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DRUG ABUSE AND TRAFFICKING: GLOBAL TRENDS

AFRICA

Despite some eradication efforts and significant seizures in some countries in Africa, the region remains a major supplier of cannabis and cannabis resin to domestic illicit markets and to Europe. More recently, cannabis from Africa has also been finding its way to North America.

Several seaports and airports in Africa have become major transit centres for cocaine from South America destined for Europe and for heroin from Asia destined for Europe and North America.

Drug abuse is on the increase, particularly in big cities in Africa. Cannabis remains the main drug of abuse. The abuse of psychotropic substances (stimulants and sedatives) has been reported in a number of countries. The abuse of cocaine and heroin has emerged mainly in the proximity of seaports used by illicit traffickers for the trans-shipment of those drugs. The Board points to a need for a study to be carried out on the drug abuse situation in the region.

The medical consumption levels of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are low in most countries in the region. According to the Board, there is a need to increase the quantities of such drugs and substances to be made available to meet medical needs.

AMERICAS

Central America and the Caribbean

Large-scale transit trafficking in cocaine from South America to North America continues. The determination of Central American countries, together with Mexico, to cooperate has been translated into practice, and co-ordinated action has led to major seizures.

Legislative measures against money-laundering have been recently introduced in several Caribbean countries and more and more countries are joining the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force. The Board hopes that those developments will lead to successful results similar to those in Panama, as the Caribbean continues to be affected by money-laundering operations.

The abuse of cocaine in Central America and the Caribbean (in some countries in the form of "crack") is spreading fast as a consequence of the large-scale transit traffic in cocaine. In the light of the increasing transit traffic in heroin, the Board calls on the Governments in the region to undertake measures to prevent a spillover effect, which could lead to the spread of heroin abuse.

North America

In North America, comprehensive national drug control programmes, covering many areas related to drug control,

are being systematically carried out. Many of the law enforcement actions are conducted jointly.

The number of demand reduction programmes is increasing in the region. The funding of youth-oriented drug prevention programmes is becoming a priority issue. Efforts are being made in all three countries in the region (Canada, Mexico and the United States) to improve data collection methodologies.

The level of drug abuse is different in each of the three countries in North America: the last-month prevalence of illicit drug abuse is highest in the United States (6 per cent) and lowest in Mexico (0.45 per cent). The abuse of cannabis, cocaine, heroin and lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) among youth appears to be slightly increasing in Canada and the United States. The Board also points out that in the United States amongst teenagers the perception of cocaine being a risky drug is diminishing, therefore the Board believes that there is a real future danger of increased cocaine abuse among youth.

Despite significant seizures, cocaine and heroin continue to be smuggled on a large scale through the territory of Mexico. Methamphetamine continues to be clandestinely manufactured in Mexico and the United States and abused in Canada and the United States.

South America

Joint transborder operations have led to the seizure of substantial amounts of drugs and to the dismantling of trafficking organizations in South America. Despite the geographical obstacles in the region, a more comprehensive mechanism for the exchange of information and better coordination of law enforcement activities could enhance efforts to combat illicit drug trafficking, particularly in the Amazon and Paraná basins.

Most States in the region concluded a number of bilateral and multilateral mutual assistance agreements and further agreements are under consideration. In several countries, laws against money-laundering have been adopted in the last few years; however, more concrete regulations and improved organizational systems must be put in place in order to achieve more practical results. The Board also recommends that Governments in the region define clear rules on the management, use and final destination of seized and confiscated assets. Illicit coca bush cultivation, coca leaf production and manufacture of and trafficking in coca derivatives continue in South America. The abuse of coca base, coca paste, cocaine hydrochloride and "crack" is spreading in the region.

Non-compliance with national regulations concerning the manufacture, prescribing and sale of psychotropic substances continues in several countries in South America. The Board again urges Governments in the

region to ensure the enforcement of regulatory controls.

National drug abuse surveys have been conducted recently in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador; and, according to the Board, similar surveys are needed in other countries in the region.

ASIA

East and South-East Asia

Illicit opium poppy cultivation, opium production, heroin manufacture and opiate trafficking remain major drug problems in south-east Asia, particularly in Myanmar. Heroin injecting is spreading in the region, particularly in some southern provinces of China. The illicit manufacture of and traffic in amphetamines, particularly methamphetamine, are on the rise in the region and the spread of methamphetamine abuse poses a major challenge to some Governments in the region. The prevalence of the abuse of methamphetamine and other amphetamine derivatives seems to be significantly lower in Japan and the Republic of Korea than in most European countries and the level of heroin and cocaine abuse remains very low despite the high purchasing power of their populations. The illicit traffic in acetic anhydride (used for the manufacture of heroin) and in ephedrine and pseudoephedrine (used for the production of methamphetamine) has continued in the region.

