



REPORT: Regional Media Forum: Governments' Response to Public Perceptions on Counter Narcotics

26th May 2015
Dushanbe, Tajikistan

1. Introduction

UNODC's Regional Programme for Afghanistan and its Neighbouring Countries was launched in December 2011 with the aim of strengthening cooperation among the countries of the region in countering narcotics. The Regional Programme has delivered a number of significant achievements since its launch, resulting in ever-increasing cooperation between lead agencies of governments of the region. It is acknowledged that countering narcotics requires a holistic approach that is not merely limited to enforcement but also inclusive of the need for effective treatment provision, advocacy and engagement with the public at large. Therefore, all segments of the society such as the media, scholars, youth, students and academics must be involved in countering the harmful effects of the illicit drug trade.

Enhancing partnerships between governments and the public is an important tool in countering narcotics. These partnerships can help educate the public on the threat of illicit drugs, its effect on good governance, security, the licit economy, health and livelihoods. Dialogue and interaction between governments and civil society increases public awareness on counter narcotics, and can help to promote trust and confidence. In addition, students and academia can also positively influence perceptions of the younger generation on illicit drug use in support of wider drug demand reduction initiatives.



Sub-Programme 4 of the Regional Programme is thankful to the Government of Tajikistan for hosting "The Regional Media Forum: Governments' Responses to Public Perceptions on Counter Narcotics" on the margins of the regional counter narcotics conference of Heads of Counter Narcotics Agencies of regional countries on the 27th of May 2015 in Dushanbe. The Regional Media Forum consisted of narcotics focused discussions between a panel of Heads of Counter Narcotics Agencies from the

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and UNODC in front of and with participation from an audience of students from a number of universities and colleges in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

The first such event organized by the Regional Programme to bring together policy makers and members of society, the Regional Media Forum was aimed at increasing awareness amongst students and the wider public on issues related to illicit drug trafficking and use, understanding public perceptions on narcotics as well as strengthening regional cooperation on drug control.

The question and answer segment of the Regional Media Forum was covered by media from both Afghanistan and Tajikistan and broadcasted as part of news bulletins and also as a special event feature. Aryana TV, one of Afghanistan's leading channels broadcasted the Regional Media Forum four times to audiences in Afghanistan, Europe and the North America.



The Regional Programme is extremely thankful to the Government of Finland for their support, without which the Regional Media Forum would not have been possible.

2. Outcomes

Major outcomes of the Regional Media Forum include:

1. Media coverage of active engagement and discussions between Heads of Drug Agencies and students / academics resulting in increased awareness of issues related to illicit drug trade;
2. Sharing of experiences related to countering narcotics between Regional Programme countries;
3. International coverage of counter narcotics efforts in West and Central Asia; and
4. Commitment of Heads of Drug Agencies for continued engagement and discourse with members of the public to support wider counter narcotics efforts.

3. Participants

There were different categories of participants with the predominant group consisting of university students from colleges who were identified in consultation with counterparts in Tajikistan. The event was attended by:

1. Panel Members consisting of the **Heads of Counter Narcotics Agencies** from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, UNODC's Representative for Central Asia, and the Senior Programme Coordinator UNODC's Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries.
2. **Students from universities and colleges** in Tajikistan including but not limited to students of law, economy, agriculture, social sciences, journalism, medical, security and criminology studies from the University of Mili Tajikistan, Tajik-Russian Slavonic University, University of Amozgari Tajikistan and Medical University of Tajikistan. Five representatives of youth focused civil society organisations (from Youth and Educational Council, Women for Women Organisation, Afghanistan Youth Network and two students one from Kardan University and the other from Kabul University) from Afghanistan also attended. The Regional Media Forum was a unique, first time opportunity for students to engage with senior, counter narcotics authorities.
3. **Professors and independent experts** were also invited to participate in the forum and had the opportunity to ask questions from the forum.

4. **National and international media** based in Dushanbe were invited to cover the proceedings of the forum. Ariana TV from Afghanistan also attended the Forum, covering then broadcasting the whole programme to Afghanistan, Europe and North America.
5. **Representatives from embassies** of the region stationed in Dushanbe also attended the event.

In total, there were over 450 participants of the Regional Media Forum.

4. Acknowledgements

We are extremely thankful to the Government of Tajikistan for allowing us to hold the Regional Media Forum in Dushanbe.

Our sincere gratitude also goes to the Government of Finland for their financial support, without which it would not have been possible to hold the Forum.

And finally, our thanks to the Heads of Drug Agencies from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, students, civil society organisations for their active engagement in Forum and the media from Afghanistan and Tajikistan for their coverage.

5. Programme of the Regional Media Forum

MC:	Hashim Wahdatyar, National Programme Officer, UNODC Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Its Neighbouring Countries
16:00 – 16:10	Opening remarks of Deputy Head of Drug Control Agency, Under the President of Tajikistan Introduction and elaboration of the Forum’s structure
16:10 – 16:50	Briefings by the Heads of CN Agencies (5 minutes each) covering: - The drug situation, achievements, challenges, and way forward Afghanistan, I.R of Iran, Pakistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and UNODC
16:50 – 18:00	Questions & Answers – interactions with university students, professors, academics on counter narcotics and media

GROUND RULES:

In order to promote active participation of and between participants, all those in attendance were informed of the following ground rules and asked to abide by them.

1. The entire programme to be recorded and broadcasted by Jahanamo TV, as well as Ariana TV of Afghanistan. Other media in attendance were invited to make their own report of the RMF.
2. Participants had to be invited by the MC to ask questions / make interventions before doing soon.
3. Participants should introduce themselves (name, title, organisation body) and specify to whom his/her question is addressed to. The individual had one minute and could ask only one question to maximize chances of questions from the hall.
4. The Regional Media Forum was not an opportunity for political point scoring but instead an honest and open discussion on countering narcotics.

A list of panellists was distributed to all the participants beforehand.

