



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 March 2024

English only

Commission on Narcotic Drugs

Sixty-seventh session

Vienna, 14–22 March 2024

Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

**Follow-up to the implementation at the national,
regional and international levels of all
commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial
Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the
world drug problem**

Statement submitted by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GITOC), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* [E/CN.7/2024/1](#).

** Issued without formal editing.



Note on the Eastern and Southern Africa Commission on Drugs

A. Introduction

The Eastern and Southern Africa Commission on Drugs (ESACD) is an independent, African-led, advocacy group, championing drug policy reform and capacity building to implement a more effective, scientific and evidence-based set of drug policies in eastern and southern Africa. The ESACD was convened after a series of multi-stakeholder meetings, including with the Global Commission on Drug Policy, who expressed the need for a regional and expert-led initiative to respond to the drug issues in the region. The ESACD is committed to fostering a better understanding of the impact of drug trafficking, illicit drug use and related impacts in the region by contributing to efforts to mitigate its harms, including on health and governance.

This note, presented to the sixty-seventh Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), informs CND participants about the ESACD, and explores the vital role that all actors play in responding to the challenges of drug trafficking and related harms, especially the communities that are most affected, including civil society, law enforcement, drug commissions, academia, media, people who use drugs (PWUD) and others, and how this can be further enhanced and secured.

This paper outlines how the ESACD can support the work of the CND in the promotion of efforts to address the challenges that all countries face in developing and implementing effective drug policies based on evidence, human rights, and the rule of law.

B. Background and rationale

“Drugs have destroyed many lives, but wrong government policies have destroyed many more lives.”

Kofi Annan¹

Eastern and southern Africa faces serious and multifaceted challenges from illegal drug production, distribution, and use. It has become an established transit and destination corridor for large-scale intercontinental drug flows. There is also broad recognition that current strategic and policy responses to countering drug trafficking and use in the region are not achieving their goals and need to be systematically reviewed. In these cases, regionally led independent, high-level commissions (or groups of “champions”) in some regions around the world have helped to raise awareness of the problem, engendered public discussions and engaged with policymakers to discuss new approaches and reforms.

The ESACD, chaired by His Excellency Former President of South Africa Kgalema Motlanthe, is a high-level regional advocacy body that aims to promote informed discussion about humane and effective drug policies, as well as to develop local and regional awareness, engender public discussions and engage with policymakers to discuss new approaches to drug-related issues.

Long-standing maritime trafficking channels of opiates from Afghanistan to the eastern and southern African seaboard are recognized as a significant challenge for the region, with onward drug shipments destined for African, European and North American consumer markets. Illicit synthetic substances, such as methamphetamine, accompany consignments of heroin along this maritime route.² Since the 1990s, South

¹ Kofi Annan Foundation. Changing drug policy, 2017, www.kofiannanfoundation.org/our-work/changing-drug-policy/#:~:text=However%2C%20Kofi%20Annan%20believed%20%E2%80%9Cthat,policies%20have%20destroyed%20many%20more%E2%80%9D.

² Jason Eligh, A synthetic age: The evolution of methamphetamine markets in eastern and southern Africa, GI-TOC, March 2021.

Africa and Mozambique's shipping ports have also become key hubs in the global supply network of cocaine produced in South America.³

Many countries in the region have also seen a significant escalation in domestic drug use, partly as a result of these drug supply chains. South Africa, Mozambique, Mauritius, Tanzania and Kenya are ranked as the region's highest-scoring countries in the ENACT Africa Organized Crime Index for their heroin markets.⁴

The ESACD is dedicated to formulating recommendations for political and civil society leaders on drug policy reform, informed by analytical research; mobilizing public awareness and political commitment; and promoting local and regional capacities to respond.

The ESACD currently comprises the following Commissioners: H.E Kgalema Motlanthe, Former President of South Africa; H.E Joaquim Chissano, Former President of Mozambique; H.E Cassam Uteem, Former President of Mauritius; H.E James Michel, Former President of Seychelles; Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim, Honorary Professor of Public Health at the University of KwaZulu-Natal; and Honourable Willy Mutunga, Former Chief Justice/President, Supreme Court of Kenya.

