

## C. Asia

### East and South-East Asia

#### 1. Major developments

567. The illicit production of opium in the Golden Triangle seems to have reduced over the reporting period, as has trafficking in the substance from the Golden Triangle to other parts of East and South-East Asia. In particular, the total area under illicit opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar decreased from 55,500 ha in 2015 to 41,000 ha in 2017, the first considerable reduction since 2012. The amount of heroin and morphine originating in the Golden Triangle that was seized in the region also went down. Such developments, together with declining opium prices and the diminishing popularity of heroin as a drug of abuse, all signify the shrinking dominance of opium in the region.

568. The unprecedented amount of methamphetamine seized in some countries in East and South-East Asia in 2017 and 2018 suggests the further expansion of the illicit manufacture of and trafficking in the drug in the region. Exploiting the ongoing insecurity in some countries and better transport links within the region, transnational organized criminal groups have extended their control over the illicit manufacture of and trafficking in methamphetamine. The situation is particularly alarming and worrisome given the already huge and growing popularity of methamphetamine as a drug of abuse.

569. The shift from opium to synthetic drugs, especially methamphetamine, within the region poses serious challenges to the effectiveness of law enforcement policies and practices and raises considerable public health concerns. The relative ease of relocating illicit manufacturing facilities, coupled with more diversified trafficking routes (made feasible by greater regional integration), has heightened the need for multilateral cooperation and effective border control. Similarly, greater effort is required at the regional level to systematically assess and monitor the abuse of synthetic drugs, so as to facilitate the provision of relevant treatment programmes.

#### 2. Regional cooperation

570. The Forty-first Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and the Pacific, was held in Bangkok from 27 to 30 November 2017. Officials from law enforcement and public security agencies and representatives of relevant international organizations assessed

the latest drug situation, discussed related strategic and operational responses, and considered the progress made in implementing the recommendations contained in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016.

571. As closer economic integration among ASEAN countries accelerates, transnational organized criminal groups are further expanding their illicit activities, taking advantage of better infrastructure and transport links within the region, while exploiting vulnerable borders. Jointly organized by the Government of Thailand and UNODC, a high-level conference was held in May 2018 to discuss major cross-border challenges and identify practical solutions for strengthening border management capacities. About 200 senior government officials and representatives from various international organizations attended the meeting.

572. Together with representatives of UNODC, senior drug policy officials from the six countries in the Greater Mekong subregion (Cambodia, China, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam) met in Myanmar in May 2018 to discuss the latest illicit drug situation, review the implementation of the most recent Mekong strategy and negotiate a new strategic plan. Serving as a platform for senior management to share their priorities and concerns, the conference was instrumental in the harmonization of standard operating procedures for law enforcement operations and in the translation of standards into community-based drug treatment among participating countries.

573. The first meeting of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly Advisory Council on Dangerous Drugs was held in Singapore on 19 and 20 June 2018. Delegates from the 10 ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly member States (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam) exchanged information on their national situations and discussed strategies to support the commitment of ASEAN to a drug-free region.

574. The ASEAN Plus Three workshop for narcotics law enforcement officers on countering amphetamine-type stimulants and other narcotic substances was held in Bangkok in July 2018. About 30 narcotics law enforcement officers from the ASEAN Plus Three States participated in the workshop, which was designed to develop their skills and allow them to exchange experiences in countering drug smuggling.

575. The tenth global SMART programme regional workshop for East and South-East Asia was held from 28 to 30 August 2018 in Chiang Rai, Thailand. Experts from China and 10 countries in South-East Asia discussed the feasibility of developing drug demand indicators in order to foster systematic approaches to assessing and monitoring drug use in the region. Participants in the workshop also came from Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and the United States. The workshop was the first attempt at the regional level to address the lack, in most countries of East and South-East Asia, of quantitative data on drug abuse among the general population.

576. The tenth annual meeting and symposium of the Asian Forensic Sciences Network was held in Beijing from 4 to 8 September 2018, on the theme “New technologies, new methods, new challenges”. The event was attended by forensic scientists, academics and researchers from countries in Asia. It provided an opportunity for the participants to communicate and share knowledge and keep abreast of state-of-the-art forensic analytical methods.

### 3. National legislation, policy and action

577. The period under review was characterized by significant legislative and policy initiatives aimed at addressing State responses to drug-related criminality.

578. From the outset, it must be noted that all State responses to drug-related criminality must be based on the rule of law and respect for human rights, as well as on the principle of proportionality. The Board is aware of the continuing reports of extrajudicial action taking place in Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines in relation to purported drug-related activities and/or crimes.

579. In February 2018, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court issued a statement announcing her decision to open a preliminary examination into allegations that crimes falling within the Court’s jurisdiction had been committed on the territory of the Philippines in the context of the so-called “war on drugs” launched by the Government of the Philippines. According to the statement, the preliminary examination is aimed at analysing available information to determine whether there are sufficient grounds to proceed with an investigation pursuant to the criteria established by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.<sup>77</sup>

580. The Board reiterates that any State response, whether official or sanctioned by State actors, to drug-related criminality that is not based on the rule of law, respect for human rights and the principle of proportionality is a clear violation of the international drug control conventions and internationally recognized human rights norms.

581. The Government of Myanmar announced a new national drug control policy in February 2018. The policy was developed in partnership with UNODC and adopts, at the national level, the framework set out in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016. A defining feature of the new policy is that it represents a shift from an approach based primarily on punitive responses to drug use to one centred on public health. The new policy contains five focus areas: (a) supply reduction and alternative development; (b) demand and harm reduction; (c) international cooperation; (d) research and analysis; and (e) compliance with human rights standards.

582. Reflecting the shift to a health-based approach to drug abuse and dependence, in February 2018, Myanmar also amended its 1993 Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law in order to address the drug issue while supporting health-care structures and providing treatment to drug users, funding for sustainable projects such as civic education programmes and creating job opportunities for victims.

583. Several amendments were made to the Narcotics Act of Thailand that became effective in January 2017. The changes mainly concern reductions in penalties for the possession, import, export and production of drugs and can be regarded as moving in the direction of more proportionate sentencing. Importantly, the revised Act amends the punishment for the sale of drugs from the mandatory death penalty to either life imprisonment and a fine or the death penalty.

584. New rules relating to drug concentration levels and drug testing for drivers were released and implemented by the Government of China in May 2018. The rules specify the threshold values for drug levels in the blood or saliva of drivers, and the related methods of testing.

585. Hong Kong, China, published a three-year plan on drug treatment and rehabilitation services (2018–2020) in March 2018. The plan sets out the strategic direction for drug treatment and rehabilitation services in Hong Kong, China, and focuses on the main challenges of the drug situation. To deter trafficking in and abuse of new

<sup>77</sup>United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2187, No. 38544.

psychoactive substances, in July 2018, the Government added five new psychoactive substances (EPH, MPA, MDME-CHMICA, 5F-APINCA and U-47700) to schedule 1 of the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance and two substances (ANPP and NPP) to schedule 2 of the Control of Chemicals Ordinance. Anyone prosecuted for trafficking or manufacturing those substances will be subject to a maximum penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of 5 million Hong Kong dollars.

586. On 29 August 2018, China placed 32 new psychoactive substances under national control. The newly scheduled new psychoactive substances comprise 20 synthetic cathinones, 8 synthetic cannabinoids and other substances, including the recently internationally controlled fentanyl analogues 4-FIBF and THF-F.

587. In March 2017, the Government of Mongolia approved a national programme on combating the illegal sale of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, so as to improve State policy and the legal environment on combating the illegal sale of drugs, provide coordinated management among government agencies, implement comprehensive education and health services, identify the causes and conditions of drug-related offences, train relevant officers and introduce modern technology.

## 4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

### (a) Narcotic drugs

588. While Myanmar continued to have the world's second largest area under illicit opium poppy cultivation, the total area under cultivation in the country went down from 55,500 ha in 2015 to 41,000 ha in 2017. Reductions in cultivation were mainly found in the East Shan and South Shan States. Only minor reductions, of 600 ha in total, were recorded in North Shan and Kachin States, owing to continued instability and conflict among powerful ethnic militias.

589. Total opium production in Myanmar decreased by 14 per cent over the period 2015–2017, from 647 tons in 2015 to 550 tons in 2017, and accounted for 5 per cent of the global opium production estimate in that year. With a fairly stable cultivation area and rising yield in opium production, South Shan remains the biggest producer in Myanmar and supplies close to half of the total estimated amount of opium produced in the country.

590. According to UNODC, opiates produced in Myanmar are mostly trafficked to China and Thailand; the country also remains a source of heroin trafficked to Oceania (mostly Australia). Total heroin and morphine seized in East and South-East Asia dropped by 6 per cent in 2016, to about 11 tons.

591. The reductions in opium poppy cultivation and the decreasing volume of opiates seized, together with lower opium prices and the declining popularity of heroin as a drug of abuse, seem to suggest the shrinking dominance of opium within the region over the past two years.

592. With an estimated total area under opium poppy cultivation of less than 300 ha, authorities in Thailand no longer consider such cultivation a major threat. The country, however, remains one of the main transit countries in the region for heroin trafficking. The total amount of heroin seized fluctuated between 200 kg and 400 kg over the period 2014–2016, and rose to almost 600 kg in 2017, mainly because of a relatively large seizure (165 kg) from a shipment detected in the northern region.

593. Compared with other substances, the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in cocaine remain limited within the region, with the majority of the cocaine being trafficked from South America. The annual volume of cocaine seized in Thailand fluctuates around 50 kg and has never exceeded 70 kg. On the other hand, authorities in China have suggested that an increasing amount of cocaine, mostly transported in bulk from South America, through the south-eastern coastal areas of the continent, was trafficked into the country in 2017. The drug was then distributed to and sold in other regions, such as Oceania.

### (b) Psychotropic substances

594. The latest global seizure data suggest that East and South-East Asia and North America remain the two main regions for methamphetamine trafficking. Most of the methamphetamine trafficked between regions is destined for countries in those two regions. Considerable increases in crystalline methamphetamine seizures were reported by many countries in East and South-East Asia over the past two years, including Japan, Myanmar and the Philippines.

595. Although complete seizure data on methamphetamine for 2017 were not available at the time of writing, a number of media reports on record-breaking methamphetamine seizures in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand warrant alarm. While the *modi operandi* vary, the most common seems to be the packaging of methamphetamine

pills and crystalline methamphetamine into packages of tea for trafficking to their final destinations.

596. A number of significant methamphetamine seizure cases were reported by Thailand in 2017. Shipments involving several million tablets of methamphetamine have become common, and two shipments, each involving 10 million tablets, were confiscated in the last quarter of the year. The total amount of methamphetamine pills seized reached 240 million tablets in 2017, almost double that seized the year before. Seizures of crystalline methamphetamine also tripled, surging to 7.6 tons in 2017. The majority of crystalline methamphetamine was trafficked into Thailand through the country's border with Myanmar, using different channels. Authorities attributed the significant increases to a number of reasons, including greater production within the region, new market strategies of organized criminal groups and higher demand from other regions, most notably Oceania.

