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United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Press Release

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Experts from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region endorse the joint SADC-UNODC Regional Programme, aimed at making the region safer from drugs and crime

From 15-16 November, 51 high-level experts, designated by the governments of SADC Member States, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and SADC-Secretariat, were hosted by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa in Pretoria to discuss the final draft of the Joint SADC-UNODC Regional Programme, aimed at making the SADC region safer from drugs and crime. After their deliberations and several additions to the draft, the delegates unanimously endorsed the Regional Programme.

SADC and its member states note with concern the escalation of drugs and crime at both national and transnational levels. Some of the challenges facing the countries in the region include vulnerability to corruption, rising levels of urban violent crimes, a proliferation of firearms, widespread violence against women and children, increasing levels of drug abuse, and high infection on HIV and AIDS. Additionally, as indicated in recent reports, such as UNODC's World Drug Report, the region is increasingly being used for the transit of drugs such as cocaine and heroin, as well as for money laundering, smuggling of migrants, and trafficking in persons.

These common problems and threats can have a strong negative impact on national and regional development, undermining justice and the rule of law, and threatening overall security, for example, by making countries even more vulnerable to drug trafficking and other types of organised crime and violence.

Moreover, these challenges cannot be tackled only at national level, but have to be also addressed at regional level, by an integrated and cooperative approach to make this region and its citizens safer from drugs and crime. As the Austrian Ambassador, Dr Otto Ditz remarked in his opening address: "We are all affected by crime, therefore we have to work together to combat it".

MAKING THE WORLD SAFER FROM DRUGS, CRIME AND TERRORISM

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To do so, the key entity in the region, SADC, which was established to promote regional peace, economic development, social progress and cultural development, bringing together 15 states, is ideally situated to take joint action. UNODC as the global leader in the fight against illicit drugs, transnational organised crime, migrant smuggling, human trafficking, terrorism and corruption, is, on the other hand, ideally placed to provide support to the Member States.

The Regional Programme has to be seen as broad strategic framework. It is divided in three thematic areas: (1) Combatting Illicit Trafficking, Organized Crime and Terrorism; (2) Criminal Justice and Integrity; and (3) Drug Abuse Prevention, Treatment and Care, and HIV Prevention Treatment and Care for Drug Users and in Prison Settings. The Programme deals with issues ranging from drug trafficking, human trafficking, cooperation on border management and mutual legal assistance, harmonization of legislation, money laundering, prison reform, improving data collection and analysis, amongst others.

The Expert Group meeting endorsed the Regional Programme which is a crucial and promising step, allowing SADC, its member states and UNODC to develop a more detailed action plan and mobilize funding for the Programme.

Many of the expert delegates as well as the Programme Director, Chief Director from the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Mr Pitso Montwedi, and the UNODC Regional Representative for Southern Africa, Mr Mandiaye Niang, expressed their great satisfaction with the outcome of the meeting. They all emphasized that in order to make a real difference in the fight against drugs and crime in the region it is paramount to follow through with the next steps, namely by developing the action plans, projects and by ensuring their effective implementation.

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