

18 June 2008

Original: English

Open-ended intergovernmental expert working group on international cooperation on the eradication of illicit drug crops and on alternative development

Vienna, 2-4 July 2008

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Discussion note by the International Narcotics Control Board

Summary

Pursuant to Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 51/4, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) decided, at its last session in May 2008, to provide to the five open-ended intergovernmental expert working groups the Board's views on the five topics for discussion, namely (a) drug demand reduction, (b) supply reduction (manufacture and trafficking), (c) countering money-laundering and promoting judicial cooperation, (d) international cooperation on the eradication of illicit drug crops and on alternative development, and (e) control of precursors and of amphetamine-type stimulants.

This paper reflects the views of the Board on the topic of international cooperation on the eradication of illicit drug crops and on alternative development. The Board expects that the views of the Board will be reflected appropriately in the deliberations of the working groups, and in the final outcome of the process of the UNGASS review.

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I. Introduction

1. The international drug control conventions provide not only that States Parties should make efforts towards the eradication of illicitly cultivated drug crops. The conventions also recognize that no such effort would be truly effective and sustainable without measures to provide alternative, legitimate livelihoods for the populations affected. Article 14 of the 1988 Convention states that States Parties may cooperate to increase the effectiveness of eradication efforts and that such cooperation may include support, when appropriate, for integrated rural development leading to economically viable alternatives to illicit cultivation.

2. States must therefore make efforts in both areas – eradication and law enforcement on the one hand, and alternative development on the other. These two are flip sides of the same coin, and must proceed hand in hand if there is to be true progress. Simple eradication without the provision of legitimate livelihoods could lead to a deterioration of the humanitarian situation of the farming communities concerned, and ultimately will not be sustainable. Likewise, alternative development without adequate law enforcement will also not achieve the desired goals.

II. Achievements

3. Governments continue to make efforts in eradication, and visible results have been achieved in some countries, mainly with a consistent development-oriented approach towards the provision of legitimate livelihoods to farming communities.

4. Advanced technology, including satellite imagery, is increasingly utilized in eradication efforts to detect the location and scale of illicit drug crops.

III. Challenges

5. The lack of adequate security and stability have hampered eradication efforts in some countries, such as Afghanistan. In some other countries, Governments lack the capacity to detect and eradicate illicit drug crops in what is sometimes remote and difficult terrain. In yet other countries, corruption within the Government has hampered eradication efforts.

6. Although alternative development programmes provide initial assistance to crop growers, the problem of long-term sustainability of secure livelihoods often remains. Despite repeated calls by the international community, including by the General Assembly, for improved market access and for the setting of a fair price for the products of alternative development programmes, difficulties in strengthening the licit economy via legitimate marketing channels remain.

7. Adequate facilities for providing credit – perhaps microcredit as part of alternative development programmes – for illicit crop growers attempting to switch to alternative crops is often not provided. Growers who have given up cultivating illicit crops but whose livelihood is not secure are more likely to return to cultivating such crops.

8. There is a need to achieve a balance between development efforts and law enforcement measures in illicit crop cultivation areas. Law enforcement officers in alternative development areas need to be involved with the communities in a positive manner, so that they are seen not as acting against the well-being of the people in those communities, but rather as providing security for the community so that they can pursue legitimate livelihoods.

9. To date, alternative development has been implemented largely in the context of individual rural development projects in isolated areas. This predominance of project-by-project implementation does not provide adequate opportunities for alternative development to have an impact on drug control on a larger scale. The vast majority of illicit crop growers have unfortunately not received direct alternative development assistance.

10. Other issues stem from the isolated project-by-project approach. Governments often neglect to provide for adequate infrastructure for the transport of alternative crops, meaning the crops have no easy access to markets. The lack of general education and literacy programmes also may result in legitimate livelihoods being unsustainable in the long run, over generations. The provision of health care is also often inadequate, in particular taking into consideration that illicit drug cultivation is often followed by increasing drug abuse among the farming population.