597. Exploiting the vulnerabilities of the long coastline in Indonesia, organized criminal groups traffic the bulk of the methamphetamine brought into the country by sea. Joint operations among the police, the navy and the competent national authorities prevented the smuggling of huge quantities of methamphetamine in two major shipments (each involving more than 1 ton of methamphetamine) in 2017 and 2018.

598. According to UNODC, the total number of dismantled clandestine synthetic drug manufacturing facilities in East and South-East Asia almost doubled during the period 2012–2015. The fact that methamphetamine was being manufactured in the majority of those facilities suggests the continued growth in methamphetamine manufacturing capacity within the region. In 2017, authorities in Malaysia and the Philippines reported the detection of nine and two clandestine methamphetamine manufacture laboratories, respectively.

599. In comparison with methamphetamine, the illicit manufacture of and trafficking in “ecstasy” seemed to remain stable. Only a small number of countries (mainly China and Malaysia) have reported the illicit manufacture of “ecstasy” over the past few years. Authorities in Thailand indicated that a relatively high retail price of the substance limited its usage to wealthy individuals. About 84,000 “ecstasy” tablets were seized in 2017, slightly less than the year before.

### (c) Precursors

600. The total amount of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine reported seized in East and South-East Asia

continues to be far lower than the amount of methamphetamine seized. This, together with the limited number of reports of seizures of other methamphetamine precursors, points to a considerable knowledge gap regarding the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine within the region.

601. The amount of ephedrine seized in East and South-East Asia continues to represent a large share of global ephedrine seizures, with China accounting for the largest share of the regional total. Authorities in China reported an expansion of the illicit manufacture of ephedrine north of the Yangtze River and dismantled 27 clandestine ephedrine laboratories and warehouses in 2016. Meanwhile, law enforcement agencies in the Philippines continued to dismantle illicit methamphetamine laboratories and perceived a switch from large- to small-scale manufacture and the splitting of manufacturing into different stages in different locations. Malaysia also reported seizing a considerable amount of ephedrine in 2017.

602. Countries in the region accounted for more than half of the pseudoephedrine preparations seized globally during the period 2012–2016, mainly because of the huge quantities seized in Myanmar and Thailand. Together, those two countries accounted for almost 90 per cent of the pseudoephedrine preparations seized in East and South-East Asia. Detailed information regarding the sources of the preparations and the methods of diversion, however, has not been submitted by most countries in the region.

603. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the region can be found in the report of the Board for 2018 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

### (d) Substances not under international control

604. Countries in East and South-East Asia continue to report the emergence and considerable seizures of new psychoactive substances. In 2017, authorities in China identified 34 new psychoactive substances, in addition to the 230 new psychoactive substances seized in various parts of the country that year that were mainly being used by young people at entertainment venues. Information available to the Viet Nam Border Guard also pointed to a sevenfold increase in the amount of synthetic drugs seized at the border between Viet Nam and the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 2017.

605. As a plant indigenous to Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand, kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*) has long been used by rural populations in South-East Asia as a traditional remedy for minor ailments, to counter fatigue and as a drink in social gatherings. Its popularity as a plant-based new psychoactive substance has grown considerably over the past two years, possibly as a result of some commercial claims regarding its ability to treat opioid addiction and withdrawal. Total worldwide seizures of kratom surged to more than 400 tons in 2016, surpassing that of all other plant-based new psychoactive substances. In South-East Asia, a recent study<sup>78</sup> suggested that kratom is being used to ease withdrawal from opioid dependence in rural areas and is being consumed in adulterated kratom cocktails to induce euphoria by young people in urban areas. **In this regard, the Board encourages all Governments to take practical measures to prevent the abuse of new psychoactive substances and related consequences for individuals and society.**

606. Although widely used as an anaesthetic in medical and veterinary practice, ketamine has been placed under national control by many countries in East and South-East Asia, mainly because of its potential for abuse and its popularity as a party drug. Compared with other regions, high levels of ketamine abuse and the significant quantities of ketamine seized remain a major concern for many countries in the region. Worldwide seizures of ketamine rose from 10 tons in 2012 to 22 tons in 2015 as a result of the significant increases in the amounts seized in the region. A considerable decline in the amount seized as reported by the authorities in China, from close to 20 tons in 2015 to about 10 tons in 2016, brought down the total global amount of ketamine seized to about 13 tons in 2016.

## 5. Abuse and treatment

607. UNODC has estimated that about 34.2 million people (0.7 per cent of the population aged between 15 and 64) used amphetamines worldwide in 2016. Despite the lack of systematic estimates regarding the use of amphetamines among the general population in East and South-East Asia, many countries consider methamphetamine use to be a major threat. Specifically, the use of crystalline methamphetamine, which is usually of higher purity than that of methamphetamine tablets, has become a key concern for most countries within the region over the past few years.

<sup>78</sup>Darshan Singh and others, "Changing trends in the use of kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*) in Southeast Asia", *Human Psychopharmacology: Clinical and Experimental*, vol. 32, No. 2 (May 2017).

608. According to the information available to UNODC, declines in heroin use in 2016 were reported by experts in countries in East and South-East Asia, including Indonesia, the Republic of Korea and Thailand, as well as Hong Kong, China.

609. There is a higher proportion of treatment for the use of amphetamine-type stimulants in Asia and Oceania, compared with other regions. Out of the seven countries and territories in the region that provided such information to UNODC, five of them reported that the largest share of people receiving treatment for drug use were receiving treatment for the use of amphetamines. Some countries, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, as well as Hong Kong, China, observed an increasing number of people receiving treatment for methamphetamine abuse. In Malaysia, crystalline methamphetamine users accounted for 80 per cent of amphetamine-type stimulant users receiving treatment in 2015.

610. Authorities in China reported that there were about 2.5 million registered drug users in the country at the end of 2017, equivalent to 0.18 per cent of the total population. While the total number of registered drug users only rose by 1.9 per cent over the previous year, the number of new drug users fell by almost one third, suggesting that drug use is continuing to grow, although the rate of expansion has declined. Those aged between 18 and 35 represented the majority, followed by those aged between 36 and 59 (43 per cent). In contrast to the situation some years ago, synthetic drugs are now the most commonly abused substance (60 per cent), ahead of opioids (38 per cent). The types of drugs abused became more diversified in 2017.

611. In Singapore, about 3,000 drug users were arrested in 2017, slightly fewer than the year before. The majority of the new drug users were under 30 years old; 64 per cent of those arrested for drug use in 2017 used methamphetamine.

612. The authorities in Malaysia indicated that about 26,000 drug users were arrested in 2017. People aged between 19 and 39 accounted for the majority (about 70 per cent). Among those arrested for drug use, crystalline methamphetamine was the most commonly used drug (40 per cent), followed by heroin and morphine (39 per cent) and methamphetamine pills (20 per cent). A fairly significant increase in the abuse of methamphetamine pills was noted, contrasting with the stable trends in the abuse of other substances.

613. A study by UNODC, WHO, UNAIDS and the World Bank estimated that 3.2 million people injected

drugs in East and South-East Asia in 2016, equivalent to 30 per cent of the worldwide population of people who inject drugs. The prevalence of injecting drug use in the region, however, is relatively low (0.2 per cent) and is below the global average (0.22 per cent). Although the prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs in East and South-East Asia (9.6 per cent) is below the global average (11.8 per cent), 24 per cent of the global total of people who inject drugs living with HIV reside in the region.

614. Following efforts by a number of countries in the region to adopt a community-based treatment approach to deal with the drug abuse problem, the Narcotics Control Bureau of Brunei Darussalam took over the management of the Rumah Al-Islah treatment and rehabilitation centre from the prison department in February 2018. It is the only approved treatment and rehabilitation centre in the country focusing on behaviour changes through a therapeutic community programme.

## South Asia

### 1. Major developments

615. South Asia continues to face a multitude of drug control challenges that are exacerbated, in part, by its geographical location between the two main illicit opiate-producing and trafficking regions of the world, namely the Golden Triangle in South-East Asia (between the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand) and the Golden Crescent in South-West Asia (covering Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan). Against that backdrop, South Asia remains a target for traffickers smuggling illicitly produced opiates from Afghanistan to Europe and North America along the "alternate" southern route. In contrast to the Balkan and southern routes, the alternate southern route bypasses the Gulf countries and runs through South Asia to North America (in particular Canada), sometimes through East Africa, by air. In addition, coastal States in South Asia are vulnerable to maritime trafficking as a result of their exposure to trafficking routes across the Indian Ocean.

616. Opiates, cannabis and amphetamine-type stimulants remain the main substances of concern in the region, with record levels of cannabis herb seized in Bangladesh and India during 2017. There has been a thirtyfold increase in seizures of methamphetamine pills (known as "yaba" in countries in South Asia) in Bangladesh since 2011, and

the amounts of illicitly produced opiates seized throughout the region have been increasing. The diversion of controlled substances, particularly ephedrine and pseudo-ephedrine, from licit to illicit channels has continued, as has the smuggling of pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, notably codeine-based cough syrups, which remain a considerable challenge in Bangladesh, Bhutan and India, and of synthetic opioids such as tramadol, which has been encountered in significant quantities across the region and has been scheduled as a narcotic drug in some countries of the region as of 2018.

617. There is also growing evidence of an emerging modus operandi of drug trafficking in the region that involves the use of the Internet as a marketplace for drugs and precursors, with mail or courier services being used for delivery. Authorities in India and Maldives have seized a comparatively large number of parcels containing controlled substances. However, little is known about the extent of regulations applicable to Internet pharmacies and business-to-business platforms acting as intermediaries between buyers and sellers (by offering access to various substances that may be abused) or about the role that express courier service providers play in the cross-border movement of controlled and non-scheduled substances.

618. In South Asia, the death penalty for drug-related offences is provided for in the laws of several countries, but death sentences are passed infrequently and have reportedly never been enforced for this type of offence. However, during the reporting period, several jurisdictions announced their intention to start executing people who have been sentenced to death for drug-related offences. In addition, there have been reports of extrajudicial killings of alleged drug offenders by law enforcement officials in Bangladesh. Such killings, if the reports are confirmed to be true, would be in contravention of international law.

### 2. Regional cooperation

619. Countries in the region continue to cooperate on drug-control issues through a number of regional initiatives. The Forty-first Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok from 27 to 30 November 2017, was focused, among other issues, on the role of the Internet in drug trafficking and abuse, which is an issue of concern to the region.

620. In March 2018, senior law enforcement and ministry officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka finalized the agreement documents related to the establishment of the South Asian Regional Intelligence and Coordination Centre, to be based in Colombo. The legal framework for the operation of the Centre has been submitted to the participating Governments for endorsement. Drug trafficking will be one of the focus areas for cross-border cooperation against transnational organized crime through the Centre.

