

PRESS RELEASE

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UNODC reveals devastating impact of Afghan opium *How the world's deadliest drug feeds addiction, crime and insurgency*

Vienna, 21 October 2009 (UNODC) – Afghanistan has the world monopoly of opium cultivation (92%), the raw material for the world's deadliest drug – heroin. The size and impact of the opium economy in Afghanistan were documented in the *Opium Survey* of September 2009. Less well known is the size of the opiate trade once it leaves Afghanistan, and its impact on the world.

A new report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Addiction, Crime and Insurgency: The transnational threat of Afghan opium*, shows the devastating consequences that the 900 tons of opium and 375 tons of heroin, trafficked from Afghanistan every year, have on the health and security of countries along the Balkan and Eurasian drug routes, all the way to Europe, Russia, India and China. It documents how the world's deadliest drug has created a market worth \$65 billion, catering to 15 million addicts, causing up to 100,000 deaths per year, spreading HIV at an unprecedented rate and, not least, funding criminal groups, insurgents and terrorists.

According to UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa, “we have identified the global consequences of the Afghan opium trade. Some are devastating, but expected; others seem surprising, yet they are very real. I urge the friends of Afghanistan to recognize that, to a large extent, these uncomfortable truths may be the result of their benign neglect.” The Report's findings reveal a number of anomalies.

In Afghanistan, high volumes of opium flows, low volumes of seizures

One such anomaly is the incongruence between high volumes of heroin use and low volumes of seizures. Approximately 40% of Afghanistan's heroin (150 tons) is trafficked each year into Pakistan, around 30% (105 tons) enters Iran, while 25% (100 tons) flows into Central Asia.

The root of the problem lies in Afghanistan where corruption, lawlessness and uncontrolled borders result in an insignificant 2% interception rate of the opiates produced, compared to one third (36%) in Colombia for cocaine. In the south and east of Afghanistan, smuggling prospers because of centuries-old Pashtun and Baluchi cross-border tribal links, the violence and chaos caused by insurgency, disregard of

international obligations in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, and the violation of the trade transit agreements with neighbours. According to Mr. Costa, "the Af/Pak border region has turned into the world's largest free trade zone in anything and everything that is illicit – drugs of course, but also weapons, bomb-making equipment, chemical precursors, drug money, even people and migrants."

Outside Afghanistan, interdiction rates decline while drug values rise

A second anomaly exposed by the report is that, counter-intuitively, interdiction rates decline as the drugs move closer to lucrative, and more opulent markets. It should be the other way around, as richer countries can afford better law enforcement: not so. While Iran intercepts 20% of the opiates crossing its territory and Pakistan 17%, Central Asian states intercept just 5%, and Russia a meagre 4%. Faring even worse are countries of South Eastern Europe, including EU Member States like Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania that intercept less than 2% of their opiate trade. This, despite the fact that Europe consumes 88 tons of heroin per year, and Russia 70 tons. World-wide, only 20% percent of Afghan opiate shipments are being intercepted, compared to twice as much for cocaine from the Andean countries.

The value of the drugs doubles with every border crossed: a gram of heroin worth \$3 in Kabul may reach \$100 on the streets of London, Milan or Moscow. The cost of law enforcement grows correspondingly. "Seizing Afghan opium where it is produced is infinitely more efficient and cheaper than trying to do so where it is consumed", said Mr. Costa. He therefore called for more resources to tackle the problem at its source – in Afghanistan and its neighbourhood. "This is not just a shared responsibility: it's hard-headed self-interest", said Mr. Costa.

Taliban making more money from drugs now than ten years ago

A third anomaly is the significant increase in the drug money made by the Taliban today, in comparison to the 1990s, when they were in power. *Addiction, Crime and Insurgency* documents that a decade ago the Taliban earned \$75-100 million per year by taxing opium cultivation: the only source of foreign exchange available to their regime. Since 2005, Talibs and other insurgents in Afghanistan have derived \$90-160 million per year just from taxing opium production and trade (a tithe known as *ushr*). This drug money increases substantially by adding the charges insurgents impose on labs and precursor imports, as well as the taxes on economic activity in the districts they control. Furthermore, the Taliban and al-Qaeda inspired groups take a share of the \$1 billion opiate market in Pakistan.

