

UNODC Press Release

**Opium poppy cultivation in South-East Asia jumps
by more than 20 per cent in one year, says UNODC**

Bangkok/Vienna. 13 December 2010. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released its 2010 South-East Asia Opium Survey today indicating a surge in opium cultivation in the region over the past year. The Survey, which comprises the UNODC Lao PDR and Myanmar Opium Surveys as well as information on poppy cultivation in Thailand from that country's Office of the Narcotics Control Board, points to rising levels of opium poppy cultivation across all three countries. It also highlights the fact that opium prices remain at the high level of the last years. For the period under review, the potential value for opium production in South-East Asia rose dramatically to US\$ 219 million - an increase of US\$ 100 million over the 2009 estimate, and a monetary jump of 82%.

In terms of poppy cultivation, there was a 22 per cent increase between 2009 and 2010 in the region as a whole. Myanmar experienced the biggest increase in actual area with cultivation shooting up by 6,400 hectares (ha), or 20 per cent, to reach 38,100 ha in 2010. In the case of Lao PDR the increase was the largest in percentage terms - 58 per cent - increasing from 1,900 ha to 3,000 ha. Thailand's already small cultivation increased marginally from 211 ha to 289 ha.

The Survey shows that while opium poppy cultivation in South-East Asia remains well below the peak figures of the mid-1990s - where it hovered around 160,000 ha - the year-on-year increase over the past four years, from the low point in 2006, has been relentlessly upward.

In releasing the Survey, UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov noted: "While Governments have increased their eradication efforts, the potential opium production in 2010 is estimated to have increased by approximately 75 per cent when compared to 2009." As a result of the overall larger areas cultivated with the crop in all three countries and higher yields in Myanmar the production levels in Myanmar shot up the most significantly, from 330 metric tonnes (mt) to 580 mt, while Lao PDR's levels rose by 7 mt to 18 mt in 2010, and Thailand increased by 36% from 3 mt to 5 mt.

In terms of eradication 9,135 ha of poppy fields in the region were destroyed in 2010, up by 85% from 4,939 ha the previous year. At country-level, the authorities in Myanmar cleared an estimated 8,268 ha - a 102 per cent rise from 2009. Eradication efforts in Lao PDR dipped slightly by 11 per cent from 651 ha to 579 ha, while Thailand succeeded in removing 278 ha compared with the 2009 level of 201 ha.

On the causes of these increases, Mr. Fedotov stated: "Poverty and instability are two of the drivers which push farmers to grow - or sometimes return to growing - illicit crops". Regrettably, while progress has been made in reducing poppy fields over the past decade, the recent global economic crisis appears to have exacerbated the situation for poor communities and tempted

many to enter the drug market. The rising price of opium over the last few years has also been instrumental in making opium cultivation an attractive option for many.

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