621. The fifth meeting of the Sub-Group on Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursor Chemicals of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation was held in Kathmandu on 23 May 2018. Delegates from the seven States members of the Initiative, including the five States from South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) discussed, among other matters, the possible association of the Initiative with the South Asian Regional Intelligence and Coordination Centre.

622. The tenth Recovery Symposium was held in Hanoi from 8 to 12 October 2018, hosted by the Drug Advisory Programme of the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific. The Symposium brought together 174 participants, including policymakers, resource persons, persons recovering from drug dependence, family members, service providers and other relevant stakeholders from 26 countries to exchange experiences on treating drug addiction.

### 3. National legislation, policy and action

623. Over the reporting period, Governments in the region continued to take legislative and other measures affecting the control of substances under their national legal regimes. India placed tramadol, a synthetic opioid not controlled at the international level, under national control in April 2018 and granted licensed manufacturers, importers and exporters of tramadol a period of 120 days to clear their existing stocks. Another nine substances, namely 4-methylethcathinone, ethylone, pentedrone, ethylphenidate, methiopropamine, MDMB-CHMICA, 5F-APINACA, XLR-11 and khat (*Catha edulis*), were placed under national control in February 2018.

624. Bhutan amended its 2015 Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Substance Abuse Act in 2018. Among other changes, as a result of the amendment, Bhutan: (a) criminalizes the possession of cannabis

exceeding 50 g as a trafficking offence (unless certain mitigating circumstances, such as the absence of a criminal record, are present), thereby subjecting such possession to stricter sanctions; (b) employs a generic definition of new psychoactive substances to bring substances of a similar nature, effect, group or properties to those already listed under schedules I to VI of the Act within the purview of the Act; (c) has scheduled 30 new substances under the Act, among them tramadol; and (d) has transferred the competence to amend those schedules from the Parliament to the Narcotics Control Authority, with the Parliament retaining the right to be informed of changes in the scope of national control. The amendment came into effect on 8 January 2018.

625. Furthermore, the Bhutan Narcotics Control Authority published rules and regulations setting out the referral process and treatment interventions associated with compulsory treatment for persons charged with the offence of substance abuse. Aftercare and follow-up interventions, including drug testing, are key components for successfully completing treatment under the new framework. The rules and regulations entered into force on 2 July 2018.

626. Following a judgment rendered by the Calcutta High Court in November 2017, Phensedyl, a codeine-based cough syrup used to treat common cold symptoms and known to be abused in Bangladesh and, to a lesser degree, in Bhutan and Nepal, will henceforth be considered a narcotic drug falling within the purview of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985 in India. As a result, persons implicated in its non-medical use or illicit distribution could be tried for the commission of a drug-related offence. The judgment represents a precedent for the state in which the ruling was made and may be considered authoritative case law by other state courts in future, but it has no binding force in India as a whole. Phensedyl and similar preparations are banned in several countries in the region as a result of their potential for abuse.

627. In India, where capital punishment for drug-related offences is an option for repeat offenders under section 31A of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985, but has never been carried out in practice, the State of Punjab has reportedly submitted an official proposal to amend the Act to extend the death penalty to first-time drug offenders. Similarly, Sri Lanka has announced its intention to cease the commutation of death sentences to life imprisonment for repeat offenders of drug trafficking. The announcement was made by the President of Sri Lanka and contradicts the de facto abolitionist stance on capital punishment taken by the

Government for the last 40 years. The last judge-ordered execution of the death penalty in Sri Lanka took place in 1976. The Board is also aware of reports that Bangladesh is planning to reinstate the enforcement of death sentences for drug-related offences, which in that country have been provided for in law since 1990, but considered optional since the Supreme Court ruled their mandatory application unconstitutional in 2015. In October 2018, Bangladesh extended the application of the death penalty to drug-related offences involving more than 200 g of methamphetamine (“yaba”), which is widely abused in the country, and reclassified the substance as a class-A narcotic drug. **Although the determination of sanctions is a prerogative of States, the Board continues to encourage all States that retain the death penalty for drug-related offences to commute sentences that have already been handed down and to consider abolishing the death sentence for drug-related offences.**

628. In May 2018, Bangladesh declared a “war on drugs”, which has reportedly resulted in the deaths, at the hands of law enforcement officials, of hundreds of people suspected of drug trafficking. Summary trials of drug offenders through “mobile drug courts”, in which suspects are prosecuted and sentenced on the spot, have been operational for a number of years, with conviction rates of close to 100 per cent (in 2016, for example, there were 6,591 convictions and 1 acquittal). However, targeted drug law enforcement operations with large numbers of suspects reportedly killed as a result is an unprecedented development in the country. **The Board stresses, as it did in its annual report for 2017,<sup>79</sup> that extrajudicial responses to drug-related criminality are in clear violation of the international drug control conventions. Under the conventions, drug-related crime must be addressed through formal criminal justice responses, including internationally recognized due process standards.**

## 4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

### (a) Narcotic drugs

629. Illicit crop cultivation remains an issue of concern in some countries in South Asia, in particular with regard to illicit opium poppy cultivation in India, where it coexists with a sizeable area under licit opium poppy cultivation, and in Nepal. Illicit cannabis cultivation is an issue of concern in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka.

630. In Sri Lanka, cannabis is the only plant-based narcotic drug illicitly cultivated in the country, with an estimated area under illicit cannabis cultivation in 2016 of about 500 ha. That estimate remained unchanged during the three-year period 2014–2016, with no information available about related eradication efforts undertaken by the Government, including for 2017. At the same time, cannabis is commonly used in the preparation of traditional ayurvedic medicines in Sri Lanka. The Ministry of Health in Sri Lanka announced its intention to begin cultivating cannabis for medicinal purposes, partly destined for export to North America. Cultivation was to start in late 2018, with a limited area of about 40 ha, which should yield 25 tons of cannabis herb yearly.

631. During 2017, India’s law enforcement agencies intensified their efforts to eradicate illicitly cultivated cannabis in the country. In that year alone, illicitly cultivated cannabis plant covering an area of more than 3,400 ha was eradicated in India, the largest area subjected to eradication in the period 2013–2017. Nevertheless, illicit cannabis cultivation remains a challenge in the country. Bangladesh eradicated 69,989 illicitly cultivated cannabis plants in 2017, the highest number of such plants eradicated in the last seven years in the country, and almost double the number of plants eradicated in 2013.

632. Cannabis remains the most frequently seized narcotic drug in South Asia; cannabis herb was the drug seized in the largest quantities across the region in 2017. India alone carried out 6 per cent of the world’s cannabis herb (“*ganja*”) seizures in 2016 (nearly 300 tons), and reported seizing even higher quantities in 2017 (353 tons, representing a 20 per cent increase compared with 2016). The figures for 2017 are the highest in India during the period 2013–2018.

633. In comparison, seizures of cannabis resin (“*charas*”) have remained relatively stable in India over the years, fluctuating between a considerable 2 to 4 tons during the period 2013–2017, with 3.2 tons seized in 2017. Cannabis resin is reportedly trafficked from Nepal to India and, within India, from illicit cultivation sites located in southern Kashmir to other parts of the country.

634. In order of magnitude, Bangladesh recorded the next-largest quantity of cannabis herb seized in the region, with close to 70 tons seized in 2017. While seizures of cannabis herb have not fallen below 10 tons since the beginning of the decade, the amount seized in 2017 was by far the highest since 2010. Following a steady increase since 2014, the amount seized in 2017 was more than triple the amount seized in that year (17 tons in 2014, 42 tons in 2015 and 47 tons in 2016). In most cases,

<sup>79</sup>E/INCB/2017/1, para. 256.



cannabis herb is trafficked into Bangladesh from neighbouring India and Nepal.

635. Sri Lanka seized almost 5 tons of cannabis herb in 2017. This represents a 20 per cent increase compared with 2016, when 4.1 tons of cannabis herb were seized, making cannabis herb the narcotic drug seized in the largest quantity in the country during the period 2012–2017. However, with the exception of 2017, seizures of cannabis herb have been steadily declining since 2013, when a record 81.9 tons were seized. Cannabis herb used in Sri Lanka is reportedly grown locally or trafficked into the country from Kerala State in India. With regard to cannabis resin, the trend in Sri Lanka points in the opposite direction, with limited but increasing amounts seized over the past five years (from less than 500 g seized in 2012 to more than 40 kg seized in 2016). Conversely, in 2017, a slight decrease in cannabis resin seizures was noted in Sri Lanka, with 38 kg seized by police.

636. In Nepal in 2017, cannabis herb was also the drug seized in the largest quantity, with 3.7 tons, followed closely by cannabis resin, with 1.3 tons. The figures for 2018 (based on available data until September 2018) suggest no significant change in this regard compared with 2017. In Bhutan, although cannabis herb was the drug seized in the largest amount in 2017 (not counting tablets and capsules of pharmaceutical preparations containing controlled substances), the total amount seized was relatively small, totalling 166.4 kg in 2017 and 184.84 kg as of the end of October 2018. In 2018 in Maldives, the largest single seizures made by customs authorities involved cannabis and heroin (amounting to less than 5.5 kg each).

637. Except for India, where both licit and illicit opium poppy cultivation continue to take place, no data regarding cultivation or eradication efforts in countries in South Asia have been reported since 2009. Notably, the area under illicit opium poppy cultivation eradicated in India in 2017 exceeded the area under licit cultivation during the same crop year: the authorities eradicated an area under illicit opium poppy cultivation covering more than 3,000 ha, the largest for the last five years, while opium poppy was grown legally on 2,322.5 ha of land licensed for cultivation by the Central Bureau of Narcotics. In comparison, in 2016, more than 2,600 ha of illicitly cultivated opium poppy were destroyed. By the end of August 2018, opium poppy illicitly cultivated on an area covering more than 3,200 ha had been eradicated.

638. Trafficking in opiates increased significantly in at least half of the countries in the region from 2016 to 2017. For example, seizures of illicitly produced heroin

continued to rise in India in 2017, from 1.7 tons in 2016 to 2.1 tons in 2017; they have been rising steadily since 2014. According to the Narcotics Control Bureau, almost half of all seized heroin in India originated in countries in South-West Asia. Seizures of opium in the country have continued to increase since 2015, with more than 2.5 tons seized in 2017 alone. That figure had already been surpassed in mid-2018, with more than 4 tons of opium seized by 30 June. In 2017, India seized 449 kg of morphine, the origin of which was unknown, which was 15 times more than in 2016 (28 kg) and was the highest amount during the period 2013–2017. Significantly, in September 2018, authorities in India raided a clandestine drug laboratory in Indore, a city in central-west India, seizing 9 kg of fentanyl. It was the first reported instance of a clandestine fentanyl-synthesizing laboratory being dismantled in the region.

639. India is also a transit country for illicitly produced opiates, in particular heroin, which originate in Afghanistan and are trafficked through the country via Pakistan en route to Europe and North America (mainly Canada). The route used by traffickers to smuggle opiates through South Asia is an alternative part of the so-called “southern route”, which typically runs through Pakistan (or the Islamic Republic of Iran) and, via the Gulf countries, continues to East Africa and on to the destination countries. The “alternate” southern route bypasses the Gulf countries and uses South Asia as a stopover for opiates being supplied directly to the Canadian market by air, or through Africa to Europe.

