

Speech of prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra on the policy for prevention and suppression of drugs, at the meeting hall, Suan Dusit Ratchapat Institute, 3 p.m., Tuesday 14 January 2003

Translated by Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit

Deputy prime ministers, ministers, senior officials, provincial governors, provincial police chiefs.

Today is an important day in solving the country's drug problem. I invited all of you to this meeting so you will properly understand our policy on this matter—how we view this problem, and how we would like to solve it—so you will have a clear idea of the direction. Today I'd like to talk very clearly and that may not be so elegant. If you are not happy with what you hear, tell me, so we can work together comfortably, as once we start the work and assign the responsibilities, it must be done to the full. Today I may have to speak in a very straightforward manner, as sometimes if we try to talk in a roundabout way and believe we understand one another well, in fact that is not the case.

The government and I believe that drugs are destroying the security of the country. When there is conflict in our neighbours, every group involved in the fighting has to use a lot of money. The various groups forced to fight one another need a lot of money. Those living in the forest, who need cash to buy weapons, must get it from drugs because that is the quickest and easiest way. Thus, if our neighbours are peaceful, there will be no fighting and the drug affair will become a lot less severe. If you look carefully, you will see that drugs come from countries where there is fighting. Policy towards our neighbours is thus crucial in solving the drug problem and the increase in drugs. So now that our policy is taking shape, we have to make things clear both with our neighbours and with those implementing the policy domestically.

I believe that drugs have damaged Thailand a great deal. Today it is time for us to unite our forces to solve this problem seriously. I can no longer tolerate people who view drugs as something ordinary. I will not tolerate policies that fail. I will not tolerate dishonest people involved directly or indirectly in the distribution of drugs, whoever they are, because I think we have tolerated too much already, and now the country's youth has been very badly damaged. We are entering the age of the knowledge society, but the brains of the nation's youth are being destroyed. Drugs may be a consequence of many other problems including the education system, dens of vice, and other causes, but we don't have time now to talk about such matters in detail.

Today we will focus on suppression, on solving the drug problem by using the area approach. I am not telling you to do things which are not backed up with good logic. Several provinces have already done these things and achieved good results—led by Kalasin which has dared to declare itself a drug-free province, because it worked comprehensively and systematically. The governor and provincial police chief worked together very well. The governor had good relations with the communities, with local politics. After Kalasin declared itself a drug-free province, I checked up in several ways,

and it's true. Chiang Rai is another example of a province which was serious about suppression and rehabilitation, including using some police stations for rehab, and seizing assets. Sometimes people were shot dead and had their assets seized as well. I think we have to be equally ruthless. The drug sellers have been ruthless with the Thai people, with our children, so if we are ruthless with them it is not a big deal. I believe we are forced to be so. It's not something we have to be cautious about. Nonthaburi is another province which has had good results through cooperation between communities and the police.

Using the area approach, the provincial governors and police chiefs have to cooperate closely, not prepare to stab one another in the back but work in unison. Both governors and police chiefs were invited today so a clear message can be sent that you have to work together. If you can't work together and go on fighting, then the work will not succeed. At the provincial level, the governor has to be the leader. He has to preside over the province's drug activity with the provincial police chief as his deputy. Then the work has to be subdivided by districts. At the district level the district officer is the head, and the district police chief is his assistant. I want to see every square inch x-rayed. In the next three months, it has to be done seriously. At the end of three months, there will be an evaluation. If today the governor, provincial police chief, district officer, district police chief do not themselves know who is selling drugs in their locality, it shows lack of efficiency, because if you are really working then you know everything. If you don't, it is because you are not committed, because you don't give importance to drugs.

Do you know that today almost three million Thai children take drugs, and around 700,000 are seriously addicted? Many are in jail. The jails we built to hold around 80,000 criminals now have over 300,000 inmates of which 80 per cent are drug related. We have issued a new law which views drug users as patients who need rehabilitation. This principle will increase flexibility. Many offices have to give their support to the effort of solving drug addiction problems including the ministries of health, interior, education, culture, labour, justice, and tourism and sport. We have to work together. We have to understand that drugs is a vital issue, a threat to national security, something we must fight and defeat, something where people will get hurt but we must prevail. Using the area approach to solve the drug problem means the three methods already mentioned—suppression, rehabilitation, and prevention.

