

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE INAUGURAL FUNCTION OF INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CUM WORKSHOP ON "COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO COMBATING ILLICIT TRAFFICKING OF AFGHAN OPIATES & DRUG SITUATION IN NORTH EAST" ON 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2019 AT HOTEL CLASSIC GRANDE, IMPHAL

Mr. Sergey Kapinos, Regional Representative of UNODC South Asia,

Dr. Suresh Babu, Chief Secretary, Manipur,

Ms. B. Radhika, Deputy Director General of NCB,

All other dignitaries on the dais,

Delegates from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka,

Friends from the Media,

All other distinguished invitees,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very happy to be hosting this event today at Imphal. It was sometime early last month when during informal discussions in Delhi, I mentioned about the rising drug abuse in the North East and particularly in Manipur, the State which I am serving for over three years now. Around the same time, the South Asia Regional Office of UNODC approached me to convene a workshop in Manipur to take stock of the current situation and formulate an action plan for the North East as part of a comprehensive action plan for the South Asia Region.

My association with the United Nations dates back to several decades and very rewarding indeed. The United Nations decided to celebrate 1975 as the International Women's Year. Recognising my contributions to the women's cause, when National Women's Committee was constituted in 1975, I was included in it by the Prime Minister of India, late Mrs. Indira Gandhi. For the first time, I observed closely the huge gaps which existed between the policies and the actual ground realities. Soon after, I was elected as a Member of the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of the Parliament. I started interacting with the United Nations as a Member of the Parliamentary

Delegation to the General Assembly. After my election as the Presiding Officer, I became a regular member of the Parliamentary Delegations to Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Inter Parliamentary Union, many a time leading the Indian Delegation.

The Parliamentary Forum for Human Development or PFHD was formed in 1992 with the support of UNDP and I was also nominated as the Human Development Ambassador of UNDP. Under the aegis of PFHD, several action plans for sustainable development were initiated covering wider areas like environment, HIV/AIDS, population, education, illicit trafficking and of course women's empowerment. There were regular interactions and meetings with almost all agencies of UN, and particularly UNIFEM, UNAIDS, WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF and UNEP. All the Reports were published and widely disseminated, and many suggestions were adopted by the Honourable Members of Parliament in their MPLADS proposals. These were facilitated by PFHD and I also chaired the Rajya Sabha MPLADS Committee. Some of the lasting projects included over 100 schools cum shelter homes in Orissa made from MPLADS Contributions by MPs across the partylines and from different states, as also the rehabilitation in Gujarat at Bhuj and Bujodi. The shelter homes project in Orissa was undertaken after the devastating cyclone of 1999 and Bhuj and Bujodi project was for the rehabilitation of the artisans and populace of Bhuj and Anjar after the deadly earthquake of 2001.

Honourable Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, while speaking early this year on the campaign for drug free India, **said that in addition to the health problems and destruction of families due to substance abuse, narcotics trade is a great threat to the safety and security of the country. He added that narcotics trade is one of the biggest sources of income for terrorists and anti-national elements, and the money sourced by these elements through drugs trade is used to destabilize the nation.** Thus, it is a mandate for all of us, the Central Government, State Governments,

Legislators and Civil Society organizations to put our heart and soul to eliminate this evil.

I have travelled to most of the parts of my State, including the border areas of Tengenoupal and have met a large number of children, women, youth and elderly. I have noticed their pains and concerns, and their expectations and hopes. Besides poverty, the drug situation in the North East is equally alarming. The recent study, which Dr. Ambekar just now pointed out, shows high prevalence of drug abuse in several areas over and above the National Average. This is where a concerted action is required. We have to reduce both, the cultivation and production on the one hand and the demand and dependence on the other. The Study by AIIMS and Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment gives a broader picture, but a more intensive study about the cultivation and consumption of drugs for each of the eight States, including Sikkim has to be carried out to devise our response to the problem effectively. We all are aware of the rising cultivation of poppy in Myanmar. I understand, it has touched a high figure of 40,000 hectares. If seizure reports are an indication, then a coordinated approach is required by all the countries of South Asia.

Besides conducting authentic studies on the drug situation in the North East, I would suggest the UNODC to convene and conduct training and capacity building of Law Enforcing Agencies of all the six countries under the Regional Office. I am happy that the representatives from almost all the countries are present, and I am sure you would draw up a detailed and time-bound action plan. To implement any crime prevention strategy, a robust intelligence gathering and intelligence sharing system is essential. I would suggest that UNODC as the Regional Cooperation Agency takes initiative in establishing a South Asia Regional Intelligence Sharing mechanism, in addition to integrated border management mechanisms to counter illicit trafficking.

