 Mr Victor Lye, Chairman of NCADA, rallied the APFAD participants to adopt an APFAD Declaration as a statement of common purpose. He said: “All of us have a stake in building a drug-free society for our children. We are very encouraged by the support of participants at the Forum today. In every ground-up initiative, we all know that the beginning is the hardest. However, given the importance of our cause, we shall persist in our efforts. I hope APFAD participants will uphold the APFAD Declaration in their home countries and promote the green and white anti-drug ribbon as our collective symbol for the anti-drug cause through social media and other channels. We need to secure strong support from our people to build a drug-free society for our children. We need to stand together to oppose the legalisation of drugs and speak up for our children at the UNGASS-WDP in April 2016.”

5 NCADA will make the APFAD Declaration available on its website by September so that like-minded individuals and the community can also speak up and make a similar stand against drugs. A copy of the APFAD Declaration is provided at Annex for reference.

National Council Against Drug Abuse (NCADA)
Secretariat
27 August 2015

Photo 1: Chairman NCADA Mr Victor Lye giving a speech at the APFAD. Photo credit: Home Team News



Photo 2: Guest of Honour Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister, Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs, together with Chairman NCADA Mr Victor Lye and foreign delegate Mr Chun Young Koo at the APFAD. Photo credit: Home Team News



Photo 3: Participants at the APFAD. Photo credit: Home Team News





Asia Pacific Forum Against Drugs APFAD 2015



APFAD DECLARATION

1. We envision a drug-free world for our children, and uphold Article 33 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child to protect our children from drug abuse:

“States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances.”

2. Drug abuse is a global problem that harms millions of people, and destabilises families, which are the cornerstones of strong communities and nations. All peoples have the right to expect their governments and civil society to work together for a drug-free society. Our children have the right to grow up and develop in stable families, where they can achieve their potential, free from drugs.
3. We oppose the legalisation of drugs because such policies send the wrong message to our children that drugs are not harmful and addictive, which will inevitably lead to an increase in drug demand and abuse. There is an urgent need to counter the well-funded pro-drug lobby which aims to decriminalise drug abuse and legalise drugs.
4. Drug abuse should be addressed in a comprehensive and holistic manner, involving both drug demand and supply reduction measures. These measures should include preventive education, rehabilitation, evidence-based research and enforcement efforts. Drug rehabilitation programmes should have the goal of helping drug abusers kick the habit. We must be firm with repeat abusers to strongly discourage relapse and prevent contamination of others.
5. All persons have the responsibility to speak up and make a stand for a drug-free world for our children. Such a vision is neither utopian nor impossible. We call on all governments, non-government organisations (NGOs) and civil society groups to come together to combat drug trafficking and drug abuse, for the sake of our children, our families, and our communities around the world.

I, _____ (name) of _____ (country),

hereby pledge my support for the APFAD Declaration.

Signature _____ Date _____

Name of Organisation (Optional): (*Government/ NGO/ Civil Society Group)

Note:

****For participants to delete where appropriate:***

Individuals may pledge in their personal capacity, or in both their personal capacity and as a representative of their organisation.

SPEECH FOR MR MASAGOS ZULKIFLI, MINISTER, PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE AND SECOND MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS AND SECOND MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AT THE ASIA-PACIFIC FORUM AGAINST DRUGS ON 27 AUG 2015 AT 9.00AM

Mr Victor Lye, Chairman, National Council Against Drug Abuse,
Mr Ng Ser Song, Director, Central Narcotics Bureau,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

I am very happy to welcome you to the first-ever Asia-Pacific Forum against Drugs (APFAD) today. I want to thank the National Council Against Drug Abuse, or NCADA, for creating this platform, that gathers like-minded individuals from government and non-government organisations (NGOs) across the region to exchange knowledge and experience in our work to build a drug-free society.

A Drug-Free Asia-Pacific for our Children

2. The theme for this forum is “A Drug-Free Asia-Pacific for our Children”. We are here today because we all share a common vision – to build a drug-free society for our children.