Suppression has to be serious. I think the police already know all the various dens of vice which distribute drugs. There is no police station chief who does not know such things, because even the taxi-drivers do. Don't make the interior minister or his deputy have to do the duties of the police suppression unit. You all know everything; it's just a question whether you will do anything or not. Today if you don't, I will do you. We have allowed the society to suffer because of this matter for a long time. Why is it necessary to wait for a policy, for someone to give orders? The laws are already in our hands. Things that are wrong cannot be ignored. The dens of vice which distribute drugs have to be dealt with decisively. Today we are sending out a loud warning message that from now to the end of January all the service establishments that spread vice and tolerate drugs must stop doing so. The first of February is D-day. Three months ahead on 30 April there will be an evaluation. You must x-ray every square inch of your area. If drugs are still distributed in your area, it means you are not efficient. I don't believe there is any police station chief who doesn't know which of the officers in his stations is selling drugs. If you know and do nothing, then it shows you know what's going on. Don't be afraid.

Nobody has more connections. Those with the biggest connections are the people. Officials who fear the influence of the mafia should not be officials. You have no reason to fear that you will be threatened or punished for doing your duty. Just come to see me. I will protect you all. Just eradicate what is destroying the nation. If you are good officials, you must not fear any influence.

Today we are giving everyone two weeks to get ready. If drug traders are listening they must make up their minds whether to stop selling or carry on. If they don't stop, there is a chance they will be dealt with in every way, both life and limb. Those who trade, those who have entertainment places and allow the "mad drug" sellers to operate inside them—these service establishments must be dealt with. If they want to remain open and do business in peace, they must not allow these things to happen, or else there will be proceedings. From 1 February 2003, everybody will be dealt with. I want you to x-ray every sort of place, as I've said. Be very clear, you must x-ray every square inch in your area and show there is nothing left. From 1 February onwards, anyone who fails to stop selling drugs will be dealt with, whatever kind of seller they are. Assets will be seized too. On asset seizure, if today any citizen has a clue that their neighbours are unusually rich, without any obvious occupation, and without reason why they became rich, give the information, as it will give us a lead and we will make sure they do not escape. Take the example of one successful asset seizure in the central region. Fifty million baht of assets were seized. But the evidence was not enough to nail the leader who is a former national-level politician. We are still following his activities until today, but it is difficult to do anything. As we know but cannot do anything, we have to keep watch and keep the pressure on. Assets have to be seized in full, so when they are dead there is no inheritance left for their descendants, because these people are destroying the nation. The ONCB (Office of the Narcotics Control Board) has to study how officials should be rewarded for asset seizures. There must be a clear system of rewards and punishments. Those who do good will have good done to them, and those who do evil will be punished. So if you are successful at suppression, there must be rewards for asset seizure. You will have the honour and reward of money that is untainted, and you will be happy. But let me warn you one thing. We must not arrest scapegoats, and we must not have mercy towards drug traders. Those who are sick or addicted, you must treat with mercy, consider them people who have made mistakes or been led astray, and need to be rescued and cured. With the traders, you must use hammer and fist, that is, act decisively and without mercy. Police General Phao Sriyanon once said "There is nothing under the sun that the Thai police cannot do." So I'm confident that drugs are something that the Thai police can deal with. Do it to the full. Provincial governors must give support and work too. If there is failure, both the provincial governor and provincial police chief will go together. So let the rewards and punishments be very clear. When there is any suspicion that someone is involved, bring it out in the open, and then don't let up. Investigate. Find the evidence for a court case. Punish. But quickly. If procedures impede or delay exposing a drug suspect, then the procedures have to be changed. Don't protect bad people. I think that involvement with drugs is so evil that we should give absolutely no pardon at all.

