Minutes of Meeting on MOU on Subregional Cooperation in Drug Control
Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan
13 – 14 December 2002

1. Opening of the meeting
The meeting was opened with a welcoming statement from the President of Turkmenistan, H.E. Mr. Saparmurad Niyazov, which was delivered by the Deputy Chair of the Cabinet of Ministers and Minister of Healthcare and Medical Industry, Mr. Berdymukhamedov. The president welcomed the UN efforts against drugs and crime and indicated the Turkmen Government’s devotion to comprehensive efforts in that area. He also stressed the human dimension of the drug problem. The president gave his country’s support for regional cooperation in the efforts to suppress drug trafficking and to address drug abuse issues.

Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) delivered a speech in which he touched upon the drug trade as a world phenomenon and highlighted the work of UNODC. He drew attention to the current situation and developments in Afghanistan, which are negatively affecting the Central Asia region. He specifically indicated that security in Central Asia is one of the key priorities for the UN. Furthermore, Mr. Costa mentioned priorities to be addressed in the region and specifically outlined the idea of setting up a Regional Information and Coordination Centre. Finally, he highlighted the crucial importance of demand reduction related activities in the region.

2. Progress achieved in drug control cooperation: national overviews
Azerbaijan provided a summary of the drug situation and anti-drug efforts in the country and highlighted its efforts to harmonize national legislation and practices with UN guidelines. While reporting on success in interdiction efforts, Azerbaijan also brought to the attention of the delegates specific problems regarding control over the drug situation in the country’s occupied territories, including their 123km border with Iran. The delegate expressed appreciation for UNODC’s role in strengthening cooperation and institution building and requested that Azerbaijan be included in the regional activities implemented by UNODC’s Regional Office for Central Asia. A proposal to change the name of the MOU to “Memorandum of Understanding and Mutual Assistance on Drug Control Cooperation” was put forward.

The Kazakhstani delegation drew the participants’ attention to its efforts to counter drug trafficking and drug abuse. Concern was expressed over the increased flows of drugs and of the general deterioration of the drug situation. Kazakhstan supported the idea of creating a Regional Information and Coordination Centre. At the same time, the delegation raised an initiative on the creation of a Counter-Narcotics Centre to cover the countries on the main trafficking routes and stated its willingness to host such a centre in Almaty. The Counter-Narcotics Centre would (1) coordinate efforts of the appropriate bodies of the Central Asian and European countries, (2) elaborate policy suggestions, (3) monitor, analyze and forecast developments related to the drug trade, (4) support activities of the appropriate national agencies, (5) develop harmonized legal standards, and (6) develop recommendations in the demand reduction area.

Kyrgyzstan provided an overview of the drug situation in the country. Delegates were informed on developments regarding the State Programme on Countering Drugs and Drug Abuse. This programme is a national policy in legislation and law enforcement areas, and it identifies priorities in drug demand reduction. The statement also referred to possible future activities in the stabilization of Afghanistan, including the continuation of donor assistance, especially with respect to better coordination. The delegate stressed the importance of regional cooperation in improving legislation aimed at combating money laundering.

Russia described in detail its drug situation, as well as measures to counter illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors. The delegate highlighted the necessity to strengthen the role of the UN in coordinating measures to counter the threat arising from the drug trade. The head of the delegation informed the participants on the work of the Centre for Inter-Agency Coordination and about the establishment of a State
Committee on Countering Illicit Circulation of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances under the Ministry of the Interior. In cooperation with the UN, a project on an international training centre in Domodedovo has just started. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation with CIS countries is progressing, including on issues related to controlled delivery operations. With regard to drug-related threats coming from Afghanistan, the delegation stressed that countermeasures should be taken inside Afghanistan, supporting activities of the new Afghan administration with maximum participation of the international community. The delegation also stated that activities on the establishment and strengthening of ‘anti-drug security belts’ around Afghanistan are equally important in the holistic approach to Afghan drug trafficking that the international community is taking under the aegis of the United Nations. The idea of the establishment of the Central Asia Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC) was discussed by the Russian delegation, which concluded that it is an interesting proposal requiring further discussion. Russia supports the proposal of Azerbaijan that the executive director send a document on the idea of the establishment of the CARICC to Member States.

