



PRESS RELEASE

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UNODC WELCOMES DEVELOPMENT DRIVE TO TACKLE OPIUM PRODUCTION

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) welcomed President Karzai's decision in early January to allocate US\$ 76 million for reconstruction projects in all districts located near the border with Pakistan. 600 projects in 88 border districts will focus on rebuilding of infrastructure facilities and investments for local people.

If we want to influence farmers not to cultivate opium poppy, we must offer alternative sources of licit income and employment opportunities," said Christina Oguz, the new head of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Afghanistan.

"These development projects will help provide viable alternative to planting opium poppy this year and are a key part of the overall strategy to tackle this issue. With the exception of Nangarhar, the eastern border provinces are not major opium producers – but we must not be complacent," said Oguz.

Many of Afghanistan's poor do not cultivate opium, but many migrate seasonally to work in areas where opium is grown, if they lack alternative income prospects.

"These labourers are in dire need of sufficient income to support their families. Health facilities, schools, irrigation, electricity, roads and other social and economic infrastructure investments are crucial for creating a variety of licit work opportunities for them, including outside farming," said Oguz.

Every season over two million labourers are needed – in addition to the farmers themselves – to lance the opium capsules. Last year, in the eastern region alone, 124,000 labourers received their income from working in poppy fields.

In the long run, only economic development, in combination with functioning democratic institutions at central and local level will help Afghanistan to solve the opium problem. It is important for the Government of Afghanistan to support those governors, district administrators and elders now who are against opium poppy cultivation.

"Tribal chiefs and elders like those who gathered recently in Paktiya province to discuss the harms of narcotic drugs and call for alternative livelihoods should now be rewarded with investments in their districts," said Oguz.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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