640. Bangladesh seized 401 kg of heroin in 2017, the highest amount of heroin seized in the last eight years, following significant year-on-year increases since 2014 (30 kg in 2014, 110 kg in 2015 and 267 kg in 2016). The amounts of other illicitly produced opiates seized over the same period were very small. Seizures of pharmaceutical opioids, which caused serious problems at the beginning of the decade (more than 4.1 tons were seized in 2010), have been in decline, with only a nominal amount seized in 2017.

641. The overall picture of opiate trafficking in Sri Lanka is less clear. In 2017, nearly 315 kg of heroin were seized (compared with 207 kg in 2016) and less than 1 kg of opium was seized (compared with 15 kg seized in 2016). Seizures carried out in the years prior do not allow for a conclusive assessment to be made as to a particular trend, given significant year-to-year fluctuations. At the same time, in July 2018 alone, the country’s Police Narcotics Bureau seized 103.9 kg of heroin in one of the department’s biggest drug seizures ever. Most opiates are reportedly trafficked into Sri Lanka from India and Pakistan.

642. Codeine-based cough syrups sold under different trade names (e.g., Phensedyl and Corex) have continued to be seized in considerable quantities in Bangladesh, Bhutan and India and are reportedly trafficked mainly along the border between India and Bangladesh. These pharmaceutical preparations are mostly produced in India, often transported by road in trucks and trains and then trafficked across the border into Bangladesh. In the first six months of 2018, the Narcotics Control Bureau in India reported seizing 91,000 bottles of cough syrup.

643. Following an apparent peak in cocaine trafficking in South Asia in 2016, seizures of cocaine in the region in 2017 were less common and involved far lower amounts. In Sri Lanka, for example, some 221 kg of cocaine were seized in 2017, significantly less than the nearly 1.6 tons seized in 2016, a year that appears to have been the exception, with seizures in preceding years well below the 10 kg mark (5.7 kg in 2015, 26 g in 2014, no seizures in 2013 and 7.5 kg in 2012). For 2016, the main transit country from which cocaine arrived in Sri Lanka was reportedly the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

644. Similarly, the amount of cocaine seized in India fluctuated during the period 2013–2017, between 15 kg (in 2014) and 113 kg (in 2015), with no clearly discernible trend. In 2017, 69 kg were seized in India, mostly at airports. In Bangladesh, seizures of cocaine have only been reported since 2015, with relatively low amounts, ranging from 0.6 kg (in 2016) to 5.7 kg (in 2015). In 2017, 5 kg were seized. A similar amount was seized in Nepal in the same year.

645. In recent years, there appears to have been a noticeable growth in drug trafficking by sea in the Indian Ocean region. In India, several sizeable seizures of heroin were carried out at sea in 2017 (6 tons in January and some 1.5 tons in July). In 2018, several vessels carrying large shipments of tramadol from India were intercepted by Sri Lankan authorities, while, in 2016, police in Sri Lanka reportedly detected 900 kg of cocaine on a ship bound for India, representing one of the largest cocaine seizures recorded in South Asia to date. The Forty-first Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and the Pacific, highlighted the need for closer cooperation among the heads of the coastguard agencies and anti-narcotics forces of the countries in the Indian Ocean coastal regions.

## (b) Psychotropic substances

646. Amphetamine-type stimulants remain drugs of considerable concern for some countries in the region,

notably Bangladesh, where “yaba” (methamphetamine) tablets have been seized in increasing numbers, although trends in the region as a whole have proved unpredictable over the past few years. At the global level, unprecedented quantities have been seized; at the regional level, however, the predicted development of new synthetic drug markets in South Asia has not materialized.

647. Following a tenfold increase in the amount of amphetamine-type stimulants seized in India, from 166 kg in 2015 to 1,687 kg in 2016 in practically the same number of cases, in 2017, only 95 kg were seized in a comparable number of seizures. Indications for 2018 seem to show that this inconclusive trend has continued: by August 2018, 253 kg of amphetamine-type stimulants had been seized. India has reportedly also been named as a country of origin or transit for methamphetamine seized in Singapore and Spain, as well as Hong Kong, China, over the period 2012–2016.

648. In Bangladesh, methamphetamine was the second most seized drug in 2017 after cannabis herb, with 3.6 tons seized. This represents the highest quantity of methamphetamine seized in the past eight years in Bangladesh and a more than tenfold increase over the amount seized in 2016 (355 kg). In 2016, the Department of Narcotics Control in Bangladesh reported seizing close to 30 million “yaba” pills, noting a significant year-on-year increase since 2011 (almost thirtyfold between 2011 and 2017). “Yaba” tablets, the methamphetamine-caffeine compound associated with the drug abuse crisis in Bangladesh, are reportedly entering the country from Myanmar.

649. In Maldives, synthetic drugs, in particular, amphetamine, methamphetamine and “ecstasy”, were among the drugs most often seized by customs officials over the reporting period. However, amounts were typically small, ranging from a few grams to a little under 300 g. In Sri Lanka, the amounts of psychotropic substances seized in 2016 and 2017 were also very small. For 2016, Sri Lanka reported seizing 0.5 kg of “ecstasy”-type substances and 1.23 kg of LSD-type hallucinogens. There were no reports of amphetamine or methamphetamine being seized in the country in 2016 or 2017.

650. India seized a total of 170 kg of mephedrone in 2017; 110 kg of the substance, along with a range of other substances, was found in a single clandestine drug manufacturing facility. Mephedrone has also been encountered in Maldives, where 330 g of the substance were seized in four cases, all of them involving parcels sent through the mail. Seizures of methaqualone also continued in India. In 2017, authorities in India seized 124 kg of methaqualone, a significant decrease from the exceptionally high amount

of 24.1 tons seized in 2016 during the dismantling of a clandestine laboratory.

651. There is also evidence in South Asia of trafficking in prescription medicines containing psychotropic substances, in particular, tranquillizers such as diazepam (large quantities were seized in India between 2010 and 2015, including from a clandestine laboratory dismantled in 2016), alprazolam (several hundred thousand tablets were seized in India in 2017), clonazepam, lorazepam and benzodiazepine. One of the primary ways of accessing such substances in India is reportedly through illicit Internet pharmacies.

652. The vast majority of drug seizures carried out by customs officials in Maldives involved parcels sent through the mail, which appears to be a recent, yet increasingly well-established modus operandi for drug traffickers. Examples of the trend of ordering substances online and using courier or mail services for delivery could also be found in India, where the practice has been noted by authorities as one of the emerging means of trafficking psychotropic substances, in particular methaqualone, ketamine (scheduled at the national level), precursor chemicals and narcotic drugs such as cocaine, heroin or cannabis. For example, in February 2018, authorities in India seized 200 tablets of nitrazepam, a benzodiazepine-class drug, concealed in a courier parcel originating in the United States.

653. The global trend of purchasing drugs over the Internet, particularly on darknet trading platforms using cryptocurrencies, has already spread to the region, including India. One recent study of the global Internet-facilitated illicit drug trade identified some online vendors of drugs over the darknet who appear to be operating from South Asia. More specifically, the study identified more than 1,000 drug listings from India published across 50 online cryptomarket platforms. In 2017, authorities in India dismantled two illicit pharmacies selling drugs over the Internet, seizing close to 130,000 tablets containing psychotropic substances and arresting 15 people in the process.

### (c) Precursors

654. In India, precursor chemicals continued to be diverted from licit to illicit channels in 2017. They were trafficked most frequently to Malaysia, Myanmar and some countries in Southern Africa. Acetic anhydride, one of the main precursors of heroin, is widely used for

legitimate purposes by the pharmaceutical and textile industries in India. After an unprecedented peak in seizures of acetic anhydride in 2016 (2.7 tons), authorities in India seized about 25 kg of the substance in 2017.

655. There is reportedly a trend of trafficking in ephedrine and pseudoephedrine across the border from India to Myanmar and reverse trafficking of methamphetamine back into India. In 2017, authorities in India seized almost 3 tons of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, almost 500 kg of which were seized at clandestine laboratories used for the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. By August 2018, authorities in India reported having seized 127 kg of ephedrine.

656. Since 2017, the Government of Bangladesh has severely restricted the distribution of pseudoephedrine preparations in the country. Pseudoephedrine is the prime precursor for the illicit manufacture of “yaba” and is mainly imported into Bangladesh from India.

657. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in South Asia can be found in the report of the Board for 2018 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

### (d) Substances not under international control

658. As more and more new psychoactive substances are scheduled, both at the international and national levels, reported seizures of substances that continue to fall within the category of new psychoactive substances have declined in the region. However, seizures of a number of unspecified new psychoactive substances have continued to be reported by individual countries.

659. Ketamine has been seized only intermittently over the last few years in South Asia, although India was frequently named as the country of origin in seizures of ketamine in 2017 and 2018. In 2017, Indian authorities seized a total of 161 kg of ketamine. Significantly, in June 2018, as part of “Operation Vitamin”, conducted at the national level all over India, officials dismantled four illicit ketamine manufacturing facilities and seized 308 kg of ketamine, along with 2 tons of raw material that could reportedly yield another 250 kg of the substance.

660. In addition to widespread abuse of tramadol in countries in West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, the abuse of tramadol is also of considerable concern

in countries in South Asia. According to UNODC, most of the tramadol seized worldwide in the five years to 2016 originated in India and, to a lesser extent, in China.

661. In addition, significant quantities of tramadol were seized in 2016, 2017 and 2018 throughout the region. In India, more than 66 million packaged tablets, 2.2 tons of loose tablets and a further 670 kg of tramadol powder were seized, along with tableting equipment, in one operation in May 2018. In Sri Lanka, 23 out of 28 major cases of non-medical use of pharmaceutical preparations (ranging from the sale or possession of 6 to 70,000 capsules per case) detected by the National Medicines Regulatory Authority in 2017 involved tramadol (the other 5 were related to pregabalin). In two cases, reported in April and September 2018, customs authorities in Sri Lanka intercepted 200,000 and more than 15 million tablets of tramadol, respectively, that had been shipped by sea from India.

662. In Bhutan, 130,316 capsules containing tramadol, marketed under the trade name “spasmo proxyvon plus” (“SP+”), were seized in 2017. Seizures of the drug continued in 2018 and, as of the end of October 2018, authorities in Bhutan had seized close to 70,000 capsules, reflecting the continued influx of the drug into the country.

## 5. Abuse and treatment

663. There are no comprehensive prevalence data on drug use across the South Asia region for 2016 or 2017. Stigma associated with drug abuse has frequently been cited by countries in the region as an obstacle to the collection of reliable data and is a decisive factor in affected populations’ ability to access health care and treatment.