Let me repeat, all the dens of vice and distribution points for drugs, deal with them decisively. Don't be polite. Don't have even the slightest feeling for them. Don't care for little things. Do not allow the situation to arise where the senior-most police raid an area

but it fails. Today, I consider whatever bad happened in the past is forgotten. But from 1 February we will begin a new life for our nation, for our youth, our children and children's children. If any officer can't work because there are people over him, maybe a favourite of a more senior officer, in whatever branch of officialdom, just send the details direct to me. I will give protection and fairness to every official of every unit who does his duty of suppressing drugs straightforwardly but is not treated fairly. So let both commanders and subordinates be properly looked after. If anyone has a problem, or cannot get things done on their own, send details to me, to the prime minister's secretary. We will keep it secret and look after you.

If there is any problem over budget in the next three months, let the officer in charge of the unit arrange support from their own budget first, and if it is not enough, ask for extra from the budget bureau. In three months' time, drugs must be dealt with in every square inch of Thailand because we have district offices and police stations overseeing every square inch. So we will x-ray every square inch, seize the assets of anyone suspected of being unusually rich without reason. In this work, separate the good officers from the bad, from the dregs of officialdom. It must be obvious who is efficient and who is not efficient. So you must all give your utmost efforts to this task. That means the next three months will be especially tough, and after that the system will come together of its own accord. And after that we can think of many other things. Those who don't care will not know, but if you really care, you will know, and once you know, you will come together. Governors, police chiefs, district officers, stations heads will meet together to identify the methods for prevention, rehabilitation, and suppression. I guarantee that after these three months, you will have a completely different understanding about drugs compared to today. You'll come back talking in another language, a language which understands that things are like this because of that. And then we will be able to deal with this matter. Today let me call on you to give your utmost efforts to this serious task for the next three months. If some drug traders die, it will be a common thing. We have to send a message that they have to quit. Traders will get no return except risk to their own lives, risk of being arrested, and of being finished off because all their assets are seized. Whenever the chance of profiting from a crime is greater than the chance of punishment, or when the punishment is not severe enough, some people will choose to make a living by crime, without thinking about right or wrong.

So use these three months to the full. Give your utmost for the country, for your children, for the future of the nation. I believe we can deal with it. I'm not at all worried. If all you officials do your utmost, I don't think there is anything beyond our ability. I have confidence in your abilities. But you must give your utmost. Senior officers must specially look after the budget so that the work of these three months is successful. Today, go back and make preparations. From 9 a.m. on 1 February everything must be done down to the details and with sincere cooperation.

When we talk about the task, we must also talk clearly of the rewards. The Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) as the unit for policy, study, support and coordination must quickly amend regulations within the end of January 2003, for instance the reward money, bonuses for arrests, and other related matters. At 9 a.m. on 1 February 2003, rewards and punishments will come into operation immediately until 9 p.m. on 30 April 2003, when matters will be reviewed. Police commanders will report to the national police chief, the prime minister and deputy prime minister (General Chavalit

Yongchaiyudh). Provincial governors will report to the under-secretary of the Ministry of Interior. Both achievements and obstacles must be reported so we can conclude how to solve the problems and proceed further. Don't make it like a shower of rain that soon evaporates away. When we have things clear, then we can proceed without any let-up. I will talk with neighbouring countries so they give their full cooperation in every form and dimension. I think we have tolerated this matter for too long already. Today we should not tolerate it further. If we think about parents sending their children to school just for them to get drugs and Aids, we have to feel their devastation. If we don't think anything, then we don't feel anything. But if we think properly, we'll see that all our Thai children, innocent kids, who don't know what they're doing, are sometimes tricked by the drug traders in some way or other. I don't think these are things the police don't know about, but it's a question only of commitment, because the police have many levels. The police on the ground know everything, but whether the commanders take an interest or not, nothing in this world is secret. Today buying drugs is as easy as buying chewing gum. It's harder to buy chewing gum in Singapore than drugs in Thailand. Sometimes you can order them, like pizza.