11. By and large, alternative development programmes have not taken adequate account of the situation of marginalized populations. In order for alternative development programmes to be sustainable in the long term, more attention needs to be paid to these communities, in both rural and urban areas.

12. Although the Commission on Narcotic Drugs has made numerous calls for preventive alternative development, no country has yet implemented such programmes, despite the fact that, in areas where there is a high level of poverty, there is often a high risk of illicit crop cultivation.

13. Much has been achieved in eliminating the cultivation of illicit opium poppy in the so called "Golden Triangle". However, the situation of illicit opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan remains grave. Though the area of illicit cultivation in some areas of Afghanistan has been reduced, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community is hampered by the security situation and corruption, and has yet to make real progress.

14. A major concern, especially in coca producing areas, is that of the environment. It is estimated that more than 88,000 hectares of coca bush were cultivated in the Amazon in 2004, affecting important rainforest and natural ecosystems and having serious implications for the global environment. In addition, the initial processes for cocaine manufacture may also be taking place close to where the coca itself is harvested, resulting in dangerous chemical waste.

15. Outside of Morocco, there have been virtually no alternative development programmes targeting the illicit cultivation of cannabis. The situation in Africa is of particular concern, as cannabis production and drug abuse often do not receive sufficient attention in poverty reduction strategies prepared by African countries and their development partners. In its report for 2003, the Board noted that food shortages in sub-Saharan Africa were being exacerbated by the increasing

cultivation of cannabis plant. Cannabis cultivation is also becoming a major issue in Afghanistan, as well as other countries, such as Paraguay.

IV. Recommendations

16. The international community should, in Afghanistan and elsewhere where necessary, provide adequate assistance to ensure a secure and stable environment so that eradication and alternative development can be implemented. Governments, in particular the Government of Afghanistan, should also strengthen efforts against corruption.

17. The international community should, through UNODC and other relevant organizations, continue expanding the use of advanced technology, including satellite imagery, to monitor the scale and location of illicit drug crops, and assist with efforts in eradication and alternative development, with due consideration to the environment.

18. Governments should make more comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of the illicit drug economy, in order to understand the interactions it has with different aspects of the local economy, and to ensure that legitimate alternative livelihood strategies are suited to the area concerned.

19. Governments and relevant international and regional organizations should integrate alternative development into their broader development programmes. The current project-by-project approach to alternative development should be changed, with commitment being made towards long-term strategies for the provision of legitimate alternative livelihoods. This new commitment would include the provision of education, literacy and other programmes with a focus towards ensuring the sustainable development of the farming communities in question. Programmes for adequate health care, including for the treatment and prevention of drug abuse, should also be provided.

20. Governments should broaden the focus of alternative development programmes, paying greater attention to the needs of marginalized and neglected populations in both rural and urban areas.

21. Governments should pay greater attention to the growing problem of illicit cannabis cultivation, and formulate and implement strategies against this phenomenon that include eradication and alternative development programmes, with support of the international community, as appropriate.

22. Governments should formulate their domestic and international trade policies, in particular policies regarding access to markets for products and services from alternative development areas, with a view to helping to reduce the illicit drug economy, wherever it exists.

23. Governments should ensure that law enforcement activities in illicit crop cultivation areas contribute to the building of trust between the local communities and the authorities and should promote the greater involvement of communities in the formulation of policies to deal with the various aspects of the drug problem. In order to be effective, law enforcement should be considered a supportive factor in the context of overall socio-economic development.

24. Governments should ensure that alternative development programmes include measures to ensure the provision of adequate credit and other relevant supports to farming communities attempting to switch to alternative, legitimate crops.

25. Governments should, with a view towards taking measures in the area of preventative alternative development, as recommended by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, identify population groups that may start the cultivation of illicit drug crops, and work towards ensuring legitimate livelihoods for those communities.

26. Governments and other relevant institutions, including intergovernmental organizations, should share and disseminate their experiences with alternative development, ensuring the involvement of both local communities and academic and research institutions in that process, with a view to expanding the knowledge base of alternative development programmes.