664. Based on available information, the most frequently used drug in South Asia varies from country to country, although cannabis tends to rank at the top, in particular in India and Sri Lanka. In Bangladesh, however, statistics maintained by the Department of Narcotics Control with regard to patients of national treatment centres showed that, in 2016, for the first time in three years, heroin ranked first among the drugs in respect of which treatment had primarily been provided: a little over a third of patients were primarily treated for heroin abuse, about a third of patients for abuse of “yaba” and less than a fifth of patients for cannabis abuse. Figures have fluctuated over the period 2012–2016 in Bangladesh, with only one consistently discernible trend concerning the use of “yaba”: in 2012, close to 6 per cent of patients were treated primarily for methamphetamine abuse, a proportion that had increased fivefold by 2016.

665. The non-medical use of pharmaceutical drugs containing controlled substances continues to be prevalent in virtually all countries of South Asia. The preparations in question include codeine-based cough syrups sold under different trade names, such as Corex (in Bhutan and India) and Phensedyl (in Bangladesh and India); synthetic opioids such as tramadol (identified in the vast majority of abuse cases in Sri Lanka, along with pregabalin, a medicine with anti-convulsant properties used to treat epilepsy, neuropathic pain and anxiety, which is frequently encountered in Bhutan and India); ayurvedic tablets containing opium; and tranquilizers such as alprazolam, diazepam, clonazepam, lorazepam and benzodiazepine.

666. South Asia is the region with the lowest estimated percentage of people injecting drugs worldwide. In terms of core interventions to prevent the spreading of HIV and hepatitis C among people who inject drugs, South Asia has the highest coverage worldwide of opioid substitution therapy: more than 80 per cent of persons who inject drugs in the region are being treated with opioid substitution therapy. Regular HIV testing and needle-syringe distribution programmes are available to a far lesser extent. About 10 per cent of people who inject drugs are reportedly living with HIV.

667. Drug abuse has become a major concern in India in recent years, in particular in the State of Punjab, where an estimated 230,000 people were considered dependent on opioids and around 860,000 people were estimated as opioid users in 2015, according to a study commissioned by the Punjab Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and supported by the Department of Health, Punjab. The data further suggested that, among men aged 18 to 35, about 4 per cent were dependent on opioids. The majority of those men (53 per cent) reportedly used heroin, about 33 per cent used opium and some 14 per cent used a variety of pharmaceutical opioids. Some reports estimate that more than two thirds of all households in the State of Punjab have at least one family member who is dependent on drugs.

668. In Sri Lanka, residential care, treatment and rehabilitation services are offered by four governmental and nine non-governmental service providers. The primary drug of abuse for which patients received treatment across providers operating in Sri Lanka was heroin (92 per cent of all patients), followed by cannabis (69 per cent of patients), indicating a significant level of poly-drug use.

669. In Maldives, a 24-hour support hotline for drug-dependent persons seeking access to treatment services was established in 2018 by the non-governmental organization “Journey”, based in Male. “Journey”, which has

been operational since 2005, carried out a rapid assessment survey on drug use and a national drug use survey in Maldives in 2006 and 2011/2012, respectively, and cooperates closely with the National Drug Agency in offering counselling to drug users and their families, as well as training and house calls throughout the atoll.

## West Asia

### 1. Major developments

670. Despite substantial increases in annual opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan in recent years, in particular during the period 2015–2017, the heroin supply from Afghanistan to destination markets in Europe and beyond appears to have remained stable. According to UNODC, this may be due to an effort by traffickers to keep supply smooth and stable, or heroin may have been manufactured with opium from different harvests.

671. Despite a decrease of 20 per cent, the level of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan remained high in 2018. The decrease was attributed mainly to the drought in the country and to declining farm-gate prices of dry opium. Potential opium production also saw a decrease, of 29 per cent, and was estimated at about 6,400 tons in 2018, compared with 9,000 tons in 2017.

672. The so-called “Balkan route”, which passes through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey and the Balkan countries towards destination markets in Western and Central Europe, remains the main path for trafficking in opiates originating in Afghanistan. Countries along the Balkan route account for about 37 per cent of global heroin seizures. At the same time, in 2017, Afghan opiates continued to be trafficked via a sub-branch of the Balkan route passing from the Islamic Republic of Iran to the countries of the Southern Caucasus and then onward to Ukraine via the Black Sea into Eastern Europe.

673. The so-called “northern route” also continues to be used for trafficking in Afghan opiates to markets in Belarus, Lithuania and the Russian Federation, via Central Asian States.<sup>80</sup> However, most countries in Central Asia witnessed either a stable or a declining trend in trafficking in opiates through their territories. The so-called “southern route”, which accounts for about 9 per cent of opiates trafficked to Europe, runs from Afghanistan to

Pakistan for eventual trafficking through Gulf countries and East Africa to markets in Europe. In addition, drugs continue to be trafficked from Afghanistan to India and other countries in South Asia, with the final destination being markets in Europe and North America.

674. With the significant increases in opium production until 2017, the illicit opiate economy substantially surpassed the level of the entire licit exports of goods and services of Afghanistan. Not only did the Taliban and anti-government, insurgent and powerful local power-holders continue to benefit from the illicit opium economy, but many communities in Afghanistan that engage in cultivation, work on poppy fields or play a role in the illicit drug trade became further dependent on opium poppy cultivation for their livelihoods.

675. There has been an increase in the production of cannabis resin in Afghanistan. The country was identified as the source of seized cannabis resin in 19 per cent of countries that reported the sources of seized cannabis resin in the period 2012–2016, in particular countries in Central Asia, the Southern Caucasus and Europe. In 2017, Afghanistan also continued to see increases in methamphetamine seizures, in addition to detecting new clandestine laboratories manufacturing that substance on its territory.

676. In 2018, Afghanistan began to develop the new Afghan-led counter-narcotics strategy, intended to provide a comprehensive, coordinated and results-based shared approach to tackling the drug problem through enhanced regional efforts, and adopted new counter-narcotics legislation. The Board reiterates that, while it understands the challenges faced in the country and acknowledges the efforts made by the Government and the people of Afghanistan, curtailing the country’s illicit drug economy should be prioritized as part of the efforts to achieve sustainable development in the country, and acknowledges that it is a global shared responsibility to address that challenge through local, national, regional and international efforts.

677. Instability and armed conflicts across the Middle East continued to facilitate trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the subregion. Counterfeit “captagon” has become a drug of choice in war zones in the Middle East and potentially serves as a source of income for terrorist and insurgency groups. Lebanon continues to be a source of cannabis resin seized globally, and its production continued to increase. There are indications that Iraq is also gaining importance for illicit drug cultivation and production, including heroin manufacture and opium poppy and cannabis plant cultivation. In

<sup>80</sup>The Central Asian subregion as referred to in this report comprises Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

addition, drug trafficking and abuse in the Basra region of Iraq, which borders Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Kuwait, has seen substantial increases in recent years. Many countries in the Middle East also continued to observe trafficking and abuse of the prescription drug tramadol, a synthetic opioid not under international control, and there are indications that terrorist groups may also be involved in its trafficking in that subregion.

678. Most countries in Central Asia reported the emergence of a growing number of new psychoactive substances. The countries in the subregion are taking legislative and institutional measures to address that problem, but those efforts remain piecemeal and uneven across the whole subregion, leaving loopholes in the control mechanisms that are exploited by traffickers. Some countries in the subregion are facing increased abuse of synthetic cannabinoids, which are gradually replacing heroin and opium as the main drugs of choice, especially among young people.

## 2. Regional cooperation

679. The 10th Review Meeting of the Memorandum of Understanding on Subregional Drug Control Cooperation, a meeting of ministers and senior officials from the five Central Asian States (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), as well as Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation and the Aga Khan Development Network, took place in Astana on 31 October 2017. As an outcome of the meeting, a declaration was adopted underlining the threats posed by trafficking in and the abuse of illicit substances, in particular for children and young people, and noting with concern that an increased level of illicit cultivation and production of drugs in Afghanistan represented an immediate threat to the subregion and required enhanced cooperation and comprehensive measures. The parties to the Memorandum of Understanding underlined the important role played by CARICC in strengthening regional cooperation on drug control, including by facilitating intelligence-sharing and joint operational activities to address drug trafficking.

680. The International Conference on Security and Sustainable Development in Central Asia was organized by the Government of Uzbekistan under the auspices of the United Nations and in cooperation with the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and UNODC, and held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, on 10 and 11 November 2017. The Conference brought together high-level representatives of the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, SCO, the

Commonwealth of Independent States, the Central Asian States, Afghanistan, China, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Korea, Turkey and the United States, as well as scientists, public figures and representatives of the mass media. The Conference adopted a communiqué encouraging the Heads of the Central Asian States to hold regular consultative meetings to maintain an open dialogue and develop mutually acceptable approaches on contemporary regional issues, including drug trafficking and abuse, and called for increased cooperation between the Central Asian States, UNODC and INTERPOL to counter drug trafficking.

681. In December 2017, the meeting of the Council of CARICC adopted the CARICC Strategy for 2018–2022. In 2017, CARICC facilitated several joint operations, including counter-narcotics operations, and long-term multilateral subregional operations such as Operation Reflex, a subregional operation for countering new psychoactive substances, and Operation Substitute, a subregional operation for countering precursors. Additionally, a joint multilateral container control operation was successfully completed. As a result, the activities of two transnational criminal groups engaged in the distribution of synthetic drugs over the Internet were interdicted, a number of persons were arrested and various illicit substances such as heroin, opium, cannabis resin and synthetic drugs were seized.

682. The States members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, namely Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan, carried out two large-scale joint operations in 2017 to counter drug trafficking and associated money-laundering. As a result of those subregional operations, more than 20 tons of controlled substances were seized, including 16 tons of opium and 1.5 tons of cannabis resin, as well as a substantial number of firearms and ammunition.

683. In May 2018, the Secretariat of SCO held a Meeting of the Senior Officials of the SCO Member States' Counter-Narcotics Agencies in Beijing. At the event, which involved all eight member States, participants discussed the drug control situation in the subregion and avenues for streamlining practical measures for counter-narcotics cooperation.

684. On 8 March 2018, the Security Council adopted resolution 2405 (2018), extending the mandate of UNAMA until 17 March 2019. In the same resolution, the Council expressed its deep concern about the significant increase in the illicit cultivation and production of

and trade and trafficking in drugs in Afghanistan, which significantly contributed to the financial resources of the Taliban and its associates and could also benefit Al-Qaida and ISIL and its affiliates, and encouraged the Government of Afghanistan, supported by the international community and regional partners, to intensify its efforts to address drug production and trafficking with a balanced and integrated approach, in accordance with the principle of common and shared responsibility.

### 3. National legislation, policy and action

685. In 2017, Saudi Arabia adopted executive regulations on the chemical import and management system, which divided chemicals into seven lists, with a view to bringing those substances under control in line with international instruments.

686. With a view to further strengthening the drug control system through an integrated and balanced approach in line with the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016, Turkey adopted a new national strategy document and action plan on the fight against drugs for the period 2018–2023. The strategy covers areas such as the provision of services for the treatment of drug use disorders, rehabilitation, social reintegration and drug use monitoring, as well as a wide range of measures related to justice and law enforcement.