Tajikistan noted that drug trafficking is threatening security in the country. It stressed again the continuous threat from Afghanistan, especially considering the new cultivation of opium poppy, new laboratories in Afghanistan often located in close vicinity to the border, and drug smuggling attempts from Afghanistan. Tajikistan reaffirmed its support for regional initiatives to counter these problems, including the establishment of the proposed Regional Information and Coordination Centre. In Tajikistan, there is a need to continue with projects to strengthen the DCA, border control mechanisms, forensic capacities and drug seizure databases.

Turkmenistan pointed at its progress in cooperation with UNODC in the framework of UN conventions. The destructive effect of drug abuse on the social fabric was outlined and the point was made that because Turkmenistan is surrounded by drug producing countries, it is being used as a transit country. The delegation focused on the need to harmonize legislation among the countries of the region, welcomed UNODC initiatives to reduce drug flows and stated their readiness to continue participating in international efforts to address drug trafficking and drug abuse in the region. Turkmenistan also stressed that coordination efforts should move beyond a narrow interpretation of the ‘region’, and suggested that a proper and comprehensive understanding should include all ECO Member States. Turkmenistan is not opposed to the establishment of the CARICC, however, it was mentioned that this issue needs to be thoroughly examined. It is essential to first elaborate effective working mechanisms of the centre before considering approval of the project.

The delegation from Uzbekistan pointed out that importance must be attached to international cooperation, including the exchange of information related to the drug situation, between appropriate law enforcement bodies and that it is essential for developing a comprehensive approach to demand reduction activities. Attention must be paid to precursor control and the implementation of controlled deliveries, as well as the UN programme aimed at improving border controls at the Termez-Hayraton checkpoint. Uzbekistan fully supported the establishment of a Regional Information and Coordination Centre and indicated its willingness to host the centre in Tashkent. The centre could (1) facilitate the regional coordination of control efforts, (2) assist the implementation of national programmes, in particular on border control training, technical expertise and scientific exchange, and (3) coordinate donor assistance and financing.

3. Progress achieved in drug control cooperation: global and regional overview

The representative of the Aga Khan Development Network stressed the importance of understanding the drug problem as a development issue. The Network has recently pledged US$75 million for the rebuilding of Afghanistan. It is hoped that the initiatives aimed at restoring the economy in Afghanistan, as well as projects to create sustainable development in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, will be beneficial for local communities and the larger region. These projects will be useful as they will promote development on a sustainable basis, creating employment, generating income, and helping and encouraging people to stay away from narcotics and other illicit activities.
Mr. Vladimir Fenopetov, UNODC Senior Programme Management Officer, gave a presentation on current global illicit drug trends and cooperation in drug control.

Ms. Antonella Deledda, UNODC Regional Representative for Central Asia, talked about the implementation of the UNODC Regional Programme Framework, touching on the evolution of cooperation within the framework of the MOU, the agreed strategic approach for countering drugs in Central Asia and future projects.

On the invitation of the Chair for interested observers to take the floor and give a statement to the conference, the representative of the World Customs Organization and the Drug Liaison Officer of the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Ashgabat spoke.

The representative of the World Customs Organization informed the delegates about the activities of the World Customs Organization in Central Asia and, in particular, of the establishment of a WCO Regional Intelligence Liaison Office in Moscow. This office covers the Central Asian states and the extension of the Customs Enforcement Network Database to include information regarding drug seizures in the Central Asian region.

