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REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Africa

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.

Cocaine abuse is rising in almost all countries in southern and western Africa, in particular in Nigeria and South Africa. There has been a change in South Africa from dealing in cocaine to dealing in crack. The southern and western parts of Africa are being used for cocaine deliveries transported from South America to Europe and North America.

The abuse of heroin is still limited mainly to large urban areas of the continent. An increase in heroin abuse has been reported in Egypt and in most countries in the eastern and southern parts of Africa.

There are no indications that opium poppy is cultivated in any other part of Africa except in Egypt on a small scale.

An increase in the abuse of amphetamines in several countries in Africa is a growing concern.

Increasing numbers of clandestine laboratories making synthetic drugs have been raided by law enforcement authorities in Africa. In July 2002, authorities in South Africa seized manufacturing equipment and more than 100 tons of chemicals which would have been enough to produce 90 million tablets of methaqualone.

Americas

Seizures of heroin and Ecstasy have increased in Central America and the Caribbean although drug trafficking in the region mostly involves cannabis and cocaine.

Approximately 10 per cent of air passengers on flights from Jamaica to the United Kingdom are smuggling drugs according to estimates by the authorities in the two countries.

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.

The abuse of cannabis, heroin and cocaine has significantly increased in Mexico over the last few years although remaining at a much lower level than in Canada and the United States. There is increasing evidence that cocaine is being manufactured in some countries in Central America.

In Colombia and Peru 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.

Plan Colombia, supported by the United States, continues to be the single most significant effort aimed at reducing illicit drug supply in South America. More than 1,500 illicit drug laboratories were seized and 55 clandestine runways were destroyed by law enforcement agencies in Colombia in 2001.

Asia

Opium production levels in Myanmar have fallen by half since 1996 and eradication efforts in Myanmar, the world's second largest producer of illicit opium, have reduced the area under cultivation by 7 per cent in 2002.

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

Cambodia remains a major supplier of cannabis to countries in the region and other parts of the world and a transit country for heroin.

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 accelerating spread of HIV/AIDS infection along drug trafficking routes in East and South-East Asia is a worrying trend. HIV epidemics are occurring among injecting drug addicts in some provinces of China and more than 50 per cent of injecting drug addicts in Myanmar and Thailand have already been infected with HIV.

Drug abuse in Afghanistan is expected to increase as a result of the return of refugees to areas where opium poppy is cultivated or opium and heroin are produced. The Board urges the Afghan transitional administration to adopt comprehensive drug control legislation and measures as soon as possible.

Some West Asian countries including Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan and Kazakhstan have strengthened their facilities for the treatment and reintegration of drug addicts however such services are inadequate in most countries in the region.

Tougher penalties for drug related offences have been introduced in some countries in East and South-East Asia in an attempt to deter drug traffickers.

Europe

More than 300,000 Ecstasy tablets were seized in one international operation involving several Western European States, Australia, Canada and the United States in March 2002.

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 Board calls on European Governments to continue to support the Afghan authorities in their efforts to deal with the drug problem especially as Europe is the destination of most heroin from South-West Asia.

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.

Oceania

The availability of heroin in Australia has been considerably reduced after successful law enforcement operations have broken up international trafficking rings transporting heroin from South-East Asia to Australia.

The number of deaths caused by heroin overdose in Australia has been declining.

Large seizures of MDMA (Ecstasy) tablets were made in Australia and New Zealand.

Progress has been made to bring in legislation against money laundering in several countries and territories in Oceania, but it continues to be a problem in Fiji, the Cook Islands, the Marshall Islands, Nauru and Niue.

The Board is concerned about the drug control situation in Papua New Guinea, where serious drug related crime is linked to general political instability.

The Board maintains its opposition to a drug injection room in New South Wales in Australia and regrets that the project has been extended.

For more information, see Chapter III of the Report, paragraphs 197-549.