Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is a pleasure to be here with you and other distinguished delegates to present the views of the United States on this important topic.

All states share an obligation to protect our citizens from the harms of organized crime. It is one of the basic responsibilities of government, and despite occasional conflicting opinions over tactics, we share broad, nearly universal agreement on our goals: greater citizen security; honest governments untainted by corruption; and sustainable economic development, safeguarded by the rule of law. This is our shared vision. How we achieve it will occupy much discussion beyond this particular session.

Our governments have endorsed common strategies to reduce the harms caused by various types of criminality for over a century. This is an evolving process, and our tactics are not static. Over 50 years ago, an unprecedented number of UN member states agreed to establish a common framework of commitments against dangerous drugs. The 1961 Single Convention was a pioneering effort, and one of the first acknowledgements of a principle that remains true today: no state can protect its people against harmful drugs and crime by working alone. International cooperation is essential, and the basic goal of the Convention – protecting our citizens from the consequences of harmful drugs – is universally acknowledged. Two additional legal instruments joined the Single Convention in subsequent decades, giving us the body of international law that guides our cooperation to this day.

Some, including governments in this room and many observers in my own country, have observed that these commitments should be reviewed in light of experience, and changes may be in order. My government agrees that we should test our assumptions and explore new approaches. In Vienna, we are collectively preparing for a High-Level Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs next spring. The Commission, in turn, will inform the next UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs in 2016. Amid these moving components, this preparatory process draws lessons from our experiences over the past decade and identifies what has worked, what has not worked, and what we might do better. Here are some broad lessons that the United States will bring to the debate.

First, confronting international crime must not be the exclusive responsibility of law enforcement; it is also the responsibility of educators, civil society and the business community. Security and stability are contingent on economic and social development. Societies require access to public health, legal reform, and institutions free of corruption – the great force multiplier of any criminal enterprise. Progress requires effective prosecutors, courts, and correction systems that effectively deliver justice. All links in the criminal justice continuum – police, courts, corrections – must be addressed holistically; the chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and criminals will find the weakest link.

Comprehensive efforts must address all aspects of the challenges at hand, and they must be sustained. There is no shortcut; we cannot announce short-term initiatives and silver bullet solutions in order to declare a quick victory. Perseverance and political commitment are key. Without this common commitment involving all segments of state and society, long-term success is difficult. With it, history proves it is possible.

Next, we must focus on the criminal organizations. This reflects budgetary and political realities that all governments, including my own, must recognize. It is not possible or necessary to incarcerate every person who violates the law through consumption or possession of illegal drugs. We do, however, have a responsibility to
dismantle, disrupt, and eliminate large, multinational criminal enterprises that exist solely to profit from illegal activities. These organizations earn revenues that approach the GDPs of some countries, their power undermines our governments' ability to enforce laws, and their presence and reach erode the very sovereignty of nation-states.

They partner with other crime organizations and seek out countries where enforcement is weak or corruptible. They engage in human smuggling and trafficking in persons. They use the Internet for identity, credit card, and cultural property theft. They commit environmental crimes such as dumping of toxic waste, illegal logging, and wildlife smuggling. And they earn hundreds of billions of dollars in laundered proceeds that distort legitimate economies, undercut development, and undermine democratic institutions.

International cooperation is essential to investigating, prosecuting, and dismantling these organizations, and the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, or UNTOC, is the preeminent, universally accepted instrument to do so. The United States has now used the UNTOC and its Protocols on more than 100 occasions to advance cooperation on criminal cases, demonstrating their value as an important tool for our police, prosecutors, and the judiciary.

We must also remain cognizant of the role of corruption. No criminal enterprise can function at a high-level for long without penetrating and corrupting government institutions. We must incorporate into our strategy measures to address official corruption wherever it is found. The UN Convention against Corruption, or UNCAC, is a critical framework for raising anti-corruption standards, and the United States is committed to working with partners to improve its impact.

We must also support and strengthen the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and its role in promoting implementation of these conventions and improving criminal justice capacities around the world. My government's confidence in the stewardship of UNODC is reflected by our continuing financial support to the organization – over $75 million in voluntary contributions since 2012.

Finally, we recognize that work remains to be done in reducing demand for dangerous and illegal drugs. In the United States, we have made significant progress over the long term, with overall drug use declining by nearly one-third in the past 30 years. Cocaine use has dropped even more, by roughly 40 percent over the past five years. Abuse of prescription drugs remains serious, and we are concerned by the spread of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances – designer drugs that are produced and introduced faster than they can be scheduled for international enforcement. By some estimates, as many as 200 new uncontrolled substances hit the market this year, many of them extremely dangerous.

These are tall challenges. The United States claims no monopoly on how to best answer them. We are learning from the experience of others and are open to consideration of all reasonable proposals. The United States believes that collectively we are in a better place than we were several decades ago, and the international legal frameworks we created together continue to serve us well.

Criminal enterprises cannot succeed against the combined efforts of a community determined to thwart their efforts. As we look forward to the coming year, let us join together to move toward a logical, sustainable, and intelligent improvement of our international framework for addressing drugs and crime. Let us be guided by reason, evidence, and – above all – a common desire to safeguard the health and well-being of our citizens and the security of our states. Thank you.