

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Methamphetamine rise in East and South-East Asia threat to security and health, UNODC warns**

**Bangkok (Thailand), 29 November 2011** – East Asia and South-East Asia are major centres for the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS). There has been a significant expansion in the manufacture, trafficking and use of methamphetamines in the past five years. This, plus the increasing involvement of transnational organized criminal groups in the ATS drug trade pose a growing threat to security and public health in the region, warns a report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

“The international community has taken its eye off the ball on illicit drug production and trafficking in East Asia,” said Mr. Gary Lewis, Regional Representative, UNODC Regional Centre for East Asia and the Pacific. “The numbers are heading in the wrong direction. We must be pro-active on all fronts to assist the countries of the region to counteract these threats and prevent East and South-East Asia from again becoming a major illicit drugs hub.”

The report, ***2011 Patterns and Trends of Amphetamine-Type Stimulants and Other Drugs, Asia and the Pacific***, highlights the latest patterns and trends of ATS – a market which includes amphetamine, methamphetamine, methcathinone, and ecstasy-group substances – as well as other illicit drugs in East and South-East Asia. It also provides overviews for the neighbouring regions of South Asia and the Pacific.

In addition to endemic threats from regional organized crime groups, the report draws attention to the growing reach and presence in Asia of transnational organized criminal groups from outside the region. Methamphetamine trafficking by African groups has been officially reported by China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. Attempts by Iranian groups to establish illicit ATS manufacturing operations in Japan, Malaysia and Thailand have also been reported.

In terms of illicit drug use, ATS rank among the top three drugs of use in all 15 countries surveyed in the region. In 10 of those countries, ATS use increased during 2010. Only Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea reported stable or declining usage. In addition, the use of crystalline methamphetamine has expanded to countries which had not previously reported it such as Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. The manufacture and use of ecstasy declined in East and South-East Asia, which is consistent with global trends.

Since most of the methamphetamine that is seized in the region is also produced in the region, the staggering increase in seizures reflects burgeoning production. For example,

methamphetamine seizures in 2010 reached 136 million pills – a fourfold increase over the 32 million seized in 2008. In terms of the location of these seizures, in 2010, most pills were seized in China (58.4 million), Thailand (50.4 million) and Lao PDR (24.5 million).

Moreover, 442 ATS-related laboratories were busted in 2010 in East and South-East Asia – representing a nearly five-fold rise since 2006, according to the report.

The Lao PDR figure represents a ten-fold increase in just one year – and points to the targeting of that country by traffickers. The region’s manufacturing, trafficking and use of illicit drugs pose a growing threat to Lao PDR, says the report. Lao PDR is at risk of seeing methamphetamine manufacturing facilities relocate from Myanmar to its remote northern regions. Methamphetamine pills are the primary drug of use in Lao PDR, and the market for ATS continues to expand.

In overall terms, however, China, Myanmar and the Philippines still remain the largest illicit manufacturers of ATS. Significant manufacturing expansion has been reported in Cambodia, Indonesia and Malaysia, previously considered to be primarily ATS transit countries. Indonesia has developed significant problems with ATS manufacturing and use, with crystal methamphetamine now the primary drug of use, having overtaken cannabis. International drug trafficking organizations continue to smuggle ATS and other illicit drugs into Indonesia.

The report also notes that South Asia and the Pacific Island States and territories are vulnerable to an expansion of illicit ATS manufacture, trafficking and diversion of ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, often in pharmaceutical preparations, to drug-making facilities.

### **Rising number of arrests, greater demand for treatment**

Expanding methamphetamine use has fuelled a sharp increase in methamphetamine-related arrests. It has also led to increased need for effective drug treatment. In 2010, nearly 218,000 arrests in the region involved methamphetamine, a 19% increase on the previous year. Methamphetamine accounted for 87% of all drug-related arrests in Brunei Darussalam, 83% in Japan, 80% in Thailand, 77% in the Philippines and 70% in the Republic of Korea.

“Drug dependence is a chronic relapsing health condition which should be treated in the health sector based on scientific evidence and on each individual’s treatment needs,” said Mr. Lewis. “We need more motivational, cognitive-behavioural and case-management approaches. The vast majority of people can be efficiently treated on an out-patient basis.”

### **Background – the Global SMART Programme**

This report, **2011 Patterns and Trends of Amphetamine-Type Stimulants and Other Drugs, Asia and the Pacific**, was prepared by the UNODC Global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme.



**UNODC**

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNODC launched the Global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme in September 2008. The objective of the Programme is to enhance the capacity of Member States and relevant authorities to generate, manage, analyse, report and use synthetic drug information, in order to design effective, scientifically-sound and evidence-based policies and programmes.

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