STATEMENT BY MS KWEK POH HEOK,
DELEGATE TO THE 68th SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON AGENDA ITEM 109,
ON INTERNATIONAL DRUG CONTROL, THIRD COMMITTEE,
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Mr Chairman,

1 Thank you for giving me the floor.

Drug Abuse Remains a Worldwide Concern

2 Drug abuse is not a new phenomenon, but it remains a very real concern for society. The World Drug Report 2013 reported that in 2011, between 167 and 315 million people aged 15 – 84 were estimated to have used an illicit drug the year before. This represents an 18 percent increase in drug users since 2008. In 2011, there were about 211,000 drug-related deaths in the world. According to the report, most of these deaths were among the younger population and were to a large extent preventable. Sadly, one life lost is one too many. Behind every statistic, there is a human face - child, father, mother, sibling, neighbour, or friend. Drug abuse affects not only individuals, but also their families, loved ones and the wider community.

3 The same report also observed that new psychoactive substances (NPS) abuse is growing. NPS mimics the effects of controlled drugs, and can cause as much harm, if not more.

4 These trends are a sobering reminder that the international community cannot relent in our efforts to tackle drug abuse. How each country deals with this problem is very much shaped by its philosophy towards drug consumption, as well as the values and priorities of its society. Singapore respects that countries will have to adopt policies and strategies that best suit their
respective contexts and needs.

**Singapore’s Fight against Drug Abuse**

5 Over the years, Singapore has earned a reputation of being a safe and stable country. We have one of the lowest crime rates in the world. This did not come about by chance. Our enforcement agencies have taken a tough stance against crime. In 2012, our crime rate was 581 per 100,000 resident population, a 29-year low.

6 Singapore’s policy towards drug abuse has been to maintain a zero tolerance approach. As a country with few natural resources, Singapore places great importance on human resources. The Government recognises its responsibility of providing a safe environment for our citizens to bring up their families. In a recent Government survey, we found that values relating to nationhood and security, and a sense of community resonated most strongly with Singaporeans. We do not want our people to experiment with drugs and lose themselves in a vicious cycle of addiction.

7 To this end, we have put in place an integrated multi-prong approach, comprising legislation, preventive education, enforcement, treatment and rehabilitation, and aftercare to reintegrate former addicts into society. Our approach has helped to keep our drug problem in check. In 1994, at the height of our heroin problem, 6,165 drug abusers were arrested. By last year, the number fell to 3,507.

8 However, there is no place for complacency in our fight against the drug scourge. While the longer term trend of drug abuse has been declining, over the last 3 years, we have seen an increase in drug abusers arrested. It is thus important to regularly review our laws and practices. In end 2012, we amended the Misuse of Drugs Act, Singapore’s main legislation against drug abuse and drug trafficking. The amendments included powers to list and seize NPS, thereby limiting their circulation and preventing further harm to our society. We have also strengthened the punishment framework to specifically target those who recruit young or vulnerable persons to commit drug offences.
9 Our efforts must start with preventive education. In this regard, the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) works actively with schools and community partners such as the National Council Against Drug Abuse to educate our youth. We have leveraged on social networking sites to appeal to the technologically-savvy youths by launching a youth-oriented blog LiveItLoud.SG this year. This encourages them to share their views on ways to live life to the fullest without abusing drugs and to grow an online anti-drug community.

10 In rehabilitation and aftercare, Singapore takes a differentiated approach towards different types of offenders, and has provided more rehabilitation pathways for young abusers. In this regard, we are adopting a new approach for lower-risk young drug offenders. In the coming months, a Community Rehabilitation Centre will be operational. This is a step-down residential care arrangement that follows after a short period of detention in the Drug Rehabilitation Centre. Such an arrangement allows them to continue their education or employment in the day, and undergo structured counselling programmes in the evening. In turn, this will minimise disruption to their daily lives and facilitate positive relationship building with the community.

11 Singapore celebrates the success of former drug addicts and promotes their reintegration into society. An example is Mr Kelvin Soh, a former drug offender. Born in a broken home and growing up watching his father tormented by drug addiction, Mr Soh found himself trapped in a world of drugs and gangs by the age of 13. He spent the next twenty years of his life in and out of prison. Through much rehabilitation, counselling and encouragement, he has found a new lease of life in music. Mr Soh has since produced eight albums despite having little formal education and no background in music. Today, he actively advocates on behalf of offenders for second chances and travels across Asia to share his songs and life with others.

**International Efforts against Drug Trafficking**

12 Mr Chairman, no country can fight the drug scourge alone. This is a transnational problem that respects no geographical boundaries. While Singapore is not a producer of narcotics, we are an attractive target for drugs transhipment. Drug syndicates may try to leverage our transport infrastructure and connectivity to ship drugs through Singapore. For example, our investigations found that approximately 85% of methamphetamine (“ice”) seized in 2012 were meant for other
13 Singapore works closely with our regional counterparts, conducting joint operations with regional enforcement agencies. Since 2000, CNB and the Royal Malaysian Police have conducted more than 50 joint operations that resulted in large seizures of illegal drugs and arrests of drug traffickers. In addition, a key thrust of our regional collaboration is capacity building, to facilitate understanding across and raise capacity for drug law enforcement agencies. In 2012, we collaborated with the Australia Federal Police and the Colombo Plan Drug Advisory Programme in conducting training programmes for drug enforcement officials from 19 countries throughout the region.

14 Mr Chairman, we are under no illusions about the challenges we are tackling. Drug traffickers and criminal organisations will continue to create and supply new drugs, and evolve their modus operandi to evade arrest. Singapore will remain a committed and vigilant partner in the international fight against drug abuse and trafficking. We will constantly adapt and enhance our strategies and efforts to stay on top of the drug situation and to keep our country safe and free from drugs.

15 Thank you.