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UNODC *World Drug Report 2010* Shows Shift Towards New Drugs and New Markets

Report highlights threat of drugs to health and security

VIENNA, 23 June (UN Information Service) – The *World Drug Report 2010*, issued today at the National Press Club in Washington by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), shows that drug use is shifting towards new drugs and new markets. Drug cultivation is declining in Afghanistan (for opium) and the Andean countries (coca), and drug use has stabilized in the developed world. However, there are signs of an increase in drug use in developing countries, and growing abuse of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) and prescription drugs around the world.

Cultivation of opium and cocaine down

The Report shows that the world's supply of the two main problem drugs – opiates and cocaine – keeps declining. The global area under opium cultivation has dropped by almost a quarter (23 per cent) in the past two years, and opium production looks set to fall steeply in 2010 due to a blight that could wipe out a quarter of Afghanistan's poppy crop. Coca cultivation, down by 28 per cent in the past decade, has kept declining in 2009. World cocaine production has declined by 12-18 per cent over the 2007-2009 period.

Heroin: production declining, interdictions low

Global potential heroin production fell by 13 per cent to 657 tons in 2009, reflecting lower opium production in both Afghanistan and Myanmar. The actual amount of heroin reaching the market is much lower (around 430 tons) since significant amounts of opium are being stockpiled. UNODC estimates that there are currently more than 12,000 tons of Afghan opium or, around two and a half years of global illicit opiate demand, being stock-piled.

The global heroin market, estimated at US\$55 billion, is concentrated in Afghanistan (which accounts for 90 per cent of supply), Russia, Iran and Western Europe which together consume half the heroin produced in the world.

Although Afghanistan produces most of the world's opiates, it seizes less than two per cent of them. Iran and Turkey are scoring the highest, responsible for over half of all heroin seized globally in 2008. Interdiction rates elsewhere are much lower. Along the northern route, the countries of Central Asia are only seizing a meagre five per cent of the 90 tons of heroin that cross their territory heading towards Russia. In turn Russia, that consumes 20 per cent of the Afghan heroin output, seizes only four per cent of this flow. The figures are even worse along the Balkan route: some countries of South-Eastern Europe, including EU member states, are intercepting less than two per cent of the heroin crossing their territory.

Cocaine market is shifting

The *World Drug Report 2010* shows that cocaine consumption has fallen significantly in the United States in the past few years. The retail value of the US cocaine market has declined by about two thirds in the 1990s, and by about one quarter in the past decade. "One reason for the drug-related violence in Mexico is that cartels are fighting over a shrinking market," said UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa. "This in-fight is a blessing for America, as the resulting cocaine drought is causing lower addiction rates, higher prices and lesser purity of doses."

To an extent the problem has moved across the Atlantic: in the last decade the number of cocaine users in Europe doubled, from 2 million in 1998 to 4.1 million in 2008. By 2008, the European market (US\$34 billion) was almost as valuable as the North American market (US\$37 billion). The shift in demand has led to a shift in trafficking routes, with an increasing amount of cocaine flowing to Europe from the Andean countries via West Africa. This is causing regional instability. "People snorting coke in Europe are killing the pristine forests of the Andean countries and corrupting governments in West Africa," said Mr. Costa.

Use of synthetic drugs exceeds opiates and cocaine combined

The global number of people using amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) – estimated at around 30-40 million – is soon likely to exceed the number of opiate and cocaine users combined. There is also evidence of increasing abuse of prescription drugs. "We will not solve the world drugs problem if we simply push addiction from cocaine and heroin to other addictive substances – and there are unlimited amounts of them, produced in mafia labs at trivial costs," warned Mr. Costa.

The ATS market is harder to track because of short trafficking routes (manufacturing usually takes place close to main consumer markets), and the fact that many of the raw materials are both legal and readily available. Manufacturers are quick to market new products (like ketamine, piperazines, Mephedrone and Spice) and exploit new markets. "These new drugs cause a double problem. First, they are being developed at a much faster rate than regulatory norms and law enforcement can keep up. Second, their marketing is cunningly clever, as they are custom-manufactured so as to meet the specific preference in each situation," said Mr. Costa.