3. In Singapore, we adopt a firm zero-tolerance stance against drugs. Singaporeans appreciate and enjoy the safe drug-free environment for our children and families, made possible by our comprehensive anti-drug policies. However, we cannot be complacent in this ongoing fight against drugs as the global drug situation remains challenging.

4. In recent years, we have seen growing calls from pro-drug lobbyists to decriminalise drug use and even legalise certain drugs. Many pro-drug activists have framed the fight against drugs as a “failed war” and are moving away from drug controls, and supporting approaches such as decriminalisation and legalisation. Some countries in Europe and South America, as well as some states in the USA, have adopted such policies and are also encouraging others to do the same. They have chosen this approach because they could not keep drug abuse low. Therefore, they focus instead on increasing their tax revenues or alleviating prison overcrowding through decriminalisation and legalisation. Hence, the next global debate on drug policies at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) in 2016 will mark an important crossroads in our fight against drugs.

5. The misconceptions being propagated on cannabis are another worrying development. Pro-drug lobbyists claim that cannabis is neither harmful nor addictive. However, there are compelling studies which show the permanent deterioration in brain functions of youths who use cannabis. There are also claims made about the efficacy of cannabis as a medicine. In fact, the medical benefits of cannabis are not conclusive at this point. Much more medical research and tests are still needed. Furthermore, even if it is proven that cannabis has medicinal value, the answer is still not de-criminalisation or legalisation. Cannabis must still be controlled and administered in the same professional manner as other drugs, such as the use of morphine for pain management.

6. We are worried that these global trends are influencing our young people to take a liberal view on drug use. This is where we, as a community, will need to stand firm, and stand together, to proactively dispel these myths. In order to safeguard our children's future, we must stay committed to building a drug-free community for all.

Community Togetherness

7. In recent years, Singapore has seen an increasing trend of drug use by young persons below the age of 30. I am sure this development is not unique to us and is a problem shared by our fellow participants. In a 2013 youth perception survey, we found that Singaporean youths, particularly those aged 16 to 21, tend to have more liberal attitudes towards drugs. They perceive drugs such as cannabis to be less harmful and addictive than "hard" drugs such as heroin and are hence more willing to experiment with these "soft" drugs. The misperception is perpetuated by information that is easily found on the internet, which is not necessarily accurate and may be half-truths, misinformation, and lies.

8. To tackle these trends, in November 2014, we convened a Task Force on Youths and Drugs, which I co-chaired with Minister of State Sim Ann. The Task Force involved representatives from government agencies, as well as non-government organisations and community partners. The organiser for the APFAD, NCADA, was one of the community organisations on the Task Force.

The Task Force has since completed its review and one of its key recommendations was to enhance preventive drug education outreach to older youths aged above 16. We believe that effective preventive drug education is our first line of defence against drugs.

9. The Taskforce also recommended building a community of advocates against drugs. Singapore's experience with this Task Force, and indeed, in our ongoing fight to combat drugs, has been that it is crucial to partner and harness the support of different community stakeholders in order for our efforts to be effective. "Community Togetherness" allows us to better tackle the complex issue of drugs more effectively and holistically.

One Asia-Pacific Against Drugs

10. This is why I am very glad that NCADA has taken the initiative and the bold step of organising this first-ever Asia Pacific Forum Against Drugs, or APFAD in short. APFAD is a good platform for learning and networking. NCADA has put together a comprehensive programme and has invited speakers like Mr Erik Leijonmarck and Mr Kevin Sabet, who will share their experiences and research findings with you later today on UNGASS 2016 and on cannabis respectively.

NCADA has also invited Mr Tay Bian How from the Colombo Plan, Mr Pubudu Sumanasekara from IOGT International, and other practitioners from Singapore, to share more about preventive drug education, treatment and rehabilitation.

11. I am also very encouraged to see so many familiar faces from within Singapore's anti-drug ecosystem, and also new friends, from the Asia-Pacific region and even beyond. Let us take this opportunity to not only learn from the speakers, but also from each other, and to build up and strengthen our networks and partnerships with each other.

