Executive Summary

Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) are the second most widely used class of drugs worldwide, after cannabis. The East and South-East Asia region, which is home to about one-third of the global population, has some of the largest and most established ATS markets in the world. Methamphetamine in pill, powder and crystalline forms are the most widely used forms of ATS in the region. Demand for ecstasy remains high, although its use has declined. Since the late 1990s, the illicit manufacture, trafficking and use of ATS have expanded significantly in the region. These trends continued in 2011.

The present report highlights the most current patterns and trends of amphetamine-type stimulants and other drugs of use in East and South-East Asia and provides overviews for the neighbouring regions of South Asia and the Pacific. This is the latest in a series of reports prepared under the Global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme. The objective of the Global SMART 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.

The findings of the report are based on primary information submitted by the drug control agencies and designated institutions in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam, via the Drug Abuse Information Network for Asia and the Pacific (DAINAP) established through the Global SMART Programme. Information from DAINAP is supplemented with data from other Government sources such as national reports, the Annual Reports Questionnaire, and through primary and secondary research. Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Republic of Korea also provided data to the Global SMART Programme for this report.

Significant levels of ATS use were reported from all 15 countries that contributed to this report, with 12 countries reporting methamphetamine as the primary or secondary drug of use. In East and South-East Asia, annual prevalence of ATS use is estimated to be 0.2-1.3 per cent of the population aged 15-64 years. The number of persons who have used amphetamines in the past year in East and South-East Asia is estimated between 3.7 and 19.5 million. In 2011, seven countries reported the use of methamphetamine pills, while all but two countries (Lao PDR and Myanmar) reported the use of crystalline methamphetamine.

Methamphetamine seizures in East and South-East Asia have accounted for almost half of the global totals during the past few years. In 2011, seizures continued at historically high levels, with a number of countries reporting significant increases. Illicit ATS manufacture also continued at high, albeit slightly declining, levels in 2011. As is the case elsewhere in the world, much of the ATS illicitly manufactured in East and South-East Asia is used within the region. Precursor chemicals – often in the form of pharmaceutical preparations – used in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine are often easily obtainable, and a large portion of the precursor chemicals are produced in this region. In addition, transnational organized criminal groups based outside of the region continue to be involved in illicit ATS trade.

Although improvements continue to be made in the region in terms of data generation, analysis and sharing as well as forensic capacity, numerous challenges remain in order to assess the full extent of the security and health implications of illicit manufacture, trafficking and use of ATS in the region.

Based on data submitted for the years 2010 and 2011, the following observations are made in the report:

- **ATS use, in particular methamphetamine use, continued to increase in most countries in East and South-East Asia.** ATS have ranked in the top three drugs of use in all countries in the region since 2009. In 2011, reported use of methamphetamine showed an increase in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam whereas methamphetamine use was reported as stable or declining in Australia, Japan, Malaysia and the Republic of Korea.

- **The illicit manufacture of ATS continued at high levels in the region.** In 2011, some 401 illicit synthetic drug manufacturing facilities were
seized in East and South-East Asia, most of which were manufacturing methamphetamine. Significant quantities of ATS continued to be illicitly manufactured in China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and the Philippines. Large-scale illicit ATS manufacture also continued to take place in Cambodia. A small number of illicit methamphetamine pill pressing operations continued to be seized in Thailand.

- Methamphetamine seizures remained high in 2011. A total of 122.8 million methamphetamine pills were seized in East and South-East Asia in 2011, a 9% decrease compared with the 134.4 million pills seized in 2010. Most pills continued to be seized in China (62 million), Thailand (49 million), Myanmar (5.9 million) and Lao PDR (4.6 million), which accounted for 98% of the total in 2011. The total amount of crystalline methamphetamine seized in the region rose by 23% in 2011 to 8.8 mt, with a number of countries reporting record-level seizures. Half of the region’s total seizures were made in China. Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand each reported seizures of more than 1 mt of crystalline methamphetamine.

- Ecstasy has been in decline in recent years; however the demand for illicit stimulants remains high. Reported ecstasy use continued to show a stable or declining trend in most countries in the region in 2011. However, in the same year ecstasy seizures showed an increase in eight countries: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Korea and Thailand. In addition, ecstasy manufacture continues to be reported in the region, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia. While the availability of MDMA has shown a decline in recent years, a large portion of the seized drugs marketed on the street as ‘ecstasy’ in the region continued to contain psychoactive substances other than MDMA, such as ketamine or methamphetamine.

- A range of new psychoactive substances has emerged in the region in recent years. These psychoactive substances include synthetic cannabinoids, piperazines such as BZP or m-chlorophenylpiperazine (mCPP), as well as analogues of methcathinone such as 4-methylmethcathinone (4-MMC, known as mephedrone) or MDPV (methylenedioxypyrovalerone). Whereas the use of these substances has been reported in Australia and New Zealand for some time, they have also more recently emerged in China, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam.

- Cocaine traffickers are targeting the large and untapped cocaine market in East and South-East Asia. Large quantities of cocaine have been seized in several countries in recent years and Cambodia, Philippines, Viet Nam and Hong Kong, China, have emerged as transit locations for cocaine trafficking.