The number of ATS-related clandestine laboratories reported increased by 20 per cent in 2008, including in countries where such labs had never been detected in the past.

Manufacture of 'ecstasy' has increased in North America (notably in Canada) and in several parts of Asia, and use seems to be increasing in Asia. In another demonstration of the fluidity of drug markets, ecstasy use in Europe has plummeted since 2006.

Cannabis still the world's drug of choice

Cannabis remains the world's most widely produced and used illicit substance: it is grown in almost all countries of the world, and is smoked by 130-190 million people at least once a year – though these parameters are not very telling in terms of addiction. The fact that cannabis use is declining in some of its highest value markets, namely North America and parts of Europe, is another indication of shifting patterns of drug abuse.

UNODC found evidence of indoor cultivation of cannabis for commercial purposes in 29 countries, particularly in Europe, Australia and North America. Indoor growing is a lucrative business and is increasingly a source of profit for criminal groups. Based on evidence gathered in 2009, Afghanistan is now the world's leading producer of cannabis resin (as well as opium).

Insufficient drug treatment

The *World Drug Report 2010* exposes a serious lack of drug treatment facilities around the world. "While rich people in rich countries can afford treatment, poor people and/or poor countries are facing the greatest health consequences," warned the head of UNODC. The Report estimates that, in 2008, only around a fifth of problem drug users worldwide had received treatment in the past year, which means around 20 million drug dependent people did not receive treatment. "It is time for universal access to drug treatment," said Mr. Costa.

He called for health to be the centrepiece of drug control. "Drug addiction is a treatable health condition, not a life sentence. Drug addicts should be sent to treatment, not to jail. And drug treatment should be part of mainstream healthcare."

He also called for greater respect for human rights. "Just because people take drugs, or are behind bars, this doesn't abolish their rights. I appeal to countries where people are executed for drug-related offences or, worse, are gunned down by extra-judicial hit squads, to end this practice."

Warning signs in the developing world

Mr. Costa highlighted the dangers of drug use in the developing world. "Market forces have already shaped the asymmetric dimensions of the drug economy; the world's biggest consumers of the poison (the rich countries) have imposed upon the poor (the main locations of supply and

trafficking) the greatest damage,” said Mr. Costa. “Poor countries are not in a position to absorb the consequences of increased drug use. The developing world faces a looming crisis that would enslave millions to the misery of drug dependence.”

He cited the boom in heroin consumption in Eastern Africa, the rise of cocaine use in West Africa and South America, and the surge in the production and abuse of synthetic drugs in the Middle East and South East Asia. “We will not solve the world drugs problem by shifting consumption from the developed to the developing world,” said Mr. Costa.

Drug trafficking and instability

The *World Drug Report 2010* contains a chapter on the destabilizing influence of drug trafficking on transit countries, focusing in particular on the case of cocaine. It shows how under-development and weak governance attract crime, while crime deepens instability. It shows how the wealth, violence and power of drug trafficking can undermine the security, even the sovereignty, of states. The threat to security posed by drug trafficking has been on the agenda of the United Nations Security Council several times during the past year.

While drug-related violence in Mexico receives considerable attention, the Northern Triangle of Central America, consisting of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador is even more badly affected, with murder rates much higher than in Mexico. The Report says that Venezuela has emerged as a major departure point for cocaine trafficked to Europe: between 2006 and 2008, over half of all detected maritime shipments of cocaine to Europe came from Venezuela.

The Report highlights the unstable situation in West Africa which has become a hub for cocaine trafficking. It notes that “traffickers have been able to co-opt top figures in some authoritarian societies”, citing the recent case of Guinea-Bissau.

Mr. Costa called for more development to reduce vulnerability to crime, and increased law enforcement cooperation to deal with drug trafficking. “Unless we deal effectively with the threat posed by organized crime, our societies will be held hostage – and drug control will be jeopardized, by renewed calls to dump the UN drug conventions that critics say are the cause of crime and instability. This would undo the progress that has been made in drug control over the past decade, and unleash a public health disaster,” he warned. “Yet, unless drug prevention and treatment are taken more seriously, public opinion’s support to the UN drug conventions will wane.”

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