687. In 2017, Kyrgyzstan adopted legislation decriminalizing certain minor drug-related offences, strengthened judicial oversight of investigations, moved the criminal justice system from an inquisitorial to a more adversarial model and promoted the social reintegration of offenders through the establishment of a new, socially oriented probation service to manage and oversee the application of alternatives to incarceration.

688. An interministerial working group was established in Afghanistan, led by the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics, on the development of a new counter-narcotics strategy with a strong component to promote regional cooperation. In parallel to that initiative, UNODC, in close coordination with the Government of Afghanistan, developed the document “Strategic actions to respond to the global threats of opiates”, to step up regional and interregional responses to counter illicit opium poppy cultivation and

production, and address the connection between drugs, crime and terrorism.

689. Amendments to the Anti-Narcotics Act were adopted by the Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran in August 2017 and approved by the Guardian Council in October of the same year. They replaced the punishment for some drug-related offences that had previously carried the death penalty or life in prison, with a prison term of 25 to 30 years and fines. The amendments also raised the threshold for the quantity of drugs that would lead to the imposition of the death penalty, namely possession of 50 kg of opium or 2 kg of heroin, compared with the previous threshold of 5 kg of opium or 30 g of heroin. Capital punishment was retained for serious drug-related offences, including those involving weapons or organized criminal groups, or if the offenders involved minors or mentally ill persons in the commission of the offences, as well as for repeat offences. The amendments have retroactive applicability, and in January 2018, a judicial order was issued by the country’s Chief Justice that would allow for the commuting of the sentences of those on death row, based on their application.

690. The Government of Afghanistan adopted a new counter-narcotics law in February 2018. The law initiated a long-planned restructuring of the country’s drug control infrastructure, the goal of which is to give higher priority to drug control matters by associating them even more closely with the Office of the President of Afghanistan in order to improve coordination. The law is also more streamlined, as the offences contained in the recently adopted Penal Code of Afghanistan eliminate any duplication.

691. In February 2018, the new Penal Code of Afghanistan, which had been adopted in March 2017, came into force, replacing the Penal Code of 1976. According to UNAMA, for the first time, Afghanistan has a comprehensive criminal code complying with international treaty obligations in criminal justice and incorporating modern best practices in criminology. UNODC and UNAMA were among the international agencies that provided assistance to Afghanistan in drafting the new Penal Code. The new Code is aimed at improving Afghanistan’s compliance with international human rights and criminal justice standards, as well as with provisions of the United Nations Convention against Corruption and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its three protocols. The new Code also incorporates the requirements of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court covering war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, and establishes

command responsibility for those who fail to prevent or punish subordinates who commit crimes covered by the Rome Statute.

692. UNODC, jointly with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock and the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics of Afghanistan and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs of the United States, non-governmental organizations and various ministries, launched a new alternative development programme (Boost Alternative Development Interventions through Licit Livelihoods (BADILL)) in November 2017. The project is being implemented in 13 provinces of Afghanistan and aims to reach 50,000 households in four years, focusing on increasing sustainable production and the income of Afghan farmers.

693. In June 2018, six mobile inter-agency teams for countering trafficking in drugs were launched in Uzbekistan. The teams comprise officers from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Security Service and the State Customs Committee. UNODC handed over 30 vehicles and a range of specialized equipment to national authorities to support the mobile teams. The initiative has been supported at the highest level, through the resolution of the President of Uzbekistan adopted in June 2017 dedicated to implementation of the activities.

694. On 30 July 2018, the Constitutional Court of Georgia ruled that imposition of administrative punishment for non-medical consumption of cannabis was unconstitutional, as it would violate the right of the person to “free development”. The Court ruled that the consumption of cannabis would still be illegal if it presented “a threat to third persons”, including consumption in schools, certain public spaces and public transportation, or in the proximity of children and minors. The Inter-Agency Coordinating Council for Combating Drug Abuse, chaired by the Minister of Justice, is working on the legislative amendments to implement the decision of the Constitutional Court.

695. In October 2017, Azerbaijan adopted changes to its criminal legislation removing criminal penalties for minor drug offences committed by drug-dependent persons who had not committed any other offences and were prepared to undergo treatment. In addition, in November 2017, the country revised its administrative code to strengthen sanctions for trafficking in precursors.

## 4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

### (a) Narcotic drugs

696. Heroin supply from Afghanistan to destination markets seems to have remained stable over recent years through the end of 2016, despite the substantial fluctuations in the annual amounts of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. This could be observed on the basis of heroin seizures along the major trafficking routes as well as the prices of heroin and its use in destination markets during that period. According to UNODC, in order to ensure the stability of supply, heroin may have been manufactured using opium from different harvests, depending on the existence of opium inventories and market strategies. More recent price data (up to June 2018) showed significant declines in opium prices in Afghanistan as opium production in the country soared in 2017. Heroin prices in Afghanistan, in contrast, remained largely stable in 2017 and in the first half of 2018. This suggests that increased opium production has not yet resulted in massive increases in heroin manufacture in Afghanistan.

697. The main trafficking route for opiates originating in Afghanistan remains the Balkan route, accounting for 37 per cent of global heroin seizures in 2016, which runs through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey and the Balkan countries to destination markets in Western and Central Europe. Authorities in Turkey believe that significant increases in heroin seizures, coupled with an increase in acetic anhydride seizures on its territory, may indicate that increased amounts of heroin could have been entering European drug markets in the period 2017–2018. Turkey seized 17.7 tons of heroin in 2017 and 5.5 tons in 2016. Almost 9.5 tons of heroin were seized between January and June 2018. Turkey also seized 933 kg of opium in 2017 and 337 kg in 2016. In 2017 and early 2018, Turkey reported increased use of trucks with Iranian number plates arriving from the Islamic Republic of Iran to traffic substantial amounts of heroin into Turkey in transit to destination markets in Europe. In addition, according to its analysis, Turkey concluded that the opium seized on its territory was destined for illicit markets in Australia, Canada and the United States.

698. Some of the heroin seized in Europe transited Pakistan, trafficked directly from that country by air or sea to Europe. At the same time, opiates are being trafficked from Pakistan to the Islamic Republic of Iran for trafficking to European markets along the Balkan route. The vast majority of morphine and heroin seized in the



Islamic Republic of Iran entered the country from Pakistan. Pakistan seized 24.4 tons of heroin in 2017 compared with 23.1 tons in 2016, and it saw a reduction in opium seizures, from 64.6 tons in 2016 to 40 tons in 2017. Seizures of opium and heroin in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2017 saw a slight increase relative to 2016 levels (436.6 tons of opium seized in 2017 compared with 475 tons seized in 2016; and 23.7 tons of heroin seized in 2017 compared with 21 tons seized in 2016).

699. In 2017, Afghan opiates continued to be trafficked along a sub-branch of the Balkan route, going from the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Southern Caucasus, then to Ukraine via the Black Sea towards Eastern Europe.

700. There has been an increase in the use of air routes to smuggle heroin out of Afghanistan. In response to that development, the Government of Afghanistan established the Airport Interdiction Unit at Hamid Karzai International Airport. The Unit reported that in 2017, 191 smugglers had been arrested at the country's international airports, with seizures of heroin totalling 140 kg. The smugglers were bound almost exclusively for New Delhi.

701. Central Asian States located along the northern route continued to be used for heroin trafficking from Afghanistan to the markets in the Russian Federation and, to a more limited extent, in Belarus and Lithuania. There were individual incidents in China of seizures of heroin trafficked from Central Asian countries.

702. The main modes of transportation used in smuggling heroin from Central Asia into the Russian Federation remain road, rail and air traffic. Increased economic integration through the Eurasian Customs Union could potentially create a risk of increased drug trafficking among Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation. The simplification of customs requirements and the easing of border control measures would enable the increased movement of goods and services but may also create additional risks of drug trafficking in that subregion.

703. At the same time, most countries in Central Asia report either stable or declining levels of trafficking in opiates through their territories, and those reports are supported by the overall decline in seizures of opiates and a reduction in heroin use in recent years. However, it is unclear whether this means that the flow through the northern route has diminished, because there are only limited data on average heroin purity, prices and daily consumption and insufficient estimates of opiate users and assessments of trafficking methods.

704. Opiate seizures in Central Asia are concentrated in Tajikistan, where, it is assumed, most of the drugs cross the border from Afghanistan through the northern route, destined for markets in the Russian Federation and elsewhere in Europe. The average annual heroin seizure in the period 2013–2017 was highest in Kazakhstan (391 kg), followed by Tajikistan (338 kg) and Kyrgyzstan (229 kg), while Uzbekistan (99 kg) and Turkmenistan (3 kg) had lower averages, which could indicate that drug traffickers prefer the branch of the drug trafficking route that runs through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Annual heroin seizures in the subregion decreased by 34 per cent in 2017 compared with 2016. Opium seizures were stable at around 2.3 tons in Central Asia between 2013 and 2017.

705. There is limited opium poppy cultivation and production in Central Asia, as over 99 per cent of opiates in the subregion originate in Afghanistan. The law enforcement agencies of the Central Asian countries reported that there were no production facilities in the subregion for converting opium into heroin and that all opiates transiting Central Asia were processed in Afghanistan or elsewhere.

706. Another route for trafficking in Afghan opiates, which accounts for about 9 per cent of opiates trafficked to Europe, is the southern route, which runs from Afghanistan to Pakistan for trafficking onward by air and sea through Gulf countries and East Africa to markets in Europe. At the same time, illicit drugs are being trafficked from Afghanistan to India and other countries in South Asia, destined for markets in Europe and North America.

707. In May 2018, the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics of Afghanistan and UNODC released the report devoted to sustainable development, peace and security of the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017*. According to that report, a substantial increase in potential opium production in 2017, of almost 87 per cent, reaching a record 9,000 tons, resulted in the growth of the illicit opiate economy. The total gross value of the opiate economy in 2017 was estimated at between \$4.1 billion and \$6.6 billion, which is the equivalent of 20–32 per cent of the country's gross domestic product, and the farm-gate value of opium production was \$1.4 billion. The value of the opiate economy<sup>81</sup> was much higher than the value of the country's licit exports of goods and services in 2016. Political

<sup>81</sup>The value of the opiate economy (gross) is the sum of the value of the domestic market and the value of opiates believed to be exported, including the value of the imported precursor substance acetic anhydride (see UNODC and Ministry of Counter-Narcotics of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017: Challenges to Sustainable Development, Peace and Security* (Kabul, 2018), p. 5).

instability, lack of government control and poor security have been found to be the main drivers of illicit cultivation. It is believed that the Taliban and anti-government, insurgent and powerful local power-holders have continued to benefit from “opium taxes” on the farm-gate value of opium production, amounting to an estimated total of \$74 million in 2017. At the same time, opium poppy has become a substantial component of the livelihoods not only of farmers but also of the people of many communities in Afghanistan who engage in cultivation, work in poppy fields or play a role in the illicit drug trade.