Officials who have been effective against drugs, let their seniors create channels for these people to rise in government service faster than usual, according to the principle of rewards and arrest bonuses. But be careful that the heroes and villains are not the same people. Don't let this happen. The investigation must be clear. Don't let the same person play the hero in the open, but the villain in the background. Don't let yourselves be fooled. All officers must be watchful and precise. Good people must be rewarded and bad people punished. Prevention is the duty of many ministries because it concerns education, sport, culture, and science, to encourage the youth who today are still innocent to quit the drugs circle. And we need cooperation from the temples, schools and parents.

At today's Cabinet meeting, I told the ministers that the sports facilities of the army, the Thai Sports Association, and the education ministry, should be used to the full. Let people come to take exercise and play sport. Organize lots of competitions. If a province wants a Premier's Cup, tell me and I'll give one. Same with prizes. If kids love sport, they will love health, and if they love health they won't get involved in vice. The government has passed laws to help parents. On such matters, don't wait for the policy. If there's a law, then it has to be enforced. If there is to be some relaxation, you will be told. If you are not told, it means there is no relaxation, you must apply all the laws that you have. Help the parents. Act as their eyes and ears. Do whatever is right so society is orderly and everyone falls back in line.

For prevention, apart from the importance of sport and other creative activities, provincial governors and heads of government offices must help think up other projects. Many different activities don't need much budget—less than what gets wasted on useless construction projects in which the prices are inflated by collusion. Now we have bidding by computer which saves at least 20 per cent of the budget. If we spend 50 billion baht in a year, the savings are 10 billion and they can be used for creative activities and still have a lot left over. Arranging creative activities so kids and youth have something creative to do is to get them out of the system. So I don't begrudge any budget spent on creative activities or rewards for good people.

Provincial governors, you must always think of yourselves as the big bosses. You have to give the orders, follow up, evaluate, advise, hold meetings, and fine-tune the

strategy. Please don't have boundaries among yourselves, borders, walls dividing the government agencies in your province. The governor has the duty to break down the walls between government agencies, between all the representatives of government agencies in your province. Use your power as a leader. A leader must indicate clearly that he will deal severely with drugs. All those still involved will be done for. But if the leader is passive, doesn't talk about the drug issue, doesn't drive it, others will be passive too. So the leader has to determine the culture of the organizations in that place. The provincial governor and police chief must determine clearly that drugs are an evil matter, a matter that must be dealt with severely, something that is unacceptable, intolerable. But if the provincial governor and police chief are passive about this issue, then the whole province will be passive, and the province will be a heaven for drug traders. I feel sorry for parents, especially the poor who find the money to send their kids to school only to discover they have sent them to be ruined. If they knew their kids would be ruined, they would choose to keep them in the paddy fields instead. So we have to help them, arrange all kinds of activities. The budget bureau will help find something to support them. I will use the country's budget economically, for the maximum benefit, especially for building human resources, building people, building human respect. This is very important because we must have 63 million Thai people of good quality, strong in body, mind, and intellect, not weaklings who act like semi-ghosts, semi-humans. One million people have been ruined by drugs. I can't accept this. You must be wholehearted about prevention.

There are many methods of rehabilitation we can use to help. We had a seminar on this, and assigned the justice minister, interior minister and deputy prime minister (Chaturong Chaisaeng) to study the matter and decide on the direction and details to be proposed this March. But at the provincial level, the governor must call a meeting of all government agencies to make a plan for rehabilitation and prevention.

The idea of rehab communities is interesting. I'm no expert. The ONCB must prepare documents to disseminate information on this, especially about the successes in many places, and distribute them for all the governors to be informed. ONCB is the research agency which must communicate what has succeeded in one place to other places so they can be copied and known and applied. There is nothing that cannot be used 100 per cent, but must be adapted because in each place the culture is not the same. We must understand the word "adapt." The rehab communities have succeeded in several places, such as rehab at the police station, at the police kiosk. But some who pass through rehab today get hooked again and have to go to rehab again. If we have rehab every day for everyone, soon it will be over. Today over 300,000 people who are in jail for drugs cannot be brought out for rehab because there is nowhere to do it. So we must bring down the curtain on drugs, then if they come out even without rehab it will still be like rehab because they won't know where to buy drugs. Importantly, now the health ministry has issued a ministerial regulation about codeine ingredients. We must follow this all the way through, because it is constantly changing. Sleeping pills and anaesthetics all get used. Pharmacies sell them without a doctor's prescription. These are businessmen without social responsibility and must be punished.