South Asia

Strict control measures and law enforcement action in India have curtailed the large-scale smuggling of methaqualone out of that country into African countries. Cooperation between national law enforcement authorities aimed at preventing the cross-border smuggling of drugs, including cooperation between India and Pakistan, has significantly increased in the region. The abuse of and traffic in codeine-based cough syrups and buprenorphine, diverted from licit channels, as well as cannabis and heroin, have continued in South Asia. International trade in psychotropic substances is under strict control in India; however, in the other countries in South Asia, either domestic trade, distribution and dispensing of those substances are not regulated or the regulations are not adequately implemented. India is also the only country in South Asia where the manufacture, export and import of precursors are regulated; their relatively free availability in other countries in the region might result in illicit manufacturers exploiting that situation.

West Asia

The adherence to the three main international drug control treaties by the overwhelming majority of countries in West Asia, including most of the newly independent States in central Asia and the Caucasus, is a promising development. The determination of West Asian countries to cooperate with each other in the fight against illicit drug trafficking is being translated into a number of bilateral and multilateral agreements and cross-border operations.

In Afghanistan, due to civil war, political turmoil and lack of administrative structures, large-scale illicit opium poppy cultivation, opium production and heroin manufacture continue. Largely as a result of the increase of 25 per cent in the opium yield in 1997 in Afghanistan, opium

production in south-west Asia now exceeds that in south-east Asia. A ban has recently been issued on poppy cultivation, opium production and heroin manufacture. For the time being, the extent to which the illicit traffic can be reduced depends mainly on the law enforcement services of neighbouring countries of Afghanistan and the extent to which they are able to stop, or at least hinder, the flow of illicit opium and morphine from Afghanistan into or through their territories. There are also some clandestine heroin laboratories operating in Afghanistan, but most are in other countries in the region. In Pakistan, the easy availability and low prices of heroin have resulted in its abuse becoming even more widespread than before.

The illicit cultivation and abuse of cannabis are also widespread in the region. Afghanistan is one of the largest producers of cannabis resin in the world. There is a high risk that in central Asia the current levels of illicit drug production, trafficking and abuse will significantly increase as a consequence of the increasing local production of illicit cannabis and opium and the influx of large amounts of cannabis resin, opium and morphine originating in Afghanistan.

The lack of systems for the prevention and/or detection of money-laundering operations is a major problem in several countries in the region.

EUROPE

There are signs of some important changes in drug abuse trends in Europe. In some western European countries, the number of occasional abusers of stimulants and hallucinogens is increasing while the number of regular heroin abusers is decreasing. The number of hard-core drug addicts seems to be stagnating and, at least in some countries, smoking, instead of injecting, appears to have become the prevalent route of administration of heroin among young abusers of that drug.

Despite changing trends and successful law enforcement interventions, Europe remains a major illicit market for drugs. Indoor and outdoor cultivation of highly potent cannabis is spreading and amphetamine and "ecstasy"-type amphetamine derivatives are produced in a number of clandestine laboratories, for trafficking within Europe and elsewhere.

Central and eastern European countries are making progress in adapting their legal systems and administrative structures for the control of licit narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances to the market-economy situation, but they have great difficulties preventing the propagation of abuse of illicit drugs in their countries.

Among member States of the European Union, differences between national drug control policies as well as the ongoing promotion of the liberalization or legalization of the non-medical use of drugs, are increasingly threatening the consensus needed for meaningful measures against drug abuse and trafficking, especially in the area of demand reduction.

The Board welcomes the holding of drug demand reduction campaigns in the region, but regrets that some of those campaigns have focused only on "harm reduction". The Board reiterates its opinion that "harm reduction" is an

important part of demand reduction but not a substitute for it.

The activities of drug trafficking and other criminal organizations are considered to be among the biggest threats to the security of the Russian Federation and they have become a major challenge for the international community.

OCEANIA

Cooperation in drug control is increasing in Oceania;

Australia and New Zealand are efficiently assisting other countries in the region. Most of the drug problems in the region have been reported in Australia and New Zealand. In several Pacific island countries, money-laundering by drug traffickers and the resulting economic and political influence that they may gain in such small countries may pose a great danger if no timely and adequate countermeasures are taken. In Australia and Papua New Guinea, the prevalence of cannabis abuse is among the highest in the world. The abuse of amphetamine derivatives is spreading fast in Australia.