

Conclusion

The analysis of world drug markets presented in this report highlighted some positive elements. Affecting less than 5% of the age group 15 to 64, the prevalence of illicit drug use at the global level remains much lower than for tobacco, which affects close to 30%. As far as the two main problem drugs - heroin and cocaine - are concerned, the prevalence only amounted to about 0.5% of the same age group in 2002. Global production of opium is now some 80% less than at the beginning of the 20th century, prior to the introduction of an international drug control system.

Though considerable progress has been recorded, there is no room for complacency. Drug use remains at an unacceptable level and continues to bring misery to mankind. It also finances criminal and, to some extent, terrorist activities. Too many young people across the globe still die every year because of drugs, either as a direct result of drug abuse, or indirectly from exposure to infectious diseases, primarily HIV, transmitted by contaminated injection paraphernalia.

In the Political Declaration, adopted at the 1998 UNGASS, Governments decided to achieve significant progress in the reduction of illicit drug supply and demand by the year 2008. Information and data presented in this report show mixed results so far:

- Clear advances were made with regard to the global production of cocaine, which fell by 30% between 1999 and 2003, and 18% between 2002 and 2003. This decline was largely due to major control efforts in Colombia, the world's largest producer of cocaine. Global cocaine production is now at its lowest levels since the late 1980s. In the USA, the world's largest cocaine market, 2003 student surveys showed levels of consumption some 23% lower than in 1999, and more than 60% lower than in 1985. There was, however, an increase of cocaine consumption in South America and Western Europe over the last few years, but this trend may have started to lose momentum in 2003.
- In the case of opiates, progress were made in South-East Asia, the world's second largest source of illicit opium. There, opium production fell by 35% between 1998 and 2003, and by more than 50% between 1990 and 2003. These advances were unfortunately over-shadowed by developments in South-West Asia. In Afghanistan, opium production was virtually eliminated in 2001, leading to a 66% decline of global opium production in that year. This had positive consequences on the demand side. In several parts of Asia and Europe abuse of opiates stabilized in 2002. Drug related deaths declined in Western Europe by some 20% between 2000 and 2002 and the number of new IDU related HIV cases fell in Central Asia and Eastern Europe in 2002. However, Afghan opium production rebounded during the last two years. In 2003, it was already one third higher than in 1998 and there are indications that 2004 production could climb even further, resulting in plentiful supplies of opium and heroin on the international market.
- Available data for cannabis is less precise than for the other two plant based drugs. Nonetheless, all available indicators suggest that the cannabis market continued to increase over the last few years.

Cannabis production as well as global cannabis seizures rose over the last decade and are now back to the levels of the late 1980s. UNODC's Drug Abuse Trend Index showed an ongoing increase of cannabis use over the last decade and even some acceleration over the 2000-2002 period. Cannabis trend data suggested an increase in Europe, South America, Africa and in a number of countries in Asia. The market stabilized in North America, Oceania and some countries of South-East Asia.

- Data for amphetamine-type stimulants showed a mixed picture. The number of ATS laboratories dismantled clearly increased during the last decade, including over the 1998-2002 period. Seizures of amphetamines also showed a strong upward trend in the 1990s, but declined between 2000 and 2002. Similarly, UNODC's Drug Abuse Trend Index indicated, for the first time in years, a stabilization of consumption in 2002. Increases in methamphetamine use, however, continued to be reported from a number of countries in East- and South-East Asia. In North America and in Western Europe, following years of increases in the 1990s, the amphetamines market has remained largely stable in recent years.
- The trend was less favourable with regard to ecstasy. Seizures continued to rise. In many parts of the world, ecstasy use increased further in 2002. Nonetheless, there were signs that the upward trend might be losing momentum. While it continued to increase in many developing countries, ecstasy use stabilized in several West European countries and declined in the USA and in Canada in 2002/2003.

Conceptual developments in recent years offer prospects of reinvigorated drug control strategies. They reflect, for instance, the need to address the drug problem in a broader sustainable development context. A more integrated response to the twin sectors of drugs and crime is also emerging. The new paradigm of human security encapsulates this broader view of the problem. Finally, efforts are also under way to improve the understanding of drug epidemics, as well as the structure and functioning of drug markets, with a view to design more synergetic, dynamic and cost-effective interventions.