

# Preface

Last year the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) merged its former *Global Illicit Drug Trends* series with the *World Drug Report*, issued it in two volumes comprising Analysis and Statistics, and decided to make it an annual publication. Feedback on the new format and frequency has been positive. There is also continuing evidence that the world needs such annual assessments from the United Nations. They help the international community to judge where it is, how it is performing, and whether it is reaching the targets it sets for itself. Particularly in areas as globally inter-connected as drugs and crime, such assessments also help individual countries - the building blocks of the international community - to steer their own ways forward.

The *World Drug Report 2005* includes an overview of our work in two new areas of research. Both aim to provide tools to enrich our understanding of an immensely complex situation: an estimate of the financial value of the world drug market, and the preliminary steps towards the creation of an Illicit Drug Index. Now that we are able to systematically analyse trends which tell us where we are and which could tell us where we are going - we work towards defining another equally important piece of the puzzle: the baseline from which to measure progress.

Production and trafficking of illicit drugs is driven substantially, if not exclusively, by economic motives. Understanding the scale of the finances involved can be of great use to those working in the field. Who earns the most in the global illicit drug business? How does the size of this market compare with legitimate enterprises? Which substances and markets are the most profitable? How are the monetary incentives changing over time? Which sectors of the market are most vulnerable to economic sanctions? This *World Drug Report* takes a further step towards providing policy relevant answers to such questions.

The Index is a single value used to summarise the drug situation in a particular location at a given point in time. The creation of an index is an exercise fraught with controversy, because there is no objective way of deciding on the weight assigned to each of the variables included. While it is bound to generate debate which will inform its refinement and adaptation, the Index is introduced this year because there is a need to provide a substantiated answers to the most basic questions in our collective struggle with drugs: is the situation getting better or worse? Are we winning or are we losing? Can we get beyond the problem, so well known in this field, of using the same data to arrive at diametrically opposed conclusions? If production of a particular drug goes down in a certain area, but abuse of the same drug goes up in the same area, is this to be interpreted as success, failure or stagnation? A single index, provided we can agree on one, will go a long way towards answering these kinds of questions.

It is precisely because the international community has resolved to be the winner of the struggle against illicit drugs and for enhanced human security that we need to know more about where we stand and explore all possible means of measurement and comparison. This will help our assessment in 2008, when we will have to judge how we, as an international community, have done over the decade in meeting the goals and commitments made at the 1998 Special Session of the General Assembly (UNGASS).

On a very practical level, we need information of the sort provided by these two new tools in order to steer our efforts and interventions. For far too long the illicit drug market has been able to operate and hide in obscurity. It has taken much work and dedication, across the world, to shed light on this pernicious market. The goal of the information presented in the *World Drug Report* has always been to make that light shine brighter.

The global retail market for illicit drugs is estimated at US\$320bn. For all the caveats that one may put on such a figure, and the text notes them, it is still larger than the individual GDPs of nearly 90% of the countries of the world. This is not a small enemy against which we struggle. It is a monster. With such an enormous amount of capital at its disposal, it is bound to be an extremely tenacious one. We know that there are few dimensions of human security that are not affected in some way by the illicit drug market. Let us continue then, armed with new knowledge and light, to fight, in both word and deed, for those whose very existence is threatened by this trade.



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