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Senior officials from the Mekong meet to discuss drug control

Thailand, 23 May 2016 – Senior officials from the six countries of the Mekong MOU on drug control – Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam – and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have gathered in Thailand this week to discuss regional drug policy and strategy. For the first time, they will be joined by officials from India at an additional special session on the inter-regional flow of drugs and precursor chemicals.

Preliminary data for 2015 indicate that Mekong region seizures of crystal methamphetamine have increased significantly to almost 27,000 kg, and seizures of methamphetamine pills reached 286 million pills. Heroin seizures were also significant at over 10,000 kg.

The latest data also indicate that regional integration is likely exacerbating and amplifying the illegal flow of illegal drugs and precursors within the region, as well as to and from neighbouring regions. Precursor chemicals needed for the production of both methamphetamine and heroin are trafficked into the region in large volumes, mainly from China and India, while drugs are being trafficked in the opposite direction.

“Rapidly expanding connections in the form of border crossings, ports and airports, have expanded the opportunity for organized crime to move drugs and precursors across borders quickly”, said Jeremy Douglas, UNODC Regional Representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific. “The involvement of senior officials from India is an important step towards eventual inter-regional collaboration”, said Jeremy Douglas, UNODC Regional Representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

The ability of ASEAN countries and institutions - with variable capacities and approaches - to counter organized criminal groups are calling into question some aspects of the ASEAN 2025 Community Vision. And increasingly, neighbours to the region such as India are also being challenged by organized crime groups that have no regard for state sovereignty and take advantage of borders.

“We are continuing to work towards improving responses, and this meeting provides an update on the commitments made at the Mekong MOU Ministerial Meeting that took place in Ha Noi in 2015”, said Pol. Brig. Gen. Kyaw Win, Joint Secretary of the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control, Myanmar. “The participation of the delegation from India will contribute greatly to technical discussions on regional precursor chemical control, and we hope it will contribute to greater engagement in the future between the Mekong region and India.”

In addition to updating on progress made under the MOU action plan, the meeting is discussing strategies and activities for the coming year.

Under the Mekong MOU framework that incorporates law enforcement, criminal justice, alternative development, and health responses, the six countries have had some degree of success in addressing the production, trafficking and use of illicit drugs. However, the countries of the region also recognize that more needs to be done and new approaches need to be considered – and an important step is involving countries neighbouring the region in the discussion.

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