

STATEMENT OF THE ITALIAN MINISTER OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY,  
PAOLO FERRERO, AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE 51<sup>st</sup> CND –  
Vienna, 10.03.2008

Mister Chairman,

Distinguished Representatives of UNODC Member States, Ladies and Gentlemen,

while Italy confirms that fully subscribes to the statement by the Slovenian Presidency on behalf of the European Union, in view of the assessment of the results of the ten-year drug strategy, I must frankly say that the results achieved so far seem to be below expectations. The truth is that we have not succeeded in having a significant impact either on drug production or on its consumption, the case in point being Afghanistan, where there has actually been an increase in poppy harvest levels. In this respect I wish to reiterate my conviction – despite the doubts of some countries and of Afghanistan itself - that we must not give up analyzing processes leading to the purchase of part of the production of opium for medical use.

Evaluating the achieved results, defined as a “containment” of the problem, it is widely known that our objective was more ambitious by far. What we are observing rather, is a change in demand, which adapts to new social behaviour, and a market which feeds itself through supply diversification and offers consumers newer and newer substances, sometimes at decreasing price. This observation should make us reflect on the effectiveness of our strategy to combat supply, and, hence production. As far as cultivations are concerned, the forced eradication strategy has widely shown its limits and it should, in my view, be replaced by actions aimed at creating a clear separation between the

interests of farmers and those of drug traffickers. I am referring to socio-economic development programmes of the farmland concerned, with greater support from International Organizations dealing with land and conversion of production. In this respect, I believe it wrong to condemn the use of coca leaves, which is entrenched in the tradition and in the culture of some Andean countries, in that any comparison between coca leaves and cocaine is, in my view, groundless. There is a clear difference between coca leaves and cocaine and therefore they must be dealt with separately.

As far as the demand side is concerned, I wish to reiterate that concrete data show that imprisonment has not turned out to be an effective deterrent for drug users, not to mention the frequent violations of fundamental rights and freedoms which drug addicts are subject to, such as illegal detention or forced withdrawal while in detention and during treatment. Drug addicts are often victims of great stigma, because of a moral approach to the problem, which does not see them as human beings worthy of care, help and treatment.

On the contrary, I believe that drug addicts should never be denied the rights to which all human beings are entitled, and that one should aim first and foremost at severing the exclusive relationship – rather, an actual addiction – between the drug consumer and his supplier. Public structures should be able to implement efficient damage reduction policies together with measures aimed at prevention, education, psychological support and social reintegration. This is a “victim protection-oriented approach”, which also guarantees public safety and public health. I would therefore deem it not only wrong, but also incomprehensible, to propose shutting down structures which are putting in place effective damage

reduction measures and which – let us not forget – aim primarily at safeguarding human lives.

On these issues I wish to fully endorse the appeal addressed to the U.N. and to the CND by the representatives of the Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies met in Barcelona from 5 to 7 March 2008 on the invitation of the Italian and Spanish Red Cross. In this appeal they recommend to this Commission, inter alia, to take into consideration the engagement of the 107 Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, signatories of the Rome Consensus for an humanitarian Drug Policy based on full respect for human rights, on prevention and on harm reduction policies.

In this context we deem it useful the involvement of civil society, by means of instances of consultation and participation, with the inclusion of all stakeholders, among whom, drug users.

The last concept I wish to highlight concerns the delicate relationship between the fight against illicit drugs and human rights. These principles cannot be reinterpreted or be weakened in the framework of the fight against illicit drugs.

Many UN Member States still apply capital punishment for drug law offences, including, in some cases, the mere possession of illicit psychotropic substances. Italy was among the main sponsors of a General Assembly resolution in favour of a moratorium on the death penalty, and I wish to reiterate our appeal to those countries which have not yet subscribed to the Resolution.

Before concluding my contribution I wish to recall the useful exchange of ideas and experience which took place a few days past, with UNODC experts: hopefully such an exchange will continue and lead to the assessment of new methodologies for a more accurate definition of actual amount of cocaine available on world markets.

I thank you all for your attention and wish the proceedings success.