



**UNITED NATIONS**  
**Office on Drugs and Crime**

**Antonio Maria Costa**  
Executive Director

11 November 2004

Dear Mr. ~~Charles~~, *Dear Bobby*,

I am glad that we were able to meet yesterday and had the chance to discuss a number of important matters. At the outset, let me thank you for your compliments on the management reforms we have undertaken and for your support for UNODC's programme. Indeed, we have achieved, and will continue to achieve, much together.

As we discussed, there is much good news regarding reduced opium poppy cultivation in Laos and Myanmar. Similarly, there has been good progress in both Colombia and Peru, though of course much hard work remains to be done over the coming years. Regarding Afghanistan, opium poppy cultivation must decrease significantly: I am happy that large scale eradication is under consideration. There also need to be successful prosecutions of major drug traffickers and corrupt senior officials; a senior national government counterpart with whom we can work needs to be named. UNODC remains committed to working closely with your Government and our other international partners in this most challenging situation.

Regarding our drug programme, let me stress that UNODC is totally focused on its historic mandate. Drug supply control and the reduction of drug abuse are our organization's benchmarks, and we welcome the support we have received for striking an appropriate balance.

Within the area of demand reduction, UNODC stresses preventive education, public awareness, treatment and rehabilitation - all designed to prevent drug use, promote abstinence and reintegrate drug abusers into society.

Mr. Robert B. Charles  
Assistant Secretary  
International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520  
USA

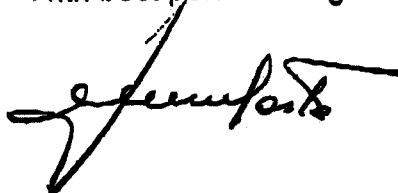
On the general issue of "harm reduction", I share your concern. Under the guise of "harm reduction", there are people working disingenuously to alter the world's opposition to drugs. These people can misuse our well-intentioned statements for their own agenda, and this we cannot allow. Accordingly, and as we discussed in our meeting, we are reviewing all our statements, both printed and electronic, and will be even more vigilant in the future. I appreciate your acknowledgement of our efforts in this regard.

As for the two specific issues of harm reduction, let me be clear. First and foremost, UNODC maintains a strong opposition to heroin maintenance, as well as drug injection and consumption rooms. Such initiatives run counter to the three UN drug conventions as reflected in the pronouncements of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), from which we take our guidance.

Another element of "harm reduction" is needle exchange (or even needle giveaways, as you mentioned). Here, the linkages between drug abuse, particularly by injecting drug users, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic fuel a well known controversy. We strongly agree with the INCB view that any such prophylactic measure to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS should be undertaken only within the overall effort to reduce drug abuse. Yet, the controversy remains and this, of necessity, continues to place UNODC in a difficult position. Nevertheless, and again taking our guidance from the conventions, CND and INCB, we neither endorse needle exchange as a solution for drug abuse, nor support public statements advocating such practices.

I believe that the forthcoming CND will be a good forum to provide clear guidance on this issue, and we are preparing a position paper. I count on your support to achieve this clarity in the period leading to, and during the Commission.

With best personal regards,



Antonio Maria Costa

cc: Mr. George Glass  
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.  
Permanent Mission of the United States of America  
to the United Nations (Vienna)