12. Ladies and Gentlemen, please also take a look in the APFAD conference kit which was specially prepared for you. In there, you will find a green and white anti-drug collar pin that is attached to a card holder. The green and white colours of the anti-drug ribbon signify 'Health', 'Vitality' and 'Strength'. Do wear this anti-drug ribbon during the forum as a symbol of our united stand against drugs.

13. Last but not least, I understand that NCADA, as the organiser of the forum, plans to put together an "APFAD Declaration". I encourage all participants to give their endorsement to make our stand against drugs clear to the rest of the world. The Declaration comprises key points of consensus centred on APFAD's vision of a drug-free society for our children. Drug abuse destroys lives and families. The addict causes harm not just to himself and his family, but also to his community and his society.

14. Apart from endorsing the Declaration, I also urge all of you to work with your respective governments to put across a clear and unequivocal position at UNGASS 2016 that there are still countries and organisations that have not given up the fight against drugs, and are working hard to achieve a society free from drug abuse, for the sake of our children.

Conclusion

15. Ladies and Gentlemen, our fight against drugs can only be effective if our communities continue to support the fight against the scourge of drugs. This cannot just be a whole-of-Government effort. It needs to be a whole-of-Society effort. We need all citizens to participate in every way they can – for example, by educating our children about drugs, or by helping addicts reintegrate into society. Lastly, as one united anti-drug community, we need to send a strong signal opposing drug abuse taking root in society.

16. With the joint efforts of non-government organisations, governments around the world, and the United Nations, I believe that it is possible to realise our vision of a drug-free world. I wish you a fruitful discussion ahead. Thank you.

SPEECH BY MR VICTOR LYE, CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL AGAINST DRUG ABUSE (NCADA) AT THE ASIA PACIFIC FORUM AGAINST DRUGS (APFAD) – 27 AUG 2015

Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister, Prime Minister's Office / Second Minister for Home Affairs /
Second Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Ng Ser Song, Director, Central Narcotics Bureau
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the Asia Pacific Forum Against Drugs!

About NCADA

1. The National Council Against Drug Abuse (NCADA) is the voice of Singapore's anti-drug movement. Bringing together members of Singapore's anti-drug ecosystem across both the private and public sectors, NCADA rallies community support for Singapore's zero tolerance stance against drug abuse.
2. Zero-tolerance means:
 - a. We reject the scourge of drug abuse;
 - b. We do not want harmful drugs in our society;
 - c. We tackle both supply and demand aspects of drug abuse;
 - d. We are tough against those who profit off drug abusers; and
 - e. We rehabilitate drug abusers, while deterring repeat abusers.

Resisting the Pro-Drug Lobby

3. Like other anti-drug advocates and community leaders across the globe, I am alarmed by the progress of the pro-drug lobby. Driven by greed and profit, the pro-drug lobby aims to remove the prohibitive provisions of the UN drug conventions, and pave the way for eventual legalization of drugs.

4. It may surprise you that drugs were once legal in Singapore. When Singapore was a British Colony, the Customs Department in 1910 collected levies from the legal sale of opium. By 1932, the revenue collected from opium reached S\$5.9 million, an enormous sum in those days. However, the social cost of legalised opium proved too high. Opium consumption was linked to crime, violence and the breakdown of the family unit. In 1946, opium was banned. We are better off after the ban, but the harm done to opium addicts and their families was to persist well into the 1970s. It would be a tragedy if history were to be repeated and drugs made legal again.
5. Drug legalisation will not solve the drug abuse problem. On the contrary, legalisation sends the wrong signal about the harm caused by drugs. In fact, it may lead to more addiction, as well as other health and social problems.
6. Arguments to legalize the drug trade are cunningly couched in eloquent socio-economic and health related cost-benefit arguments. One major motive is profit. This is clearly seen in the excited Wall Street talk about the “Cannabis Dividend” by financial and business interests. The profits will be squeezed out from the millions more drug abusers that the pro-drug lobby is seeking to ensnare. These future drug abusers being sought by the pro-drug lobby are our children!

