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Asia and North America drive global methamphetamine seizures to record levels, UNODC reports

Asian, Mexican and African drug syndicates target markets throughout Asia

Tokyo (Japan) 20 May 2014 – Growing demand in East and Southeast Asia is leading to an expansion of global production and trafficking in methamphetamine and new psychoactive substances, according to a UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report released today.

Led by a rise in seizures in East and Southeast Asia and North America, record levels of methamphetamine continue to be seized globally, says the UNODC report, 2014 Global Synthetic Drugs Assessment – Amphetamine-type Stimulants and New Psychoactive Substances.

The supply of methamphetamine continues to grow rapidly in Asia, the world’s largest market for amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), with methamphetamine seizures tripling in the past five years of reported data to 36 metric tonnes (MT), according to the Report.

China, whose latest figures reported a rapid rise in seizures to 16 MT, accounted for nearly 45 per cent of Asia’s total seizures. In Thailand, methamphetamine seizures in pill and crystalline form have increased substantially over the last five years, and recently hit historically high levels with over 95 million methamphetamine pills and about 1.6 MT of crystalline meth seized.

Due to improved transportation infrastructure and its strategic location in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) remains a major transit country for methamphetamine pills from the Golden Triangle and for precursor chemicals and cutting agents to Golden Triangle drug production sites, the Report says.

The rise in demand in Asian markets for methamphetamines and emerging demand for new psychoactive substances is being met by large production bases in neighbouring China, Myanmar and the Philippines. In addition, organized criminal gangs are increasingly trafficking methamphetamine from Mexico, the Middle East, South and West Asia, and West Africa to Japan and other lucrative markets in East and Southeast Asia and Oceania, the Report says.

“New international supply routes to Asia from the Americas and West Africa have emerged and are supplementing methamphetamine manufactured in Asia,” said Mr Justice Tettey, Chief, UNODC Laboratory and Scientific Section, at today’s launch in Tokyo. “West Africa is becoming a source for methamphetamine trafficked to Europe and East and Southeast Asia. Turkey is also emerging as a transit point for methamphetamine smuggled from West Asia to East and Southeast Asia.”

The continued spread of methamphetamine across Asia – facilitated by greater regional integration that leads to greater mobility of synthetic drugs that can be produced virtually anywhere – poses a growing challenge to justice systems and health providers in societies with
large youthful populations, according to UNODC. Meth use and trafficking is a growing public health and security threat in Lao PDR and puts a strain on the country’s limited law enforcement and drug treatment resources.

“The impact of synthetic drugs, especially methamphetamine and new psychoactive substances, on the police, court, prison and health care systems of states in the region is tremendous,” said Mr. Jeremy Douglas, UNODC Regional Representative, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, in Tokyo. “Drugs arrests make up the overwhelming majority of arrests for states across the region.

“This rising threat of synthetic drugs is compounded for Asia because the production epicenters of amphetamine-type stimulants and new psychoactive substances are nearby. States throughout the region are deeply concerned about illicit drug production, the diversion of the precursor chemicals needed to make methamphetamines and new s. psychoactive substances, organized crime syndicates, and vulnerable borders,” said Mr. Douglas.

The 2014 Global Synthetic Drugs Assessment was prepared by the UNODC Laboratory and Scientific Section. An embargoed copy may be viewed online at: http://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/2014/05/gsda/2014_Global_Synthetic_Drugs_Assessment_embargoed_Tokyo_web.pdf

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