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United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNODC Press Release

Myanmar remains the major producer of methamphetamine pills in the Greater Mekong Sub-region

Bangkok/Vienna. 13 December 2010. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for East Asia and the Pacific releases its Myanmar: Situation Assessment on Amphetamine-Type Stimulants today. The Situation Assessment provides a consolidated review of the ATS situation in Myanmar and the current developments with regard to the illicit manufacturing, trafficking and use of ATS in the country.

The Situation Assessment also shows that the impact of methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) trafficked from Myanmar extends not only to the immediate neighbouring countries but also to other countries in East and South-East Asia.

In releasing the Situation Assessment, UNODC Regional Representative for East Asia and the Pacific, Gary Lewis notes: "This Situation Assessment is the first of its kind. It aims to provide a clearer understanding of the ATS situation in Myanmar, in order to design effective and evidence-informed responses."

According to Lewis: "A significant percentage of the methamphetamine pills available in the region originate in Myanmar". Seizures of methamphetamine pills tripled in 2009 – with most seizures being made in China, Thailand, Myanmar and Lao PDR. The increase in seizures has been most pronounced in China and Myanmar itself. But this phenomenon affects most of the countries in the Greater Mekong subregion to some degree, and methamphetamine pills sourced to Myanmar have been reportedly seized even in Oceania.

Continuing insecurity and renewed hostilities during the past two years between the government and the ceasefire groups appear to be connected with the observed increase in illicit drug manufacture and trafficking both within and out of the country – primarily from the Shan State of Myanmar. In 2009, the total seizures of methamphetamine pills in Myanmar, Thailand and China amounted to more than 93 million – a rapid three-fold rise from the approximate 32 million pills seized in 2008. With more than 66 million methamphetamine pills seized in Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic already this year, there is a strong likelihood that total seizures in the region for 2010 will reach, if not surpass, the total seizures recorded in 2009.

There are indications that the methamphetamine problem in Myanmar is becoming more severe. In 2009, large seizures of high purity crystalline methamphetamine were made in Myanmar. Authorities in both Myanmar and Thailand confirm that the manufacture of crystalline methamphetamine is now occurring in the Golden Triangle. Although most of the crystalline methamphetamine seized in Myanmar was destined for international markets, the domestic demand for methamphetamine pills in the country continues to grow. Meanwhile,

drug-dependence treatment in Myanmar is under-resourced and there are no treatment facilities specifically focusing on ATS dependency.

“We are cooperating with the Myanmar drug control authorities to secure better information and data. We welcome the increased efforts by these authorities to tackle the drug problem”, said Lewis.

The Situation Assessment however notes the need for laws and policies conducive to dealing with synthetic drugs – as opposed to opiates – and the lack of sufficient information-sharing between relevant agencies, the lack of consolidated information and focused research on ATS use, impede adequate progress.

UNODC launched the Global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme in September 2008. The Programme seeks to enhance the capacity of Member States and authorities in priority regions to generate, manage, analyze and report synthetic drug information, and to apply this scientific evidence-based knowledge to the design of policies and programmes. The Global SMART Programme is being implemented in a gradual phased manner, with East and South-East Asia being the first focus region.

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