

Opening Speech: World Drugs Day event at Accra

Dear Honourable Ministers, Ambassadors, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to thank the Government of Ghana and the Narcotics Control Commission for inviting me to give a speech today, as Charge d’Affairs for the British High Commission. This is an important day to reflect on this global challenge, which affects us all.

The International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, or World Drug Day, is marked on 26 June every year, to strengthen action and cooperation in achieving the goal of a world free of drug abuse.

Each year, individuals, communities, and organisations all over the world join in this global observance, to raise awareness of the major problem that illicit drugs represent for societies around the world. The theme this year – addressing drug challenges in health and humanitarian crises – really resonates with the UK.

In December last year, we published From Harm to Hope – the UK’s new drugs strategy.

This is a long term, 10-year plan designed to cut crime and save lives. It recognises explicitly that the challenge around drugs is more than the criminal elements – it is about healthcare and society as well. As our strategy sets out, there is a massive financial cost from drugs. In the UK the financial cost is estimated at least £20 billion a year. But there is also a human cost – of lives ruined, or lost. For example:

- there are 300,000 crack cocaine or heroin addicts committing crimes to feed their habit across the UK
- in England and Wales 3,000 people lost their lives through drug misuse last year

We recognise in our new strategy that we must increase efforts to tackle drug addiction as well as drug crime.

This is complex, and it will mean getting public services to work better together, to provide more support to people battling their addictions – recognising that these are chronic and long term, so that they do not affect employment, or housing, or mental health because, then the cost to the state increases exponentially.

So the UK’s strategy will not only continue to disincentivise drug use – through awareness and stronger enforcement – but also to undermine the markets in the UK, Europe and the US that are driving this crime. We will also significantly increase funding for health workers, treatments and interventions – with an ambition for 50,000 more treatment places to be

available in the coming years.

Thankfully, Ghana does not suffer as many of the debilitating issues stemming from class A drug addiction. We hope this continues, though there are signs across West Africa that domestic markets may start to expand. So far though, it is around the supply of drugs where the UK and Ghana have worked together so closely over the last few years.

The global availability of drugs is higher than ever before, and it is not enough to work only at the source and destination points. We need to continue to disrupt every point of the supply chain. And that's where we need your help and support.

Ghana is noted as a transit country for drug trafficking particularly cocaine – with South America directly across the ocean – but also heroin and some psychotropic substances as well as precursor chemicals.

The UK has invested over £3 million in Narcotics Control Commission (NCC) over the last 10 years. And our teams from Border Force, Immigration Enforcement and the National Crime Agency have developed strong partnerships not only with the NCC, but also EOCO, Ghana Police, FIC and other law enforcement agencies. We have made great progress together.

As many of you will already be aware, the UK has also now partnered with Germany (through GIZ) to set up a new Serious Organised Crime programme. This will build upon progress already made and continue to support and strengthen some of the institutions here in Ghana.

I am delighted to say, on this World Drugs Day, that the new programme will be collaborating with NCC on a new awareness raising campaign. This programme is designed to protect fishermen and their communities from the dangers of substance abuse and ensure they are aware of the dangers of becoming involved in trafficking.

Why fishing communities?

Because we understand that, globally, people are at risk of turning to the drugs trade as an economic buffer against poverty. And in the context of mounting competition over declining fish stocks, this risk rises.

In February, we saw 9 Ghanaian fishermen arrested in Nigeria for smuggling Indian hemp. We are realists. We know that where there are profits, crimes will continue to be committed. But we need to ensure that those who commit these are fully aware of the significance of their crimes, and the risks in doing so. And this means supporting vulnerable communities – like the fishing communities along the coast of Ghana in Osu, Labone, Pram Pram and Ada.

We hope that the campaign will reach a minimum of 500 individuals. And for each one of these individuals, to become an agent for change, within their families and communities.

Much as we are trying to do in the UK, we hope that this will help act as a disincentive to stop people from committing some of these crimes. And so I'm

pleased that the UK and GIZ, through our new partnership, can support NCC in this really important awareness raising campaign.

So, once again, thank you for inviting me to attend today, thank you for your support on World Drugs Day, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to tackle this crucial issue.

ENDS