

**UNODC IN SOUTH ASIA: UNODC helps countries and its people to reduce illegal drugs and crime throughout the world and to address justice and human security. It helps Member States with technical assistance, legal advice and research within the framework of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its three Protocols, the United Nations Convention against Corruption and the three United Nations Conventions on Drugs.**

**UNODC South Asia is present in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka**

## Bangladesh: First ever Methadone Maintenance Treatment (MMT) centre launched



Bangladesh is one of the countries in the South Asian region where the problem of HIV is widespread amongst People Who Inject Drugs (PWID). There are an estimated number of 20,000 to 40,000 PWIDs with HIV prevalence of 7 per cent. While harm reduction services with needle syringe programmes and other comprehensive package of services are available, Oral Substitution Treatment (OST) was a long awaited service still to be initiated. After sustained advocacy efforts, OST with Methadone Maintenance Treatment (MMT) has finally begun in Bangladesh. The first ever MMT site is operated by the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) at the Central Drug Addiction Treatment Centre (CTC) in Dhaka. The centre was

established with support from UNODC. Since its inauguration on 8 July 2010, some 24 clients have been enrolled in MMT and are reporting improvements like "don't feel like injecting", "able to save money" and "able to be with family". Upon successful implementation of this pilot initiative, MMT would be scaled-up throughout the country, providing another menu of options to the drug dependent individuals of Bangladesh.



*Happy faces of recovering drug users who hope to start a new life with the help of methadone*

## Igniting change in the Maldives

*Dr. Antonio D'Costa leaves the Maldives after having worked there for three years in drug treatment and as a resident psychiatrist. He was crucial in setting up and rolling out the UNODC-supported methadone maintenance clinic in Maldives. He wrote the below short farewell note. UNODC would like to thank him for his dedication and wishes him and his family all the best:*

"I first joined as a resident psychiatrist in a home for the mentally disabled in the Guraidhoo island. I had always been interested in learning, how methadone can treat recovering drug users. Surprisingly, as a psychiatrist, I had never worked with methadone before. Initially, there was a lot of commotion when the methadone maintenance treatment programme was to be initiated. Therefore, I was clear that I would have to sustain it at all costs. Once I even managed to sustain the program with just three bottles of methadone to spare after the whole stock was burnt in an accident! My next target was to increase the numbers of patients on methadone from 11 to 60. My main driving forces were the patients themselves. It worked on them like "magic". Families of patients would tell me how much change they saw in their children after methadone, begging me to work hard to continue it. Till date, a total of 47 new drug users have been enrolled in this treatment and over 160 new drug users have

registered with the centre. I hope those working in this field will keep this initiative alive and make a difference in the lives of drug users!"



*A client receiving his daily dose of methadone at the 'Gagan clinic' in the Maldives*

## India: OST – a ray of hope

UNODC with the All India Institute of Medical Sciences launched the first Oral Substitution Treatment (OST) programme in November 2008 in Tihar prisons, India – the largest prison complex in South Asia. The objective of this initiative is to ensure that every prisoner has access to essential drugs, HIV and AIDS prevention and care programmes. Recently, UNODC produced a 15-minute documentary film called '**Ray of Hope**' focusing on the OST intervention in the prison and how it improves the lives of drug users. Shot in the premises of the prison, the film documents the process with sensitivity, familiarizing the audience with the intervention through real life case studies and interviews. It presents a picture of hope for recovering drug users, who can look forward to a better tomorrow with their families and society.

## India: Sign the petition to stop human trafficking!



Every year, thousands of children, women and men fall victims to traffickers in their home countries and abroad. Through coercion, deceit or force, they are exploited for labour, sex and even their organs.

As the magnitude of this problem gains alarming proportions, the international community, non-governmental organizations and even corporate power houses are working together to address this crime. One such example is the global campaign launched recently by The Body Shop which urges people to sign a petition against human trafficking. The UNODC Regional Office for South Asia was associated to the launch event in New Delhi. Bollywood actors, Ms. Nafisa Ali and Ms. Chitrangda Singh along with Ms. Cristina Albertin, UNODC Representative for South Asia were present.

The Body Shop's 'soft hand, kind heart' hand cream was also launched. Proceeds from its sales will be given to non-profit organisations who work on this cause.



## UNODC INTERNAL NEWS CORNER

### UNODC South Asia welcomes new member on board!



Dr. Ravindra Rao joined UNODC in June 2010 as the Technical Officer for the project "Prevention of HIV among drug users in SAARC countries". Recently he attended the global training on HIV and AIDS in Vienna, organised by UNODC. This training was part of the 2010 International AIDS Conference held in Vienna. Dr. Rao shares, "the training helped me understand the global perspective on drugs, HIV, prison settings and human trafficking as related to the work of UNODC.

During this period, I had the opportunity to see and listen to most of the global leaders I had only heard of. Very importantly, I could gauge my work from the perspective of donor agencies and non-governmental organizations such as the Human Rights Institute and Harm Reduction Coalition. The time spent with colleagues from different countries helped me understand the drugs and HIV issue in their region. It was indeed an ideal and enriching way to start my career with UNODC South Asia."