708. According to the above-mentioned report, the reduction of illicit crop cultivation depends on the achievement of broader development goals, such as well-established and strong State institutions for effective governance, and functioning social protection mechanisms. The report concludes that addressing the opiate problem in Afghanistan remains a shared responsibility requiring a global approach that targets all stages of the supply chain of opiates, from source to destination.

709. Saudi Arabia reported that, in 2017, it had witnessed an increase in the smuggling of illicit substances through express mail. The country attributes this trend to the weakness of the procedures of inspection and verification in the countries of origin. In addition, the country reported the continuation of the trend of people hiding drugs inside their bodies. The country also witnessed an increase in trafficking in heroin through its territory, with 106 kg of the substance seized in 2017 and 60 kg seized in 2016.

710. There is small-scale illicit cannabis plant cultivation and large areas of wild cannabis growth in Central Asia. Cannabis is produced primarily for local consumption, with a lesser portion trafficked to markets in Europe and the Russian Federation. Central Asian law enforcement agencies seized over 36 tons of cannabis and more than 4 tons of cannabis resin in 2017. Since only limited information is available on seizures of cannabis and cannabis resin of Afghanistan, it is not possible to accurately estimate the full scale of trafficking in these substances along the northern route. Tajikistan was responsible for 55 per cent of total cannabis resin seizures in the sub-region in 2017.<sup>82</sup> In 2017, as in the previous year, the portion of cannabis and cannabis resin seizures in the total volume of seized drugs was highest in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, while most of the seized drugs in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were opiates.

<sup>82</sup>Domestic cannabis resin production is much less in Tajikistan than in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

711. In the Southern Caucasus, comprising Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, cannabis seizures continued to increase over the period 2013–2017, while cannabis resin seizures for the same period continued to decline. Both those trends have been driven mainly by the drug seizure statistics reported by Azerbaijan.

712. The production of cannabis resin in Afghanistan is on the rise. Afghanistan has been reported to UNODC as the source of seized cannabis resin by 19 per cent of countries that reported the source of seized cannabis resin in the period 2012–2016, in particular in Central Asia, the Southern Caucasus and Europe. For 2016, Afghanistan reported a doubling of cannabis resin seizures, to 352 tons, and, thus, for the first time ever, was the country with the largest total cannabis resin seizures worldwide. In December 2017, the NATO Special Operations Command issued a press release that reported the seizure of 34 tons of raw cannabis resin and 300 kg of processed cannabis resin in Afghanistan during a raid carried out jointly with the National Interdiction Unit of the Afghan National Police. According to NATO, those raids were aimed at addressing the sources of income of the Taliban; the confiscated cannabis resin would have represented \$5.6 million in potential revenue for the Taliban.

713. Lebanon also continues to be a source of cannabis resin seized globally, with 7 per cent of reporting countries identifying Lebanon as the source of cannabis resin seized on their territory. Prolonged conflict in the Middle East has contributed to the continued increase in production in Lebanon. Farmers reported that their trade has grown by 50 per cent since 2012, because Lebanese authorities have had to focus their efforts on ensuring border security. Lebanese authorities seized 15 tons of cannabis resin in June 2018, which was intended for smuggling from Lebanon to Libya and then to Egypt. As far as cannabis is concerned, official data available to the Board suggest a partial reduction in seizures of cannabis in Lebanon, from 7.6 tons in 2016 to 6.3 tons in 2017.

714. The reporting period has seen more reports of trafficking in and, more importantly, the illicit production of drugs in Iraq, further confirming earlier indications of a shift towards illicit drug production in the country. There have been reports of illicit opium poppy and cannabis plant cultivation in the country. There have also been indications that heroin is being produced in northern Iraq, indications that are supported by the increase observed in the amount of seized heroin being moved in the direction of Turkey and the considerable amounts of

acetic anhydride destined for Iraq seized in the western border region of Turkey.

715. Drug trafficking and abuse in the Basra region of Iraq, which borders Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Kuwait, have increased substantially in recent years. Since late 2014, arrests for drug trafficking and drug use have nearly doubled in Basra as compared with the period 2011–2014. Large amounts of drugs are being seized in containers at Basra ports and border crossings.

716. Kuwait witnessed substantial increases in cannabis trafficking into or through its territory, as evidenced by the seizure of 4 tons of cannabis in 2017, compared with the 1.2 tons seized in 2016. The same trend was observed in Bahrain, where 324 kg of cannabis was seized in 2017, compared with the 134 kg seized in the country in 2016. Turkey saw substantial increases in trafficking in cannabis resin, seizing 81 tons in 2017, compared with 36 tons in 2016. At the same time, Turkey seized less cannabis in 2017, namely 94 tons, whereas in 2016 it had seized 110 tons. Turkey witnessed a significant increase in trafficking in “skunk”, a highly potent form of cannabis, resulting in 6.5 tons of that substance being seized in 2017, a fourfold increase from the previous year. The quantities of “skunk” seized in Turkey originated in Europe (mostly the Netherlands) and had been smuggled from Central and South-Eastern European countries, in particular Greece.

717. According to UNODC, the quantity of cocaine seized in West Asia doubled in 2016. Most cocaine seized in the region seems to have departed from or transited through Brazil. There were also some major incidents of cocaine trafficking in the period 2017–2018. In January 2018, customs officers at Hamad International Airport in Doha seized 7.25 kg of cocaine from a passenger arriving on a direct flight from Latin America. Reports relating to another incident of a seizure of cocaine at the international airport in Bali, Indonesia, in March 2018 suggest that Hamad International Airport in Doha was used as a transit point for the smuggling of that drug from Colombia. The United Arab Emirates has also been often used as a transit point for trafficking in cocaine in the region; countries in Asia, including Israel, were cited as the main destinations. Saudi Arabia witnessed a partial reduction in seizures of cocaine on its territory, from 842 kg in 2016 to 520 kg in 2017.

718. Turkey saw a substantial increase in seizures of cocaine in its territory: 1.5 tons of cocaine were seized in 2017, compared with 845 kg in 2016. Turkey reported that Istanbul Atatürk Airport had frequently been used for trafficking in cocaine that had arrived directly from South American countries, such as Brazil, Colombia and

Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), or that had transited through African countries, such as Nigeria and South Africa. Similarly, Pakistan saw a substantial increase in seizures of cocaine, equalling 415 kg in 2017 compared with 231 kg in 2016.

719. The total area under opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan in 2018 was estimated at 263,000 ha, representing a 20 per cent decrease from 2017, when 328,000 ha had been used for opium poppy cultivation. According to the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018*, that decrease could be attributed to the severe drought that has affected Afghanistan, especially in the northern and western regions of the country. The survey suggests that, following a fall in the farm-gate prices of dry opium in 2017, there was a substantial drop in such prices in 2018, which hit their lowest level since 2004. In addition, it was estimated that potential opium production was about 6,400 tons in 2018, compared with 9,000 tons in 2017, representing a decrease of 29 per cent.

720. Most (69 per cent) of opium poppy cultivation continued to take place in the southern region of the country, followed by the western region (12 per cent). The eastern and northern regions accounted for 8 per cent and 7 per cent of total cultivation, respectively. Despite the decrease in 2018, the area under opium poppy cultivation remained at very high levels in 2018, and was in fact at the second highest level since 1994, when the monitoring of illicit crop cultivation began.

## (b) Psychotropic substances

721. According to the UNODC “Central Asia synthetic drugs situation assessment 2017”, seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants in Central Asia have remained at relatively low levels compared with other drugs. “Ecstasy” appears to be the most prevalent amphetamine-type stimulant appearing in use and trafficking data, and there have been sporadic reports of methamphetamine trafficking and manufacture over the years. It appears that the countries of the subregion do not have local illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. It also appears that the subregion is used mainly as a transit point for trafficking in such stimulants, for example, from the Islamic Republic of Iran and from European countries (Germany, in particular) to Asia. Amphetamine-type stimulants are also being trafficked between the Russian Federation and Central Asian countries, such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Finally, the collection of data on amphetamine-type stimulants in the subregion is not comprehensive and remains sporadic due to the limited analytical capacities and varying drug control priorities in the subregion.

722. In a reverse of the trend reported the previous year, the Islamic Republic of Iran witnessed a 30 per cent increase in methamphetamine seizures in 2017, a total of 2.3 tons, compared with 1.7 tons in 2016. Armenia continued to seize increasing amounts of methamphetamine, reported to have been trafficked into the country mainly from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

723. Instability and conflicts in the Middle East, coupled with a lack of effective interdiction capacities, continued to contribute to trafficking in counterfeit “captagon”<sup>83</sup> in the subregion. According to various reports, including from the scientific community, it has become a drug of choice in war zones in the Middle East, given its use in combat situations. In addition, the lack of control and monitoring has led to an increase in the manufacture of “captagon” tablets in certain countries in the Middle East, potentially serving as a source of income for the terrorist and insurgency groups in the subregion.

724. Although official data on trafficking in “captagon” remain scarce, there has been some media coverage of certain notable seizures. In two separate incidents, in January and March 2018, customs authorities of Saudi Arabia foiled attempts to smuggle “captagon” tablets into the country. A total of about 6.3 million tablets of the substance were recovered during those operations at the border with Jordan. Jordan, for the first time, dismantled a clandestine laboratory manufacturing “captagon”, and 95 per cent of the substance manufactured was destined for markets in neighbouring countries. Saudi Arabia also reported that “captagon” seized in 2017 originated in India and had transited Egypt with Saudi Arabia as its destination. Saudi Arabia has also seen an increase in trafficking in methamphetamine into its territory. In 2017, the United Arab Emirates seized 45 million tablets of “captagon”. Turkey reported that it continued to be used as a transit country for trafficking in “captagon” manufactured or marketed in the Middle East, particularly in the Syrian Arab Republic, including by terrorist and insurgency groups. Some 599 bags of “captagon” were seized by law enforcement officers in the Basra region of Iraq, near the Kuwaiti border, in November 2017, from what is believed to be one of the largest smuggling operations in recent years.

<sup>83</sup>Captagon was originally the official trade name of a pharmaceutical preparation containing the substance fenetylline, a synthetic stimulant. As encountered in seizures across West Asia today and referred to in the present report, “captagon” is a counterfeit drug compressed into pills or tablets that are similar in appearance but distinct in composition from the earlier pharmaceutical preparation Captagon. The active ingredient in counterfeit “captagon” is amphetamine, which is typically cut with multiple adulterants such as caffeine and other substances.

725. The amounts of methamphetamine seized have continued to increase in Afghanistan, with 121 kg seized in 2017. In addition, three methamphetamine manufacturing laboratories were dismantled in 2017. Afghanistan also seized 2,322 MDMA tablets in 2017. Tajikistan reported that, in 2017, it had seized 7.5 kg of powdery methamphetamine (no seizure of such substance had been recorded in the country since 2012), believed to have been smuggled into the country from Afghanistan.

