

Text of the opening speech given by M.R. Disnadda Diskul at the WFAD in Stockholm

September 8, 2008

100 Years of Drugs Prevention—how do we move forward?

Your Majesty, Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am so pleased to see everyone here, 100 years after the Shanghai Conference, and the launch of a century of drug prevention. Today's event is an important milestone in our fight against the world drug problem. Despite the demise of the Golden Triangle nearly 20 years ago and the success of demand reduction programs in many countries, the fight against narcotic drugs is still an urgent cause.

Drug dependence cripples the labour force; it diverts funds from the economy to the arms trade and terrorism, increasing instability in the world. Absolute numbers of cannabis, cocaine and opiates users have increased. Previous gains in containing the demand for drugs are in danger of being lost.

This comes at a time when we face the overwhelming challenges of a global food crisis and climate change. Exploding world population is forcing us to invade forest to make way for bloating cities. We encroach on arable land to feed more people, all while exhausting our supply of fossil fuels. Environmental degradation, food shortages, and rising fuel prices—these are the results of our own doing. For decades we have been consuming more than we give back, and nature will soon run out.

It is funny how we say that we are all affected by these changes and yet little efforts are put forth in addressing them. If we are suffering, imagine the lives of those who are less fortunate than us. I say that it is the poorest of the poor who suffer the most.

And these people contributed to our global problems the least. With commodity prices rising daily, and food supply dwindling, these people do not have a lot of choices. Faced with mouths to feed, poor land, no infrastructure—that's why they have to get involved in narcotics. They have no choice. Narcotic crops are bought right at the farm gate, and they provide a way to soothe the desperation of their situation.

For these people, drugs will be a bigger issue than ever before, in terms of production and addiction. As long as we leave poor people vulnerable, they will grow narcotic crops. We must address the supply of drugs by giving everyone, everywhere, licit, sustainable, alternative livelihoods.

It begins and ends here, with poverty; by breaking the vicious cycle of sickness, poverty and ignorance, we can begin the process of lifting people out of their **survival world** so that they can be masters of their own destiny, and agents of their own future. These are the people who need help; this is who I work with. I am a DOER, working on the ground.

... Allow me to tell you a little about our work. Established by the late Mother of His Majesty King Bhumibhol of Thailand over 20 years ago, the Mae Fah Luang Foundation is a “practitioner” of Sustainable Alternative Livelihood Development, or S-A-L-D. S-A-L-D is “people-centric”-- designed to help the people help themselves.

Our primary activities take place in the heart of the infamous Golden Triangle. In the past, ethnic hill minorities used to grow opium because it was their SINGULAR means of survival. We worked to improve health, create employment and provide access to formal education for the roughly 11,000 people at Doi Tung— ex-growers, traffickers and recovering addicts alike.

Today, the people of Doi Tung have choices. A choice to work on the project’s macadamia economic forests, or in coffee-roasting plants. They have the choice to work at our tourist destinations, guest houses, and gardens. They can tell their story to customers at Doi Tung cafes and Lifestyle shops scattered throughout the country. Daughters who had been sold to work in the sex industry now work in tissue culture facilities in the horticulture industry, and in sales, and many other alternatives. Grandmothers can choose to work in the handicraft center alongside their children, creating a world-class fashion line. Ex-addicts reforested hillsides denuded from slash and burn cultivation. Ex-opium growers have learnt landscape design. These local people have made Doi Tung a signature Thai brand. Opium is all but a thing of the past. Most of all, the people have regained pride and dignity, which money cannot buy. They dare to dream of a brighter future for their children.

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In recent years, Thailand has extended SALD assistance to Myanmar, Afghanistan and Indonesia, sharing best practices and lessons learned in our fight against drugs.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the drug problem, but DOERS must find ways to work together, contributing in more ways than any government whose financial resources are bound by red tape, whose technical assistance is clouded by political motives.

Forums like this one matter. People like you matter. We can’t just come here and talk for the sake of talking. We must act. We must build on this opportunity to trade best practices and learn from each other in order to improve the lives of future generations, because all countries, communities, and companies, no matter how large or small, developed or not, rich or poor—we are all affected by the drug problem.

If more people are ready to take up this cause, we will leave here knowing that we have provided a better world for our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Thank you for your kind attention.