India's expertise in testing drugs and precursors is well known. Perhaps it would be beneficial if NCB and Customs Academy take up the

responsibility of training the laboratory personnel in this field. It is not only drugs which have to be controlled, but also its precursors must be effectively monitored so that while the requirements of the medicine are not hampered, no precursor falls into the hands of illicit drug manufacturers. It is important to have an effective precursor control programme in the Region.

Capacities of the law enforcing agencies of the States of North East can be significantly enhanced if the Central Enforcement Agencies like NCB, ED and DRI impart their skills to the operational local State agencies in the North East. Stakeholders from other countries of the region can also join for better coordination in future operations. The opportunity can also be utilized to expose different regional agencies to the global best practices and skills in various fields like air intelligence, container control programmes and human trafficking. Even illegal trafficking of wild life and artefacts, have been found to have a linkage with the drug trafficking.

As a Parliamentarian, I always encouraged legislative action to empower the executive in achieving the policy goals. As the President of the Interparliamentary Union, a global body of 176 national parliaments, we passed several significant resolutions which led to major constitutional and legislative changes in the member countries. One such example is the female suffrage which during my active involvement in IPU was achieved in Afghanistan, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Iraq and later in UAE and recently in 2015 in Saudi Arabia. Drug related crimes keep changing and so is the need for changes in the enforcement laws. I therefore feel that UNODC should consider a study of gaps in legislative provisions in the acts, rules and regulations of the Region and suggest required changes. Moreover, there is a strong need to sensitize the law and policy makers at all levels about these issues.

My association with the IPU continues for life as I have been nominated the Honorary President for Life, and it was during my Presidency that IPU got the observer status with the United Nations. There have been important collaborative events of IPU with the UN and specifically with

UNODC. Recently in May, 2019 the IPU, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to cement their cooperation in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. The IPU already works with the UN on several issues including the Sustainable Development Goals, gender, human rights, and peace and security. I would separately pursue with Speaker, Lok Sabha, who is also the President of Indian Parliamentary Group through the Manipur Branch of the Indian Parliamentary Group to consider a Special Session of IPU in association with the UNODC at Manipur or any other suitable venue in the North East specifically focussing on drug and drug related wide range of issues which require Parliamentary intervention.

North East touches the Golden Triangle, one of the most lucrative of the drug trade regions on the globe. India should establish inter-governmental and institutional mechanisms with neighbouring countries to counter the drug menace. I recall that recently our Home Minister Shri Amit Shah ji, while reviewing the drugs situation in the region, suggested a concerted and coordinated action by Delhi, Naypyidaw and Dhaka individually on their soils to stamp out illicit trafficking and cultivation. During the recently concluded North East Council Meeting at Guwahati, the Union Home Minister also announced that North East should be made drug free by 2022, when country celebrates the 75th Independence Day. To meet the challenge, he asked all the Chief Secretaries and Directors General of Police to draw up and implement an action plan.

Many a time, the cultivation of poppy and cannabis is for the economic needs and to wean away, a better crop replacement must be facilitated. Besides, there should be skill training and interventions to prevent negative social outcomes and to add to the National Human Capital while providing a sustainable solution to the problem. There is also a need to promote a culture of lawfulness and build integrity and ethical values through the education system. We need innovative and comprehensive educational initiatives that

support the integration of crime prevention and other rule of law aspects into all levels of education, thus contributing to community participation in crime prevention, and engaging with young people in a truly consultative and participatory process while building on and investing in them as agents of positive change.

The States of North East particularly require identification of specific skills and training where UNODC can take the lead. As the drug crimes are not standalone crimes, and with the given mandate of the UNODC, it is also expected that the South Asia office would take initiative in other related areas like corruption, money laundering, human trafficking, deaddiction particularly in the neglected areas like prisons, HIV/AIDS, gender based violence, narco-terrorism, criminal justice reform and so on. The list is long, but so is our resolve. No step is small as it paves way for larger strides. Today, friends, we should resolve to join the Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in his clarion call to eliminate drugs completely from the region and make it drugs free.

With these words, I wish the Conference a great success and look forward to the recommendations which would emerge tomorrow for a concrete and time bound action plan. I extend my fullest support to this laudable initiative of UNODC and the State Government of Manipur in the Region.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.