### (c) Precursor chemicals

726. Central Asian country borders with China and Afghanistan make the subregion particularly vulnerable to trafficking in precursors. Because of the substantial amounts of precursors needed for opium processing, especially in the recent years of record cultivation levels in Afghanistan, the precursors must be shipped in large volumes. Since large consignments of precursors cannot be moved over many mountainous borders, they must instead be trafficked by established roads and railways, in order to be shipped in large volumes. However, information available on precursor trafficking in Central Asia is insufficient to estimate the scale of that trafficking, since no movements have been detected in the past decade.

727. Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan continued to carry out seizures of precursors on their territories, not all of which were intended for the manufacture of illicit drugs but which were used or imported for other purposes without appropriate authorization. Azerbaijan seized 5.5 kg of potassium permanganate in eight separate seizures in 2017, mostly smuggled from the Islamic Republic of Iran. The precursors were packed in plastic bags or put in glass bottles. Also in 2017, Kazakhstan seized 5.48 litres of precursors, while Kyrgyzstan seized more than 1.1 tons of hydrochloric acid and 1.7 tons of sulfuric acid. In the same year, Tajikistan carried out 10 seizures of sulfuric acid, totalling 876 kg, which were in production shops and intended for the refuelling of car batteries and not for the illicit manufacture of drugs. Uzbekistan seized 23 litres of acetone and 3.6 kg of potassium permanganate in 2017.

728. The Counter-Narcotics Police of Afghanistan continue to emphasize that precursors were mainly trafficked through Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan. Smugglers were also developing new methods of transporting precursors into Afghanistan, such as concealing them among consumer goods or among other licit chemicals (engine oil and antifreeze). At the same time, Turkey reported a significant increase in seizures of acetic anhydride, a key precursor used to produce heroin, totalling

over 23,000 litres in 2017, compared with 1,588 litres in 2016. Between January and June 2018, over 34,000 litres of acetic anhydride were seized, indicating a further surge in trafficking in that precursor. The authorities in Turkey reported that acetic anhydride seized in the country mostly originated in Central and Western Europe (mostly Germany and the Netherlands) and transited Turkey on the way to Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Iraq.

729. Seizures of precursors in Afghanistan continued to increase, as the country seized 53,046 kg of solid precursor chemicals and 77,272 litres of liquid precursor chemicals in 2017. The operations also resulted in the dismantling of 50 heroin laboratories. This could be another explanation of the steady heroin prices in 2017 despite the record opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors in the region can be found in the report of the Board for 2018 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

#### (d) Substances not under international control

730. There is still relatively limited information available on trafficking in and abuse of new psychoactive substances in most countries of West Asia owing to the lack of monitoring and analysis capacities in the countries of the region.

731. The “Central Asia synthetic drugs situation assessment 2017”, published by UNODC in December 2017 provides some of the latest available information on synthetic drugs in Central Asia, including new psychoactive substances. Almost all countries in the subregion reported the emergence of a growing number of new psychoactive substances, indicating that the subregion is linked to international trafficking in these substances.

732. Between 2013 and 2016, a total of 58 new psychoactive substances were reported by the authorities of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. More than 43 per cent of reported new psychoactive substances were synthetic cathinones, with synthetic cannabinoids accounting for 38 per cent and phenethylamines making up 10 per cent of the total new psychoactive substances reported. Ketamine and phencyclidine-type substances, tryptamines, piperazines, aminoindanes and other new psychoactive substances were reported only once by countries in the subregion. While only one new psychoactive substance was reported in the subregion (by Tajikistan) in 2013 and another (by Kazakhstan) in 2014, the number of new psychoactive substances reported

increased to 31 in 2015 and to 48 in 2016. The trend is mainly dictated by dynamics in Kazakhstan, which reported an increase from 1 new psychoactive substances in 2014, to 21 in 2015 and 38 in 2016. Uzbekistan also observed an increase, from 3 new psychoactive substances in 2015 to 8 reported in 2016. Kyrgyzstan reported the emergence of new psychoactive substances for the first time in 2015. Tajikistan has reported the emergence of two or fewer new psychoactive substances annually since 2013.

733. The Central Asian subregion borders countries with dynamic markets for synthetic drugs, such as China, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and the Russian Federation, which could further stimulate the growth of this market in the subregion. For example, between 2013 and 2014, Kazakhstan reported seizures of synthetic cannabinoids smuggled by post, which were believed to have originated in China. The Russian Federation reported seizing new psychoactive substances that had been trafficked from or were to be trafficked to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Although the countries in the subregion are taking steps and legislative measures and are improving their forensic capabilities to address new psychoactive substances, these efforts remain uneven across the whole subregion. This development argues in favour of the adoption of a comprehensive regional approach to the issue by strengthening regional cooperation and information exchange, including through the possible establishment of a sub-regional early warning mechanism.

734. In 2017, Jordan put the following substances under control; AB-FUBINACA, *N*-ethylpentylone and pregabalin and its preparations. Saudi Arabia put carfentanil under control. Armenia put pregabalin under national control in 2017. In May 2017, Turkey put 138 central nervous system depressants under national control owing to a recent increase in the number of those new psychoactive substances, and in August of the same year a further 31 new substances were put under control in the country.

735. Many countries in the Middle East continued to observe trafficking in and abuse of tramadol, a synthetic opioid not under international control. In February 2018, law enforcement authorities in Saudi Arabia dismantled an operation to smuggle 35,600 tramadol tablets. In November 2017, authorities in Italy seized 24 million tramadol tablets worth about €50 million euros in the Calabrian port of Gioia Tauro, en route to Libya from India, which were suspected of being destined for sale by ISIL to its fighters in North Africa and the Middle East. Increased misuse of and trafficking in tramadol have also been observed in Iraq, especially in the Basra region. There are also reports of tramadol that has possibly been adulterated

to produce a stronger psychoactive effect being smuggled alongside other drugs to the Gaza Strip, in the State of Palestine, through the tunnels that had been dug along the Egyptian border, leading to widespread abuse of and addiction to that substance among young people. Despite reporting a drop in 2017 in overall trafficking in drugs into or through its territory, possibly owing to a blockage enforced by some countries in the subregion, Qatar intercepted a boat that was coming from the United Arab Emirates carrying 1.8 million tramadol tablets. There have been many reports of smuggling and abuse of tramadol in the Syrian Arab Republic, and of unregulated pharmacies in some parts of the country that are contributing to the widespread abuse of the substance.

## 5. Abuse and treatment

736. Most countries in the region continue to face problems with the availability of resources for conducting comprehensive and regular drug abuse surveys, making it difficult to assess the extent and trends in drug abuse in the region.

737. Only a few individual country reports provide information on the drug abuse situation, and even that information is limited. Increased use of crystalline methamphetamine was reported in Iraq for 2017. Kazakhstan reported that there is a growing trend of referrals to medical treatment of persons, mainly below 30 years of age, for abuse of synthetic cannabinoids, especially in its largest cities. Uzbekistan witnessed increased cases of consumption of synthetic cannabinoids and pharmaceutical preparations, such as tramadol, nalbuphine (an opioid analgesic), zopiclone (a non-benzodiazepine hypnotic agent), tropicamide (a medication used to dilate the pupil and help with the examination of the eye, but prone to abuse by injection as a recreational drug), baclofen (a medication used to treat spasticity) and pregabalin in 2017 among men aged 25 to 39 years old. Saudi Arabia reported an increase in the spread and abuse of methamphetamine, pregabalin and cannabis in the country in 2017.

738. According to media reports, the Ministry of Health of Afghanistan estimated that there were between 900,000 and 1 million female drug addicts in the country, out of a total female population of 14.4 million, a prevalence rate that is three times that in 2010. According to statements from female drug users themselves, they have become addicted to illicit substances because of the influence of their spouses. They return to their drug use behaviour when they reunite with their families after treatment in rehabilitation/treatment centres in Afghanistan. One of the reasons for the consumption of and addiction to

opium is the use of the substance as an unprescribed medicine for pain or small injuries, a practice that has been ongoing for centuries in the country. Opium is sometimes also given to children as a sedative.

739. UNODC observed that the highest prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs is in South-West Asia, which has a rate that is 2.4 times the global average. South-West Asia, together with Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, account for 49 per cent of the total number of people who inject drugs worldwide living with HIV.

740. In November 2017, an assessment of illicit drug use (non-prescription drugs) was released in the State of Palestine, updating the previous 11-year-old data on drug abuse. In addition, UNODC is supporting the Ministry of Health of the State of Palestine in developing a comprehensive drug dependence treatment and care system and facilitating the establishment of the National Rehabilitation Centre of the State of Palestine. The problem of drug use has in recent years been mainly spreading among young people and women, especially among family members of current drug users.

741. That assessment estimated that 1.8 per cent of the male population aged 15 years and older were high-risk drug users. Most of these high-risk drug users were living in the northern and southern parts of the West Bank, as well as the Gaza Strip. In the Gaza Strip, tramadol was the most commonly used substance, followed by benzodiazepines and methamphetamine. In the study sample of high-risk users, 97 per cent of respondents in the Gaza Strip reported the non-medical use of tramadol, while in the West Bank, amphetamines were the most consumed substances, followed by cannabis, anticonvulsants (mainly pregabalin) and benzodiazepines. Of the 26,500 high-risk drug users, 1,188 inject drugs, of which 81 per cent had started using drugs before turning 18 years old. Among the high-risk drug users, 4.2 per cent were people who inject drugs. In Gaza, cocaine was mostly injected by the high-risk drug users, while in the southern and central parts of the West Bank, heroin was the main drug injected. There was also found to be a significant prevalence of cannabis and cannabis resin use, as well as use of anti-depressants and painkillers in high doses (methadone, morphine, phencyclidine, barbiturates, benzodiazepines, etc.) in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

742. According to UNODC, Central Asian countries, as well as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, have high prevalence rates of past-year use of opiates (heroin and opium) (0.9 per cent of the population aged 15 to 64 years) among opioid users, while misuse of pharmaceutical opioids such as tramadol is more prevalent in the Middle

East, as reflected in the number of people in treatment for abuse of tramadol and the number of tramadol overdose deaths. There is also concern about the increasing number of countries reporting methamphetamine use, especially among opioid users in West Asia. Several countries in the region reported increases in heroin use in 2016, in particular Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, which could be due to an increase in trafficking in heroin from Afghanistan to those countries. In some other countries, including Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, heroin use stabilized, and stimulants abuse has been more prevalent. At the same time, based on available data for 2016, most countries in Central Asia have not yet been affected by the increase in Afghan heroin manufacture.

743. In general, synthetic drug use is not widespread in Central Asia, primarily due to economic factors, but is becoming more common because of the heroin deficit (i.e., more demand than supply) and the improvement of economic conditions in the subregion. Although a thorough assessment of this matter is required, the improvement of economic conditions, a developed licit chemical industry in the subregion and the availability of the *Ephedra* plant, containing ephedrine, which is a precursor to methamphetamine that grows in the wild across the Central Asian region, might all potentially stimulate the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine in the subregion.