

PREFACE

The *Bulletin on Narcotics* is a United Nations journal that has been in continuous publication since 1949. It is printed in all six official languages of the United Nations: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

The *Bulletin* provides information on developments in drug control at the local, national, regional and international levels that can be of benefit to the international community.

In 1999, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (then the United Nations International Drug Control Programme) issued a special double issue on cannabis. The issue, volumes XLIX and L, 1997/1998, contained articles covering recent developments in research into the drug. Almost 10 years later, it is clear that the cannabis market, the largest of the illicit drug markets, remains little understood and under documented. Unlike the other plant-based illicit drugs, the surveying of all suspected cannabis cultivation has thus far proved to be impractical. Similarly, the abuse of cannabis is so pervasive that, despite some impressive efforts at the national and international levels, it is also very difficult to assess. Given these facts, relying only on official or scientific literature to assess this market would convey only a limited picture. Cannabis, however, is a drug that is consumed within a specific cultural and social context. This culture has spawned an enormous amount of "grey" literature which, when used to complement the scientific literature, can help us to develop a more comprehensive assessment of the world cannabis situation. Therefore, while grey literature is not part of a conventional scientific review, it does help to fill an undeniable knowledge gap that hampers our understanding of the cannabis market.

A shorter version of this comprehensive article was published in the *World Drug Report 2006*.^{*} Some of the research that informs the present review was undertaken in response to and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 59/160 of 20 December 2004, in which the Assembly requested UNODC to prepare a global market survey on cannabis.

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