The representative of the Embassy of the United Kingdom stressed the global dimension of the drug trade and assured the delegates of the firm commitment of the UK to provide the Central Asian states with necessary assistance. To better focus assistance programmes, the representative appealed to the Turkmen delegation to regularly provide information on the national drug situation, as envisaged by presidential decree.

The co-chair expressed his hope that the timely provision of information from the party states would facilitate the implementation of additional and more effective projects.

4. Measures to strengthen subregional drug control cooperation

Mr. Brian Taylor, Chief, Supply Reduction and Law Enforcement Section, UNODC HQ, gave a presentation on suggested future regional activities in strengthening law enforcement, with special reference to the possibility of establishing a Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC).

The Chair invited comments on the topic of the centre.

Mr. Antonio Maria Costa reiterated UNODC’s strong support for the CARICC project and expressed his optimism about the provision of funding.

The Uzbek delegation underlined the necessity of developing permanent coordination between law enforcement bodies. President Karimov had previously raised the issue of the establishment of the centre in Tashkent at a meeting with the Secretary-General of the UN. The delegate reiterated the readiness of the Uzbek government to host the centre.

Kazakhstan expressed appreciation of the CARICC proposal and suggested that the CARICC would benefit not only Central Asia, but also CIS and European countries. UNODC’s proposal for the structure of the centre was considered as a good basis for further discussion.

The Kyrgyz delegation supported the CARICC project, with the final structure of the centre to be discussed. The delegate stressed that the location of the centre was secondary to ensuring maximum operational effectiveness.

The idea of the establishment of the CARICC was discussed by the Russian delegation, which did not rule out the possibility of further consideration of this proposal.

Tajikistan highlighted to the members of the MOU the benefits of establishing a single coordinating agency along the DCA model. The delegation also commented favorably on the establishment of the CARICC and suggested leaving the issue of the location of the centre open for future discussion.
Azerbaijan raised the consideration that the establishment of the CARICC in Tashkent would facilitate cooperation with UNODC ROCA. Seeing this, the delegation supported Tashkent as the venue for the CARICC.

On behalf of the Foreign Anti-Narcotics Community (FANC), the German Police Liaison Officer in Tashkent expressed support for the CARICC initiative.

In his presentation, Mr. Akira Fujino, Deputy Secretary of the International Narcotics Control Board, discussed the essential role of precursor control in the fight against drug trafficking. He informed the delegates on the aims and progress of Operation Topaz. He particularly made reference to the availability of a Topaz international task force to assist Member States with investigations regarding the diversion of acetic anhydride, the main precursor used in the production of heroin.

Ms. Zhuldyz Akisheva, UNODC Desk Officer for Central Asia, gave a presentation on drug abuse trends in Central Asia and provided an overview of measures taken to address the problem.

On the initiative of the delegation of Tajikistan, the Member States discussed the role of poverty reduction and development in fighting drugs. The delegations supported the Tajik initiative to address the drug problem in this comprehensive framework. They called on UNODC to implement further inter-agency cooperation activities and decided to give prominence to the roots of the drug trade in development issues in the final document of the conference.

5. Conclusions of the Chairman
In conclusion, the following main points emerged as a result of the conference:

Strengthening national drug law enforcement capacities remains a priority.

There is a need to improve regional and international cooperation. One of the ways could be to establish a regional centre for the exchange of information and intelligence. UNODC was requested to provide further information about this initiative to Member States in order to allow the competent authorities to make a decision about this proposal.

The Uzbek delegation asked for a working proposal for the establishment of a regional centre to be included in this information. The proposal was handed over to UNODC.

Concerning the future development of the Memorandum of Understanding, there may be a possibility to expand its competence to cover cooperation in the field of prevention and control of terrorism and organized crime related to activities on countering illicit drugs.

Poverty reduction is an important element in a balanced approach to drug control, embracing supply and demand reduction.

An offer was made by the delegation from Azerbaijan to host the next MOU review meeting in the second half of November 2003 in Baku.