



Department of Justice

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ADDRESS

OF

THE HONORABLE EDWIN MEESE III
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE

BANGKOK AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

MONDAY, MARCH 17, 1986
BANGKOK, THAILAND

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

It's good to be in Bangkok, or as you say here, Krung Thep, the City of Angels. I'll have to let the folks back in Los Angeles know that you have first claim.

We, Americans have long looked to Thailand as an ally in Southeast Asia, a bulwark for freedom and free enterprise, and a staunch foe of communism. For many thousands of American soldiers serving in Viet Nam, Thailand was a place of rest and recuperation. Most of them have gone home, but the Thais remain, of course, defending an ancient way of life and an enduring love of liberty.

Today, for a large and growing number of Cambodians fleeing a murderous conflict, Thailand is an oasis in a troubled corner of the world, a last refuge. Despite continual attack by communist guerrillas since World War II, Thailand has remained strong, and now generously receives those who have lost their homes and freedom. Facing the imperial ambitions of others so near, Thailand remains determined. And the United States remains committed to Thailand.

Today, the United States and Thailand, and, indeed, all free nations, must continue to guard themselves against the relentless assaults of communism. But we must also recognize another enemy.

For now we must wage combat against a foe in many ways even more insidious, one that attacks from within a country as well as from without. I'm speaking of illegal drugs.

There was a time when many nations considered drug abuse an American problem, the self-inflicted wound of a decadent society. Though opium, cocaine or marijuana might be produced on their lands, or cross them in transit, these nations believed that their own people would remain largely free of the drug blight that afflicted Western society.

That view of the world has changed as a result of developments at times startling to traditional drug-producing countries. What has long been known on American streets and in our communities has now become apparent in the circle of nations: drug use is not a passive, victimless crime that concerns only the user. No, no nation that values its health, its independence, and its freedom can long remain neutral to the aggressive advance of narcotics. For the march of drugs means psychological, economic, and political imperialism.

Thailand understands this threat. It has taken its place in a community of nations determined to address the drug problem in an effective manner. Clearly, the climate of world opinion is changing. In 1985, we saw Secretary General of the United Nations Perez de Cuellar, President Reagan and the leaders of the seven Economic Summit nations, and Mrs. Nancy Reagan, joined by numerous First Ladies, calling for concerted international action.

And we are encouraged that the United Nations is considering enacting a new drug trafficking convention and also planning for a World Conference on Drugs in 1987 to focus the attention of consuming and producing nations alike on this global problem.

In the next few minutes, I would like to outline this Administration's drug control objectives at the international level, sum up the situation as we see it in Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand, and then suggest steps that we and the government of Thailand will or should be taking in the future.

Our program for dealing with drug abuse in the United States has five prongs. These are education and prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, law enforcement, international narcotics control, and research.

As Attorney General, I head the Department that is primarily responsible for enforcing the laws of the United States. And, we have made enforcement of the drug laws our number one criminal justice priority. But an effective campaign against narcotics, particularly at the international level, requires the participation and cooperation of many other departments and agencies, not least the Department of State.

The strategic objectives of this Administration at the international level were recently made public in an annual report to Congress by the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics Matters. Two key points in that report are worth emphasizing here.

First, our ultimate international objective is to control in all key geographical regions both the cultivation and the production exported to the United States of illicit drugs. The two primary steps to this objective are crop control in source countries and the interdiction of drugs as they move from producing areas through transit countries to the United States.

Crop control means keeping land out of illicit cultivation and destroying those illicit crops already in the field. No longer ago than 1981, only two drug source countries that exported to the U.S. had eradication programs. Today, no fewer than 14 countries are conducting eradication programs with United States support. Together, we have made a sizeable dent in the marijuana production of Colombia, Belize and Jamaica, and in the poppy production in Burma and Thailand. And, we hope to expand existing programs and enlist many other countries especially in aerial spraying campaigns. But our efforts must be followed by containment programs in adjacent countries. Without these programs the trafficking will simply move to another country.

The second point is that we aim to make narcotics control a top foreign policy issue and a diplomatic priority. International conventions obligate the major drug producing to control production and distribution of illicit drugs. Our aim is to encourage them and help them to live up to those commitments.

This may take many forms:

- bilateral assistance, supplying expertise or resources where these are lacking;

- multilateral assistance through the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control and other regional and international agencies and organizations;
- involvement in international organizations which raise the diplomatic profile of the drug problem;
- training; and
- technical assistance programs.

