Drug report a mixed bag

Buth Reaksmeye Kongkea

THE National Authority for Combating Drugs released its statistics on drug seizures and trends in 2012 yesterday, yet again presenting a seemingly incomplete picture of the scale of Cambodia’s drug problem.

The figures – released at the NACD’s National Congress at the Ministry of Interior, which was attended by more than 1,000 police and military police officials – contained what appeared to be at least two significant omissions of the amount of drugs seized in the country, as was the case with the authority’s year-to-date statistics released last September. The report did, however, highlight interesting trends in the Kingdom’s illicit trade.

According to the report, the NACD seized only 5.16 kilograms of methamphetamines in 2012, despite police reports from last June that one raid in Sihanoukville alone netted more than 10 kilos. The report also stated that authorities had seized just 319 grams of heroin, despite yet another high-profile raid in December yielding a full two kilograms.

Calls to the NACD and Ministry of Interior officials regarding the apparent inaccuracies went unanswered yesterday, and National Police spokesman Kirth Chantharith declined to comment.

Speaking more generally at the meeting, NACD Chairman and Deputy Prime Minister Ke Kimyen noted that 2012 had seen drug producers seemingly become savvier, noting that “so far we have not found many places of drug production in the country”.

“This means that the drug criminals have been well organised in producing and circulating the drugs in Cambodia,” he added.

“They have also changed their drug smuggling activities from smuggling across the borders to transporting via ships, the air and sending [drugs] via post offices,” he went on, referring to past high-profile busts of precursors and drugs seized at the Sihanoukville port, the Phnom Penh and Siem Reap airports and disguised in mail parcels.

The report also said that drug users were most commonly between the ages of 18 and 25, and were frequently students.

In his remarks, Kimyen called for a renewed focus on treatment, a call echoed by UNODC Country Director Olivier Lermet, who added that “the health side of this is fundamental”, noting that past experiences had “proved that it is possible to combine public health and public security approaches”.

BY STUART WHITE