So if there is anything that needs to be controlled but there is no current law, study what law is needed, so that government officials and police can do their duty without being sued. For example, before there was no ministry regulation controlling the sale of caffeine. Now the government has made one. Codeine is an ingredient in cough medicine

popular in the south. The government has acted on this today, because these things can be applied very quickly. I have seen the state of kids in various communities who are taking drugs and it's pitiful. There are many drug sellers in communities like Khlong Toei. They get rich and then move on, go out to Minburi or Nong Chok, and leave their sale network in Khlong Toei. It's like MLM (Multi Level Marketing), setting up lower levels. We must turn MLM back against them, turn their method back against themselves, that is, chase them from the police, from top to bottom, from the bottom to the community, create a suppression network to find the information to work back up the chain, and seize their assets. You need not be afraid of any influence, even if there are politicians or whoever behind them. You can meet me any time. If politicians are involved, arrest them, deal with them severely, whatever party, whatever name. Anyone who sells drugs is destroying the nation. Let me say this very clearly. However many times I say it, it will be the same. If you come across influence, if you are intimidated, come to see me. I'll stand by you and I'm ready to give you justice. Nobody has such influence or merit with me that I have to fear or defer to the extent that I will tolerate their involvement with drugs. You can all rest assured. Act decisively. If someone threatens to move you or punish you because of drug suppression work, come to see me any time.

On rehabilitation, let all agencies gather their thoughts on what else can be done. I don't have knowledge of everything but I appeal to all agencies to help. At present we have brought some drug convicts out to the Citizens Development School, and detained some instead of imposing fines. The detention centres are now overflowing. At some places there is not enough water for bathing. Now we must bring drug users punished under the old law out for rehab and give them an opportunity to return to society. Most of the petty traders are housewives who, during the economic crisis when prices went up and there was no work, were invited to become sellers under the MLM system. Recently I went to see Kaset Yothin School in Chiang Mai. I found that 90 per cent of the female convicts were small drug vendors who had been arrested. They sell petty amounts of drugs, because they think the police won't arrest women. So we need cooperation on the issue of rehab communities and forced rehab. Any government agency that is ready to help can go ahead, so we can complete rehab quickly, and bring down the curtain quickly.

Each of the six deputy prime ministers has a region of responsibility. You must follow up matters closely, give encouragement and support, and evaluate the progress in the provinces under your responsibility. Government inspectors (phu truat ratchakan), chairman of the advisors, please help oversee every area, go and check what is beyond the capacity of the province and has to be reassigned at the government level. Please take decisions on my behalf to ensure these three months are highly successful. Let every area have a boss, that is the provincial governor and the police chief, and below them the district officer and station heads, and the Bangkok Police Chief, and the station head in every locality, but it does not mean the police chief is free of responsibility, even though there is no province, the police chief must oversee all units under his command just as if he was a provincial police chief. The deputy prime ministers have to double check matters for the prime minister, but not to the extent of doing the duty of a police officer; just oversight is enough; give encouragement to the implementers, coordinate, and solve immediate problems so the work can proceed smoothly. Anything which requires an emergency budget can be arranged. You can order it on the prime minister's behalf. In these three months, don't waste any time. There are no weekends. For these three months

there are no holidays. You can take a rest, but you cannot take a rest from the responsibility. You can take a rest, but the responsibility will still be there. So for these three months, get in the frame of mind, make a plan, a strategy, work systematically and absolutely continuously.

In addition, about news. We must help one another. I believe all you deputy prime ministers will help solve your problems so you can work to your utmost. Know the government is beside you. Work to your utmost. We are beside you, ready to help you work to the best of the skills you have acquired, and with the ideal and commitment to work to preserve a peaceful population, overcome problems, and increase well-being.