The ESACD is implemented under the aegis of the European Union's Enhancing Africa's Response to Transnational Organised Crime (ENACT) project. ENACT is a consortium partnership between South Africa's Institute for Security Studies (ISS), the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) and INTERPOL. The GI-TOC serves as the secretariat for the ESACD.

C. Process

On 10–11 February 2023, the ESACD was officially launched in Cape Town, South Africa. The event was attended by commissioners, academics, PWUD, other civil society representatives and other stakeholders. Participants reviewed and assessed the impact of current drug policies across the region and recommended more evidence-based approaches oriented towards healthcare and human rights. The ESACD also agreed that it should aim to mobilize public opinion and catalyze political support for further action at the national, regional and international levels. Several background papers were prepared by the ESACD Secretariat, covering illicit drug markets, palliative care medicine and essential controlled medicines, drug policy and infectious disease transmission, and the impact of drug policy on children and young people.

On 10–11 August 2023, another ESCAD high-level meeting took place in Mauritius. The meeting had wide participation from law enforcement, drug commissions, civil society, academia and other stakeholders from the region to talk about their experience and the work they do. Based on background papers prepared for this meeting, participants discussed drug policy and legislation in the region; maritime drug trafficking and law enforcement strategies to disrupt illicit drug markets in the region; and the role civil society plays in evidence-based drug policy recommendations. In total, 14 background papers have been produced for the commission.

D. CND and ESACD

The ESACD presents this paper as a summary of how it can seek to contribute to the work of the CND by proposing measures that can strengthen the national, regional and international responses to the challenges of drug trafficking and the harms of

³ Jason Eligh, A powder storm: The cocaine markets of East and Southern Africa, GI-TOC, December 2022.

⁴ See Organised Crime Index Africa 2023, ENACT, <https://africa.ocindex.net/>. Distribution, sale and consumption were considered as factors in determining the Index rankings.

illicit drug use. The ESACD will build on its initial outputs, through the publication and dissemination of an action plan on the scale of the challenges in the region, with prioritized, implementable recommendations. The action plan will be based on a readily available evidence base of data and analysis of drug trafficking and the impact of drug markets in eastern and southern Africa.

Secondly, the ESACD aims to promote public advocacy and campaigning to promote dialogue and engagement among national and regional bodies, to encourage and empower them to prioritize drug policy reform and enhance cooperation in response to drug trafficking and the harms of illicit drug use, both among themselves and with civil society organizations.

E. Way forward and recommendations

The ESACD is clear in its conviction that regional drug control responses should be refocused on targeting national and regional structural vulnerabilities that facilitate the proliferation of criminal networks. This requires a more coherent policy framework for law enforcement activities related to illicit drug markets, alongside measures to mitigate the adverse impacts that current disruption strategies have on public health and safety, communities and economic development.

To this end, the ESACD puts forward the following key principles, upon which its action plan will be built:

1. Put people's health and safety first. Ensure universal access to harm reduction, evidence-based prevention and treatment services for PWUD, as well as in prisons and other closed settings.
2. Ensure universal access to essential medicines, particularly opioids for pain control.
3. End the criminalization and incarceration of PWUD, and the stigma associated with drug use.
4. Refocus national drug enforcement responses to drug trafficking and organized crime.
5. Consider alternative approaches to established legal and regulatory frameworks of domestic drug market control.
6. Involve civil society, women, marginalized groups and PWUD as essential constituents in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and reform of national drug policies.

F. A working commission

The ESACD is an active, working commission, and not merely a consultative or honorary body. Accordingly, even in these early stages of the initiative, the commissioners have actively engaged with key stakeholder communities to advance the key messages of the commission.

In 2024, among other activities, the ESACD seeks to convene several high-level meetings with the scope of accelerating its contribution to the process of drug-policy reform in countries across the region. Some of the meetings planned in the coming months include a discussion to be convened in Maputo on the implementation of national policies on the legalization of cannabis; a high-level meeting in Zanzibar to consult with and listen to civil society voices on the most pressing drug policy challenges in the region; a meeting with civil society and parliamentarians in Kenya to encourage discussion of the adoption of a harm reduction bill; and the finalization of an ESACD regional strategy.