"The Taliban direct involvement in the opium trade allows them to fund a war machine that is becoming technologically more complex and increasingly widespread", said Mr. Costa. "Newly born *narco-cartels* in and around Afghanistan are blurring the difference between greed and ideology. Some profiteers in the heroin trade wear suits and white collars, other wear black turbans", said the head of UNODC. "Many of these drug barons, with links to insurgency, are known to Afghan and foreign intelligence services. Why

have their names not been submitted to the UN Security Council, as required by Resolutions 1735 and 1822, in order to ban their travel and seize their assets?"

A perfect storm on the move

Sometimes forgotten is the double nature of the Afghan drug flows. There are the physical quantities (tons of opium and heroin), that cause health havoc in consuming nations: law enforcement concentrates on these flows. Then there are the value flows, the money made around Afghanistan by the drug trade in the hands of criminals, to be sure, and also insurgents, like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Party of Turkmenistan, and the East Turkistan Liberation Organization. "The perfect storm of drugs and terrorism, that has struck the Afghan/Pakistani border for years, may be heading towards Central Asia. A big part of the region could be engulfed in large-scale terrorism, endangering its massive energy resources", warns the head of UNODC.

More deaths at home (from drugs) than on the battlefield (from bullets)

Surprising as it may seem, the human cost of addiction in consuming countries is higher than the number of soldiers killed in Afghanistan's poppy fields. The number of heroin addicts in Russia has gone up by a factor of ten in the past decade, to the point that more Russians die every year from Afghan drugs (more than 30,000 according to government figures) than the total number of Red Army soldiers killed during the 10-year Afghan war. In NATO countries, the number of people who die of heroin overdoses every year (more than 10,000) is five times higher than the total number of NATO troops killed in Afghanistan in the past 8 years. Iran faces the world's most serious opiate addiction problem, while injecting drug use in Central Asia is causing an HIV epidemic. "Opium hasn't caused such grief since the plague of addiction in China a century ago", said Mr. Costa.

Much more supply than demand – so where is it?

Anomalous, yet broadly known, is also the fact that, since 2006, much more opium has been produced in Afghanistan than is consumed in the world at-large. The report confirms that there is now an unaccounted stockpile of 12,000 tons of Afghan opium – enough to satisfy more than two years of world heroin demand. "With so much opium in evil hands, the need to locate and destroy these stocks is more urgent than ever", said Mr. Costa.

Some numbers do not add up

A final anomaly concerns the drug trade and consumption statistics: the numbers just do not add up. India, despite having 800,000 addicts, does not report any inflow of raw opium: either vast quantities of domestic (licensed) production are diverted; or there is illicit opium cultivation in India; or some of the Afghan opium reaches the sub-continent. Similarly, North America consumes around 20 tons of heroin every year. Since Latin America reportedly produces less than this amount, either several tons of heroin are being

trafficked from Afghanistan, or Latin America produces more heroin than reported. Equally hard-to-explain are the enormous amounts of Afghan drugs flowing into Iran, despite the country's admirable efforts to block the smugglers' path with gigantic infrastructures along its eastern borders: nothing similar has been done by other Afghan neighbours that are the recipient of smaller amounts of drugs.

Frightening, but not just because of the numbers

Addiction, Crime and Insurgency offers a perspective that is both deeper in scope and broader in geographical coverage than earlier UNODC work on Afghanistan. "The numbers are scary", said Mr. Costa. "Even more frightening is the fact that governments have not recognized that they can only tackle this threat by addressing all links in the chain: assistance to farmers to reduce supply, drug prevention and treatment to curb demand, and law enforcement against intermediaries."

Copies of the report are available upon request.
Report will be posted on www.unodc.org on 21 October
For TV producers, B-roll is available.
Still pictures available for newspapers.
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