APFAD

7. As anti-drug advocates, we must unite and take a stand for the sake of our children. NCADA hopes to rally like-minded anti-drug advocates to resist the relentless money-driven march of the pro-drug lobby, starting first in Asia, before linking up with anti-drug advocates across the globe.
8. To this end, I championed the idea for APFAD after attending the 2014 World Forum Against Drugs (WFAD) in Stockholm. At the WFAD, I met many like-minded anti-drugs NGOs and civil society groups. I was impressed by their resolve to resist the drug scourge as they shared best practices and presented scientific evidence to debunk the pro-drug lobby. However, Asia Pacific anti-drug advocates were noticeably absent.

9. I am therefore heartened to see almost 200 like-minded anti-drug advocates across 18 countries gathered here today at the first APFAD. I warmly welcome each one of you as well as ASEAN Senior Officials, fresh from your 36th ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting on Drugs. I wish to thank the NCADA Secretariat, the Central Narcotics Bureau and the Ministry of Home Affairs for making this historic and important event possible. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the encouragement and support of Minister Masagos in this challenging but satisfying anti-drug cause.
10. This APFAD is a timely networking and resource sharing platform for us like-minded anti-drug advocates. We will learn much from the presentations about youth drug abusers by Ms Vasuki Utravathy, Singapore Health Promotion Board (HPB) and Dr Jasmin Kaur of the Singapore Prison Service (SPS).
11. Mr Pubudu Sumanasekara, from the IOGT Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC), Mr Tay Bian How of the Colombo Plan Secretariat and Mr Abdul Karim from the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) will share their respective organisations' experiences on preventive education, treatment, rehabilitation and the reintegration of drug abusers into society.

Preparing for UNGASS 2016

12. The UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) will be held in April 2016 in New York. UNGASS in 1998 espoused the aim of a "Drug Free World" and the total eradication of drug supply and abuse. However, today, many countries are considering decriminalising drug use – and for some, legalisation – as well as taking a public health approach to tackling drug abuse.
13. ASEAN is the only regional bloc that has maintained a consistent drug-free stance in drug control policies. I trust that the 36th Meeting of ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters (ASOD) hosted by Singapore in the last few days will strengthen the resolve to coordinate our respective government's positions ahead of UNGASS 2016.
14. UNGASS 2016 is an inclusive process. Member states are encouraged to engage civil society organisations and NGOs on the world drug problem. Therefore, I urge all of you to work closely with your respective governments to have your voices heard and resist the pro-drug lobby. We must not allow the pro-drug lobby dismantle or weaken the UN's anti-drug stance as a first step to hooking our children into consuming drugs. Ultimately, we are fighting for the rights of our children to grow up in a drug-free society.
15. I am glad that Mr Erik Leijonmarck, Secretary General, European Cities Against Drugs (ECAD) – is here with us at APFAD. He will share insights on the "Road to UNGASS 2016". Please tap into Eric's wealth of knowledge in this subject – and build up our case to resist the pro-drug lobby.

The Cannabis Trojan Horse

16. The pro-drug lobby has a Trojan Horse in its spearhead cannabis legalization agenda. We must prevent it from reaching our shores. In May 2014, Uruguay became the first

country in the world to legalize the production, sale and consumption of cannabis. In the USA, 23 states have moved to legalise medicinal cannabis while four of those have done the same for recreational use. This violates US Federal Laws and the UN drug conventions. But the US Constitution limits the powers of the Federal Government to enforce its laws on the states. This US incapacity to enforce federal drug laws has dire global consequences.

