

Illicit Drug Economy Hinders Sustainable Development Says International Narcotics Control Board In Annual Report

VIENNA, 20 February (UN Information Service) -- The overwhelming share of the profits made from illicit drug trafficking does not occur in countries where illicit drug crops are cultivated, but in countries where finished products are illegally sold and abused. This is the key message of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) annual report released here today. This is the first time that the Vienna-based independent expert body, which reviews the global drug situation annually, has focused its attention on the impact of illicit drug cultivation, trade and abuse on overall economic development.

The INCB categorically dispels the myth that drug trafficking may constitute a route to prosperity by stressing that illicit drug production prevents economic growth and does not lead to sustainable development in the long-term. According to the report, the farmers growing the illicit crops do not make the profits: in fact, only one per cent of the money ultimately spent by drug abusers is earned as farm income in developing countries. The remaining 99 per cent is earned at various other points along the drug trafficking chain.

The report also notes the destabilizing effect of illicit drug production on the state, economy and civil society, which is damaging long-term economic development. Therefore, the Board concludes that national long-term economic development is not possible without an effective drug control system.

Afghanistan: need for comprehensive and coherent strategy

The Board continues to focus considerable attention on the drug cultivation and drug trafficking situation in Afghanistan. As regards the link between economic development and drug trafficking, the INCB is using the example of Afghanistan to show how the illicit drug trade can destabilize a country. As the Board points out, massive increases in opium production in the early 1990s helped fuel civil wars, and evidence suggests economic growth declined and living standards fell.

In reviewing the most recent drug related developments in the country, the Board stresses that Afghanistan has to develop a comprehensive and coherent national drug control strategy to include all drugs illicitly cultivated, produced and trafficked. Sustainable and peaceful development in Afghanistan will not be possible without addressing the drug

problem in its totality, according to the INCB.

Recognizing the efforts of the current Government, the Board calls for comprehensive and urgent support and cooperation from the international community as well as from countries in the region. The Board also stresses that eradication of illicit opium poppy can only be achieved if relevant laws are fully respected and implemented, while sustainable alternative livelihoods are provided for farmers.

Morphine: overproduction with under supply

The danger that the worldwide legal market in opiates for pain relief may get out of control with supply currently exceeding demand is highlighted by the INCB. The Board warns that cultivation and production levels are far in excess of medical consumption and an increased risk exists that stocks could be diverted to the illegal drugs market. The INCB adds that despite the worldwide surplus of licit opiates for pain relief, these opiates are often not available in many developing countries. Medical consumption of morphine has increased in the developed world and ten countries account for 80 per cent of morphine consumed worldwide.

Synthetic drugs: chemical control

Synthetic drugs like Ecstasy could become the main future illicit drugs according to the Board. These drugs are very difficult to control because they can be made cheaply and easily anywhere in the world as long as drug traffickers can obtain the necessary chemicals. The INCB has, therefore, launched a major initiative to stop the chemicals needed to make synthetic drugs, such as Ecstasy, from reaching the clandestine laboratories where they are made. Project Prism aims to cut off the supply of chemical precursors and to identify and arrest the traffickers. Similar international tracking programmes coordinated by the Board have already focused on the international control of the precursors used in the clandestine manufacture of heroin and cocaine.

Regional highlights

Illicit cannabis cultivation continues to be widespread in Africa especially in Morocco. African law enforcement authorities expressed concern that trends in Europe and North America towards liberalizing or even legalizing non-medical use of cannabis will undermine the efforts of African countries to counter illicit cannabis cultivation, trafficking and abuse.

Reduced availability of cocaine and heroin in North America has pushed up prices. Drug seizures at airports and border crossings in Canada and the United States have decreased possibly because drug traffickers feared detection due to increased border controls following the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001.

In South America the drug problem is increasingly being linked to political and national security issues. Guerrilla and paramilitary groups in Colombia control drug trafficking

and laboratories and are exchanging illicit drugs for firearms.

More than 70 per cent of worldwide seizures of amphetamines took place in countries in East and South-East Asia mainly China and Thailand.

China has become the main destination and transit area for heroin consignments and there have been significant increases in heroin seizures in China during the last five years.

The Board wants to see more international cooperation between law enforcement authorities to tackle global large-scale trafficking in Ecstasy which continues to be illicitly manufactured in Europe for the global market.

The Russian Federation is being used as an alternative trafficking route for illicit drugs from Asia into Europe. In 2001 law enforcement agencies confiscated more than 75 tons of narcotic drugs, including 3.5 tons of heroin.

The Board is concerned about the worldwide repercussions of the United Kingdom's decision to reclassify cannabis requiring less severe controls but welcomes the United Kingdom's announcement that it does not intend to legalize or regulate the non-medical use of any internationally controlled drugs, which would be in violation of the international drug control treaties.

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