- Organized criminal groups from Africa and the Islamic Republic of Iran continue to traffic methamphetamine and other illicit drugs into the region. West African drug trafficking organizations, which used to traffic primarily cocaine and heroin, are increasingly involved in methamphetamine trafficking. Transnational organized criminal groups from the Islamic Republic of Iran continue to traffic quantities of methamphetamine to various countries in the region, including Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand and Thailand.

- Arrests and drug treatment demand related to methamphetamine remain high and continued to show an upward trend in 2011.

- The neighbouring regions of South Asia and the Pacific Island States and territories remain vulnerable to the expansion of ATS trafficking and the diversion of precursor chemicals used for the manufacture of ATS, in particular ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, often in the form of pharmaceutical preparations. Illicit manufacture of ATS has also been reported from these two regions. Moreover, in the absence of formal drug surveillance systems or comprehensive illicit drug assessments, either nationally or regionally, the nature and extent of the ATS situation in these two regions are not fully understood.
Background

Since the late 1990s, the use of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), such as methamphetamine and ecstasy, has been one of the most significant drug problems worldwide. The most recent global estimates of past year use of amphetamine-group substances exceed that of heroin and cocaine users, combined. Unlike cocaine and heroin, ATS can be manufactured anywhere, and since 1990 more than 65 countries worldwide have reported at least some ATS-related manufacture. Because of cheap and easy ways to manufacture the drugs, more countries are added to the list each year. ATS in East and South-East Asia have become the leading drugs of use and concern, replacing heroin, cannabis and opium which until a decade ago were the drugs that dominated the regional illicit market.

The primary ATS of use in East and South-East Asia are methamphetamine and, to a much lesser extent, ecstasy. Methamphetamine is a white, odourless, bitter-tasting crystalline powder that dissolves easily in water or alcohol. It is available as a powder or in crystalline form and may be presented as a pill or tablet. It can be ingested, smoked, snorted, sniffed and injected.

Ecstasy (MDMA) has the psychoactive action of both a stimulant and a hallucinogen and it is ingested almost exclusively in pill or tablet form. Use of ecstasy originated among teens and young adults at raves or night-long dance parties in Europe. However, use of the drug has expanded in recent years to include varied social settings and diverse demographic subgroups throughout the world. Manufacture of this drug has also spread, moving from more traditional locations in Western Europe closer to often young and lucrative consumer markets across the world.

Risk and protective factors for initial and progressive use of drugs are influenced by a wide range of social and behavioral factors. The use of certain ATS and other drugs has been sufficiently prevalent among middle and upper class youths and young adults in bars and discos, such that the phrase ‘club drugs’ became a term of reference. Research has documented that the groups at particularly high risk are marginalized youth, especially the homeless. In addition, workers in low-paying, labour-intensive jobs and those whose wages depend on working long hours have greater vulnerability to problem drug use, as do sex workers, including bar and karaoke workers and hostesses.

Method

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime established the Global SMART Programme in September 2008, to assist Governments in the establishment or strengthening of drug monitoring systems. This kind of support involves knowledge transfer in understanding and implementation of information systems, and training in the collection, collation and communication of data on drug use patterns and trends. An end-point to the provision of individual country assistance in data development is the organization of the national information into a standardized reporting format for the region and the implementation of a regional drug use surveillance network among countries participating in the programme.

The Global SMART Programme builds on mechanisms and lessons learned from a previous project on Improving ATS Data and Information Systems, established in 2002 and implemented by the UNODC Regional Centre for East Asia and the Pacific. Through consensus among the participating Member States, a minimum data set – aligned with UNODC Annual Reports Questionnaire (ARQ) – was developed. Data collection focuses on national trends, treatment and health-related information, and law enforcement data and is uploaded by Member States into the Drug Abuse Information Network for Asia and the Pacific (DAINAP).

DAINAP, initiated in May 2005, is an Internet-based drug use information system which integrates data collection efforts of two major UNODC projects, i.e. Improving ATS Data and Information Systems, cited above, and the Regional Cooperative Mechanism to Monitor and Execute the ACCORD Plan of Action. DAINAP enhances both the timeliness and ease of data submission as well as improved efficiency and quality control of the information submitted. It has also provided a mechanism for communication among the national counterparts themselves. Key to the success of the SMART Programme is the effort that has gone into developing and implementing operational activities which ensure that the most accurate and up-to-date information is obtained from national data systems and to assist in the further development of those systems. The flow chart shown in Figure 1 outlines the data quality and integrity controls that have been implemented to achieve that objective.
The capabilities of countries in the region to collect, compile, and disseminate accurate and timely data on the current drug use situation vary greatly. Some countries have sophisticated and well-funded data systems, research infrastructures, and survey programmes, while data collection activities in others are relatively basic due to various reasons including a lack of resources. The Global SMART Programme provides valuable assistance to a number of countries in the region in efforts to improve their data collection capabilities. In addition to oversight of the regional surveillance, another aim of the Global SMART Programme is the development and maintenance of a comprehensive clearinghouse of ATS information. A complete description of the background, activities, and objectives, as well as other clearinghouse information, can be viewed on the Asia and Pacific Amphetamine-Type Stimulants Information Centre (APAIC) website at: www.apaic.org.