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UNODC chief calls for health, development and rights-based approach to drug problem

*Around 230 million people – 1 in every 20 people – took illicit drugs at least once in 2010:
UNODC 2012 World Drug Report*

Vienna/New York, 26 June 2012 - (UNODC) - Countering transnational organized crime and illicit drugs must become an integral part of the development agenda, Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) told the United Nations General Assembly today. During a special thematic debate on drugs and crime as a threat to development, Mr. Fedotov said that with the 2015 deadline approaching to take stock of global progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, there is an increasing recognition that organized crime and illicit drugs impede the attainment of those goals.

Illicit drugs fuel crime and insecurity, while undermining human rights and posing significant public health risks: “Heroin, cocaine and other drugs continue to kill around 200,000 people a year, shattering families and bringing misery to thousands of other people, insecurity and the spread of HIV”, said Mr. Fedotov, launching the flagship 2012 World Drug Report of UNODC at the General Assembly.

“The public health aspects of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration all have to be recognized as key elements in the global strategy to reduce drug demand,” the Executive Director told the General Assembly, convening today, the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

The global picture

Although global patterns of illicit drug use, production and health consequences largely remained stable in 2012, the Executive Director cautioned that opium production had rebounded to previous high levels in Afghanistan, the world’s biggest opium producer. Looking at the global picture, lower overall levels of cultivation and production of opium and coca have been offset by rising levels of synthetic drug production.

Around 230 million people, or 5 per cent of the world’s adult population (aged 15 to 64), are estimated to have used an illicit drug at least once in 2010, according to the Report. Problem drug users, mainly heroin- and cocaine-dependent persons, number about 27 million, roughly 0.6 per cent of the world adult population, or 1 in every 200 people, the Report notes.

Opium – prices rise, production soars

Afghanistan returned to high levels of opium production. Global opium production amounted to 7,000 tons in 2011, up from the low levels of 2010, when plant diseases wiped out almost half the crop yields and triggered steep price rises in Afghanistan. The amount of opium produced in Afghanistan increased by 61 per cent, from 3,600 tons in 2010 to 5,800 tons in 2011. While the global production of opiates remains high, opiate use in North America and Europe appears to be stable or shrinking. However, in Africa and Asia, which together account for about 70 per cent of

global opiate users, there is a lack of clear data so the possibility may exist of increasing, but undetected, use.

High prices are making opium production attractive to farmers in South-East Asia. From 2010 to 2011, poppy crop cultivation in South-East Asia jumped 16 per cent from some 41, 000 ha to almost 48,000 ha. Overall, cultivation has doubled in South-East Asia since 2006.

Myanmar remained the world's second largest poppy-crop grower and opium producer after Afghanistan, with cultivation up by 14 per cent in 2011 and a 9 per cent share of global opium production. Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) saw an even steeper rise in cultivation of 38 per cent although total cultivation remains low compared with global estimates. Myanmar's potential opium poppy production is estimated at some 610 tons and Lao PDR's at around 25 tons.

Cocaine – decline in production

The number of estimated annual cocaine users in 2010 ranged from 13.3 million to 19.7 million, or around 0.3 to 0.4 of the global population aged 15 to 64. The major markets for cocaine continue to be North America, Europe and Australia. The United States has seen cocaine use decrease from 3.0 per cent in 2006 to 2.2 per cent in 2010 among those aged 15 to 64 and in Europe cocaine use remains stable but continues to rival use in the United States. However, cocaine use is up in Australia and South America. It is also spreading to parts of Africa and Asia, although the number of Asian users is thought to be low.

The total area under coca bush cultivation fell by 18 per cent between 2007 and 2010, due largely to sharply declining coca cultivation in Colombia from 2007 to 2010. During the same period, however, coca bush cultivation and coca leaf production shifted markedly to the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Peru. These shifts have considerably reduced cocaine supply in North America, which is almost exclusively supplied by Colombia; whereas in Europe, more cocaine from Peru and Bolivia has at least partially offset the diminishing supply from Colombia.

ATS markets stable, but methamphetamine and 'ecstasy' on the increase

The use and global seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants, the second most widely used drugs worldwide, remained largely stable. However, in 2010, methamphetamine seizures (45 tons) more than doubled those of 2008 (21.5 tons), due to significant seizures in Central America and East and South-East Asia.

In Europe, "ecstasy" pill seizures more than doubled (from 595 kg in 2009 to 1.3 tons in 2010), pointing to a stronger market on that continent. The drug's availability and use appear to be rising in the United States and Oceania, and East Asia has witnessed increases in seizures.

Cannabis – the world's most widely used illicit substance

There are between 119 million and 224 million estimated cannabis users worldwide. Europe is the world's biggest market for cannabis resin (hashish) mainly supplied by Morocco, although its relative importance is declining. Most European Union countries report the increasing indoor cultivation of cannabis herb (marijuana), possibly reflecting a growing preference for marijuana over hashish.

The cannabis plant is now Afghanistan's most lucrative cash crop, with a cannabis-growing household earning \$9,000 compared with \$4,900 earned by a household growing opium poppy in 2010.

“Legal highs” and the abuse of prescription pharmaceuticals

In many countries there is more non-medical use of prescription drugs than of controlled substance, other than cannabis. While illicit drug use is overall much higher among males than females, the non-medical use of tranquillizers and sedatives is higher among women, as shown where data are available (South America, Central America and Europe). Worryingly, the abuse of tranquillizers and sedatives can develop into a lifetime habit, especially among women.

New psychoactive substances, which are chemically engineered to elude international control, are being pushed as “legal highs” and substitutes for other illicit stimulants, such as cocaine or ecstasy. These substances, which can be mixed together to vary the effects, include mephedrone and MDPV, which are often sold as "bath salts" or "plant food"; and piperazine. Other formulations include "spice," which mimics the effects of cannabis; and *salvia divinorum*, a hallucinogenic plant.

A shortage of heroin in some countries seems to be giving rise to crude and highly dangerous codeine-based replacements, such as desormorphine, also known as ‘krokodil’. The injected substance poses serious health problems, even with limited use.

A shared responsibility for sustainable development

Drug-producing and drug-consuming countries alike have a stake in fighting this scourge, Mr. Fedotov said, adding that Governments should not forget that illicit drugs affect health and security globally. Drug use appears to be spilling over into countries lying on trafficking routes, such as in West and Central Africa, which are witnessing rising numbers of cocaine users, and Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, which are grappling with the highest rates of opium and heroin use.

As developing countries emulate the lifestyles of industrialized nations, drug consumption will probably increase, placing a heavier burden on countries ill equipped to deal with burgeoning drug demand. International support should therefore aim at strengthening the capacity of vulnerable nations to confront that challenge, he said.

Alternative development is the key to reducing illicit drug crop cultivation and drug production, he told Member States: “At present, only around one quarter of all farmers involved in illicit drug crop cultivation worldwide have access to development assistance. If we are to offer new opportunities and genuine alternatives, this needs to change”.

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