Now let me sketch the situation, as we see it, in Southeast Asia.

Opium production in this area of the world is legendary. The "Golden Triangle" has been the stuff of countless movie and television scripts. The name and the product suggest something exotic, but the misery exported from these regions has been very much less romantic. The United States has roughly a half million heroin addicts. That number has held pretty much constant over the past five years. Thailand, according to the 1984 National Narcotics Estimate, had somewhere in the range of 400 to 600 thousand addicts, potentially more than the U.S., the greatest consumer, even though Thailand has only about a fifth of our population. Indeed, although Thailand exports opium products abroad, it consumes considerably more than it produces. Clearly, Thailand and the United States both have a very large stake in controlling opium.

DEA's latest estimate is that 51 percent of the opium entering the U.S. came from Southwest Asia, 32 percent from Mexico, and 17 percent from Southeast Asia. Although the

National Narcotics Intelligence Estimate for opium production in Southeast Asia has fluctuated over the past four years, 1986 production is projected to fall in the same general range as in 1983. Burma, of course, remains the largest opium producer in the world, and, by far, the largest in the region, followed by Laos and then Thailand. While the amount of land under opium cultivation in Thailand increased from 7,900 hectares -- a hectare is 10,000 square meters -- in 1984 to 9,654 hectares in 1985, Thailand's production is estimated to have declined from 41 metric tons in 1984 to 36 in 1985, and is projected to fall in the range of 16 to 36 tons in 1986. The decline in 1985 is attributable to both bad weather and the increased eradication efforts of the Thai government.

The Thai government took 552 hectares out of opium cultivation in the 1984-1985 growing season by prohibiting its replanting and also manually eradicated 517 hectares. We applaud the efforts of the Thai government. And we understand that it will greatly expand its crop control efforts in 1986. The Thai government now anticipates that opium cultivation will drop to some 6,300 hectares this year, with a gross production of about 28 metric tons. This would be an important step forward. Success will depend in part on persuading the northern hilltribe farmers to abandon opium cultivation. Working with Thailand and other nations, the United States will promote the integration of these populations into Thailand through foreign assistance.

Opium, although traditionally the farmers' principal cash crop, has never been very lucrative and many farmers are now

being successfully encouraged to plant more profitable crops. Indeed, during the last ten years opium has declined as an income source. Today only 10 percent of the opium planted in Thailand is sold commercially, compared to some 60 percent ten years ago, and most of that is sold to other opium smokers rather than to refineries.

Other progress was made in 1985 in achieving our mutual goals. For example, the Government of Thailand took effective steps to deny sanctuary on Thai soil to Burmese drug traffickers. It also pushed Burmese refineries further back from the Thai border. And, by establishing better border security, Thailand has forced some traffickers to shift their routes around its perimeters.

The increased vigilance of the Thai authorities is reflected in the number of arrests, which totalled more than 37,000, up from 34,000 in 1984. Thai authorities also seized 3.3 metric tons of opium and two metric tons of heroin.

Opium is, of course, not the only drug produced in Thailand. Thai marijuana is renowned for its high quality and brings a premium in the U.S. market. Although we do not yet have hard figures, it is now clear that marijuana has become an important export crop. By local standards it brings a high price, five times what a farmer can get from growing tomatoes, the next most profitable crop.

But once again, marijuana is as much a Thai problem as an American problem. Traditionally used as a food seasoning and abused by a small segment of Thai society, marijuana is now

moving into the Thai mainstream, with all the attendant ill effects on personal health, economic and social productivity, and crime that we have suffered in the United States.

The Thai people, who have long taken a tolerant view of marijuana use, are rapidly becoming acquainted with its dangers. Among these are the destabilizing effects that large drug profits in the hands of criminal elements can have on Thai society. Bordered by hostile forces, the Thai government has been preoccupied with national security. It has tended to deal with marijuana as an afterthought. But now Thailand is coming to understand, as other nations have, that narcotics trafficking can be a powerful weapon in the hands of guerrillas. Consequently, it is stepping up its eradication efforts. Operating in the northeast, the Border Patrol Police and the Provincial Police have manually eradicated more than 1,900 tons of marijuana in the fields. In addition, authorities have seized some 100 metric tons destined for export. These are important efforts and we hope that they will increase

The Thai government is to be congratulated on making major strides in the development of honest and professional law enforcement agencies. The United States, working through the DEA and other agencies, is proud to have played a part in helping the Thai government improve its narcotics enforcement capabilities. The agencies of our two governments have achieved an exemplary level of cooperation. Today, the Thai are increasingly able to meet their own training needs. But where we can assist, we stand ready to do so.