17. The USA has been the leading light for other countries to adhere to the UN drug conventions. However, the pro-drug lobby's progress in undermining domestic USA drug policy will embellish weak countries to backpedal on their anti-drug efforts, with consequential escalation in organized crime and money laundering.
18. This is the global drug policy conundrum as the USA, the leading international enforcer of drugs prohibition is being undermined at home by the pro-drug lobby's "medical cannabis" Trojan Horse. Moreover, the soft power of the USA is being exploited by the pro-drug lobby to change societal attitudes towards drugs. US pop culture, celebrity endorsements and misguided campaigners are promoting the false notion that cannabis is harmless – all to build a new multi-billion dollar drug market targeting our children.
19. The scientific evidence is damning. Cannabis use affects brain development and lowers the IQ of adolescent users, leading to cognitive problems in everyday life¹. Other research shows that cannabis addiction is several times higher if the abuser is a teenager. Cannabis is a gateway drug, with cannabis abusers highly likely to abuse other drugs.² Yet, the cannabis legalization movement ignores such scientific evidence - only to wax lyrical about medical use to push its agenda. This is nothing more than an evil guise for ruthless profiteers.
20. Dr Kevin Sabet, Director, Drug Policy Institute and Assistant Professor, College of Medicine, University of Florida – is an expert on cannabis and drug policy. He will share his knowledge on the cannabis challenge for anti-drug advocates.

Adopt Green & White Ribbon as our Anti-drug Symbol

21. Minister Masagos has shared with you the significance of the Green & White Anti-Drug Symbol - 'Health', 'Vitality' and 'Strength'. In Singapore, we encourage our students to put on this Green & White Ribbon on World Drug Day (June 26) each year as a sign of their solidarity with our anti-drug cause.
22. I am happy to learn that the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting on Drug Matters which concluded yesterday – has proposed to adopt the Green & White Ribbon as the anti-drug symbol for ASEAN. But this symbol belongs to the children of this world, whose future drug-free society we are fighting for.
23. I urge you as APFAD participants to recognise and adopt this Green & White Ribbon as our common anti-drug symbol. Upon return to your home countries, raise awareness of our collective anti-drug cause by promoting this symbol through social media initiatives

¹ <http://guardianlv.com/2014/04/marijuana-use-does-cause-brain-damage/>
<http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/803197>

² <http://www.drugfreeworld.org/drugfacts/marijuana/on-the-road-to-drug-abuses.html>

and your anti-drug campaigns. NCADA will be happy to work with you wherever possible in this outcome.

APFAD Declaration

24. As anti-drug advocates, our voices must be heard collectively, loudly and clearly. To this end, it is important for every APFAD participant to endorse the APFAD Declaration which espouses the vision of a drug-free society for our children. Please read it and let it resonate within your hearts as fathers and mothers, as brothers and sisters – as members of humanity – for the sake of our children. Sign it and help us speak with one voice for our children at this APFAD.
25. NCADA will make the Declaration available online and propagate it via social media so that like-minded individuals and the community can also speak up and make a similar stand against drugs. I implore you to do the same for your respective countries upon your return.

Conclusion

26. Our children's future is at stake. Our strong anti-drug stance is about our values and the kind of society we want our children to grow up in. Unlike the pro-drug lobby, there is no profit to fund anti-drug advocacy. Instead, we are driven by our fundamental duty to protect our children's future. We need to stand together and oppose the legalisation of drugs. We must speak up for our children at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) in April 2016.
27. As pointed out by Minister Masagos, the support of the community is vital for our vision of a drug free society for our children. APFAD participants must take this lead to rally our respective peoples. As we return to our home countries, I call on each of you to discuss with your respective anti-drug organisations to join hands with NCADA to achieve the following outcomes:
 - a. Endorse, uphold and promote the APFAD Declaration in your home countries.
 - b. Adopt and promote the Green & White Ribbon as our common anti-drug symbol to your respective communities.
 - c. Work with NCADA to build an online APFAD advocacy network
 - d. Link up with WFAD and other like-minded anti-drug advocates internationally to speak up for our children at UNGASS 2016
28. Let us unite in our common vision to build a drug free society for our children. The time to act is now.

Thank you.

Victor Lye
Chairman
National Council Against Drug Abuse
Singapore

