

## **Opium cultivation and production in South-East Asia give cause for concern**

15 December 2011 – Vienna/Bangkok - (UNODC) - The 2011 South-East Asia Opium Survey launched today in Bangkok by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) points to “significant increases” in opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR).

“The high prices for opium in the Lao DPR and Thailand, as well as steep price increases in Myanmar, are making production attractive to farmers”, said Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), calling for the creation of alternative livelihoods to wean farmers off opium poppy cultivation. “Although the international community has supported alternative development for many years, and with great success, there is a need for increased investment”, said the Executive Director.

As also seen in other parts of the world, there was a strong correlation between insecurity and opium poppy cultivation. In Myanmar, with an estimated 35 per cent of surveyed households struggling to feed themselves, the scarcity of food also drove cash-strapped farmers to grow poppy crop.

In 2011, opium poppy cultivation in the region jumped from some 42,000 hectares (ha) to almost 48,000 ha, a 16 per cent increase over 2010. Overall, cultivation has doubled in South-East Asia since 2006. Myanmar accounted for 91 per cent of cultivation in this region, with Lao PDR taking 9 per cent.

Myanmar remained the second largest poppy-crop grower and opium producer in the world after Afghanistan. Cultivation in Myanmar climbed for the fifth year in a row, up, in 2011, by 14 per cent over the previous year. Lao PDR saw an even steeper rise of 38 per cent. Myanmar was responsible for 9 per cent of global opium production, down from 12 per cent in 2010, but that downward revision was due to a 61 per cent increase in yields in Afghanistan.

In 2011, opium prices in South-East Asia showed a mixed pattern but remained high on average. In Lao PDR, prices were stable at US\$ 1,640 per kg. However, in Myanmar, prices rose sharply in 2011, from around US\$ 300 per kg in 2010 to US\$ 450 per kg.

“In Myanmar, there is a need for more programmes that support alternative development for opium poppy growers. These programmes must also take into account the issues of poverty reduction, environmental protection, food security and improved social and economic conditions as key objectives. Indeed, these projects are a necessity because reductions in illicit crop cultivation and opium production can bring tangible benefits to the lives of ordinary people,” said Mr. Fedotov.

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