Thailand has also taken steps toward more active drug abuse prevention. We whose job it is to enforce the drug laws in the United States believe this is the way of the future. We are focusing a growing part of our effort on reducing the demand for illicit drugs through education, prevention and treatment.

Last year, the free choices of American consumers made the drug trade a multi-billion dollar industry in the U.S. That so many Americans made those choices does not, of course, make them good choices. Nor does the fact that many Thai made similar choices. Quite the contrary. A chemical pest continues to gnaw at our social fabrics.

But with a proper understanding of the cost in personal and social terms that narcotics inflict upon us, I believe the people of Thailand and the United States will make the right choices--to free themselves of drugs.

If there is one weapon in our fight against drug abuse that we have underused, it is the truth. We have simply not done enough, so far, to get the word out about drugs. Not only does the medical research coming out of the laboratories unquestionably oppose drug use, but more and more Americans are seeing first hand the costs in terms of lives, health, productivity, wealth, crime and morality brought on by drug abuse.

American attitudes about drug use are already changing. In the last ten years, for example, the number of high school seniors who use marijuana daily has been cut in half. Today a majority of high school seniors consider regular use harmful and

inappropriate behavior. That's an important development. Think what might happen if we really put our every public effort into drug education, prevention and treatment. The government of Thailand understands this challenge, and we stand ready to share with it the knowledge we have gained from our own experience.

I am very happy to say that the cooperation of our governments is not limited to narcotics control, although this is very important, but extends to law enforcement generally, and beyond to many other mutual concerns. For example, we are now in the process of mutually updating our criminal code and procedures through a series of law enforcement treaties.

Let me briefly review our recent accomplishments on this front and outline possible future initiatives:

First, extradition. Extradition is presently governed by a treaty signed in 1922. It is badly in need of updating. Fortunately, in 1982 we negotiated with Thailand a new treaty, which my predecessor signed in late 1983, and to whose ratification the Senate consented in June of 1984. The Thai legislature is set to consider the agreement early this summer. When the new treaty enters into force, it will permit us for the first time to extradite fugitives sought for drug offenses, conspiracy and any other crime punishable by more than one year's imprisonment in both countries.

Second, prisoner transfer. In October 1982, we signed a prisoner transfer treaty with Thailand. Although our own Senate has consented to the treaty, Thailand has not yet ratified it. Internal implementing legislation is still needed from the Thai

legislature. We, of course, understand Thailand's concerns that its efforts to stop drug smuggling not be undercut by undue solicitude for American prisoners properly serving terms in Thai prisons. For that reason, we have pledged that, absent extraordinary circumstances, we would not authorize the transfer of prisoners serving time in Thailand for major drug offenses.

Third, mutual legal assistance. In April 1985, we came within a jot or tittle or two of completing the negotiations for a treaty on mutual assistance in criminal matters. A single remaining issue was recently resolved, and I am happy to report that it will be my privilege to sign this treaty on behalf of the United States here in Bangkok, the day after tomorrow. This treaty will greatly enhance the narcotics investigation capabilities of both our nations.

In addition to these three areas, where Thailand and the U.S. have new treaties in various stages of completion, we hope the Thai legislature might be encouraged to revise its laws in two other areas:

First, to provide for the seizure and forfeiture of the assets of drug traffickers. In the U.S., such measures have been an important step in dismantling drug empires and in supporting law enforcement agencies at all levels of government.

Second, to make extraterritorial drug trafficking by Thai citizens a prosecutable offense. Several investigators and prosecutors have contacted the Department about cases in which Thai nationals have fled from indictments in the U.S. to Thailand. The Thai government, which retains full discretion

over extradition, has assured us that when extradition is denied because of Thai nationality, the government will assume responsibility for prosecuting the offender--if it has the laws to do so. This is why we feel it is so important in our mutual effort against drug trafficking that Thailand enact legislation that will give it jurisdiction over drug offenses committed outside of Thailand.

Well, these are some of the areas where Thailand and the United States have been and are now working together.

I learned the other day that Thailand means literally, "the land of the free." And Thailand is indeed "the land of the free." Working together we can resist the twin dangers of communism and drug trafficking, and together we can preserve the proud heritage of freedom we share.

Thank you.