When the US makes war against terrorism, they do it with full commitment, pour in all their resources, and use every kind of influence they have, use every level of politics to deal with this matter. I think that task is more difficult than a domestic drug problem because they have to work all over the world. So today we have to make war on drugs, have to attack, and that is not beyond our ability. I have confidence in you, especially as I was a military cadet. I know that if the police work seriously they can do anything, deal with anything. I am really confident. I'm confident that my friends and colleagues can do it. The provincial governors must give support. You must plan together, and think together. For sure, in any organization not all the people are good people, and not all are bad people either. The bad people are fewer than the good, or else Thai society could not survive. But we must unite to deal with the bad people. None of you must flinch.

I hope that in these three months, these ninety days, everyone should make preparations, have a meeting plan, and think together well. In these three months, work to the best of your ability, in every area, without diversion. Wherever they show their heads, arrest them all. And in the end we will have information which will enable the police, especially the officers at the centre, to make out the "jigsaw" and be able to crush the whole system. I myself shall travel to neighbouring countries in February to create the understanding to solve all the problems. I will do this in parallel. I am giving orders here because I will be working it as well. We will be working in parallel. Not one thing will be overlooked. Government agencies must have no boundaries between them. Help one another to the full. Use the full power of the land. And for sure, three months will not be enough, for sure. There must be rehab and many other things following on. Let me just say one thing. One day I went to play golf and had a caddy around 30 years old who was quite good looking. I asked whether she was married. She replied no. I was surprised and asked why with such an appearance she was not married. She replied that around her home everyone was on drugs and she did not know why she should get married, just to get bashed about. Don't you see how sad this story is? She said around her home everyone was on drugs. This is an ordinary person speaking. Wherever I go I like to ask the villagers one or two questions, so I can think about them.

This shows how bad the situation is today, because the impact goes right down to the village, the countryside, and the poor. Before it was only the slums in Bangkok, but now it is in every school at every level. Almost every famous school has drugs. So-called "white" [i.e., drug-free] schools are white because of the smoke. This is the truth. And today the attitude of many teachers towards kids is different from teachers in the past. Then they felt that students were like their own children and treated them with compassion. Nowadays the behaviour of some teachers towards kids is not good. The compassion and fairness towards kids has deteriorated. Teachers think their duty is to

finish teaching in the evening and then go to give special classes. Kids lack warmth. Parents have no time because they have to work hard for a living. At the schools, the attitude of teachers is deteriorating. These things have changed a lot. So today we have to help one another in every form. We have to turn back to the good things in the past. Everyone should help one another.

Today we do not have much time to discuss together. The main purpose is to hear the policy. I apologize this has been like one-way communication, but let us be of one mind in pooling our efforts. Whoever has the manpower and the facilities must help. If there is no budget, it doesn't matter. If you need budget, use your own first and if there really is no budget, make a proposal. I'll arrange things, you need not worry. I will take full responsibility to ensure these three months have real value, that they make history in dealing with drugs in Thailand. I hope that in these three months, we will be of one mind for the future of our children, to eradicate drugs, and to give rise to common wisdom about solving the drug problem in the long term, through both rehabilitation and suppression. After the three months for which we are pooling our efforts, a new wisdom will emerge, a more systematic thinking. After that, in March, after the deputy prime minister (Chaturon Chaisaeng), the justice minister, and interior minister, carry out the three tasks already assigned to you, we will get a picture of the things you find during these three months of eradication, and will be able to solve things completely in the long term. But in these three months, I believe there will be a lot of arrests, especially of traders. As for the dens of vice, they will gradually be brought under regulation so they cannot distribute and sell drugs at all. RCA, where you can buy ecstasy like from a chewing gum vendor, will be totally stopped, and hopefully fully cleaned up. In these three months, the six deputy prime ministers should not go overseas. Go to the provinces instead. Go to provide support, go to solve the problems on the spot in every province you oversee.

Good luck and thank you again for all your efforts for our nation.