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EMBARGO:

**24 February 2010,
1100 hours CET**

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Africa

After years of increasing cocaine trafficking from South America through West Africa to Europe and to a lesser extent to North America, there has been a decline in seizures of cocaine since 2008 and no large seizure in 2009 at all. However, smuggling remains a serious problem and contributes to increasing drug abuse in West Africa. According to UNODC, cocaine worth an estimated US\$1 billion is trafficked through the region, and West African distribution networks in Europe appear to have remained intact.

Africa continues to be vulnerable to the diversion of the chemical precursors ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, used in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine in Central and North America. A seizure in Guinea in July 2009 of large amounts of chemicals and equipment suspected for the manufacture of synthetic drugs such as MDMA (“ecstasy”), underscores the urgent need for all African countries to improve their national mechanisms for precursor control.

Cannabis remains the drug most widely produced, trafficked and abused in Africa. Cannabis resin (“hashish”) destined for Europe is produced in North Africa. According to Government figures, Morocco significantly reduced illicit cannabis cultivation from 134,000 ha in 2003 to 60,000 ha in 2008 and cannabis resin production fell 71 per cent, from 3,070 tons to 877 tons in the same period.

Seizures of cannabis continued throughout the region. In Morocco, seizures of cannabis herb almost doubled from 116 tons in 2005 to 222 tons in 2008. Tanzania continues to report the largest seizures of cannabis herb in East Africa, but seizures and drug-related arrests are also on the rise at the international airports in Nairobi, Kenya, and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Heroin continues to enter Africa mainly through the countries in East Africa, but increasingly through islands in the Indian Ocean. As a spill-over effect, Mauritius has the highest levels of abuse of heroin in Africa. From East Africa, part of the heroin is smuggled to West Africa, especially to Côte d’Ivoire, and from there into Europe and North America. While the number and size of heroin seizures in West Africa remain very small, the organized crime networks based in the subregion play a key role in supplying the drug worldwide.



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Americas

Central America and the Caribbean

Drug trafficking has become a major security threat and has an impact on the increasing drug abuse and homicides linked to organized crime. Drug trafficking is often protected by local gangs (maras) that appear to have established criminal associations with Mexican drug cartels. Despite new regulations implemented in several countries, the region continues to be used for smuggling precursors into Mexico, which are increasingly trafficked in the form of pharmaceutical preparations.

While transport by sea remains a major problem, drug trafficking by light aircraft is on the rise, in particular with stolen or falsified aircraft registration numbers. For example, in May 2009, a light aircraft bearing a Venezuelan flag and operated by Colombian nationals crashed in Honduras. Approximately 1,647 kg of cocaine were seized at the scene of the crash.

Jamaica continues to be a major producer and exporter of cannabis in the Caribbean and Central America, where cultivation appears to be decreasing in several countries, including the Dominican Republic and Cuba as well as Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras.

Cocaine seizures have increased significantly in El Salvador in recent years (with seizures of 39 kg in 2005, 108 kg in 2006, 4,074 kg in 2007 and 1,354 kg in 2008). Jamaica seems to be assuming greater importance for trans-shipment of cocaine bound for the United States and the United Kingdom.

There was significant increase of heroin trafficking cases in the Dominican Republic in 2008, during which a total of 120 kg of the drug were seized. Costa Rica is faced with a resurgence of LSD trafficking, where the first four seizures amounting to 117 doses were reported since 2001.

Honduras reported a record seizure in 2008 of pharmaceutical preparations containing pseudoephedrine, amounting to 2 million tablets originating in Bangladesh. Costa Rica seized a large number of pharmaceutical preparations in the form of tablets containing acetaminophen with oxycodone or hydrocodone or codeine, which were purportedly intended for sale over the Internet.

North America

Drug-related violence remained high in Mexico—the death toll doubled between 2007 and 2008. While measures taken by the Government, including the deployment of military troops, have resulted in the disruption of drug trafficking operations throughout North America, organized criminal groups have expanded their control over drug trafficking operations over the continent. Mexican drug cartels have expanded their control to cover the entire supply chain for illicit drugs, from shipment from South America to distribution in the United States. Violent gangs affiliated with Asian and Mexican drug



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cartels are largely in control of illicit drug distribution at the street level in the United States and are increasing their hold on distribution at the wholesale level.

Illicit cultivation of cannabis appears to be rising in the United States and may end up exceeding the total quantity of cannabis coming in from abroad. In 2008, the total quantity of eradicated cannabis increased by 14 per cent (7,562,300 outdoor and 451,000 indoor grown plants eradicated). Mexican drug cartels have expanded cannabis cultivation on public land in the United States, whereas Asian criminal organizations based in Canada have set up indoor cultivations.

The potency of cannabis seized in the United States continues to increase and in 2008 reached an average tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) content of 10 per cent and more.

In the United States, the overall declining trend in drug abuse continued. An estimated 35.5 million persons, or 14.2 per cent of the population, aged 12 and older had used illicit drugs in 2008. The decline in the abuse of drugs among youth aged 13-18 is an encouraging sign. The abuse of cannabis dropped by 29 per cent in the period 1997-2008, cocaine by 36 per cent, methamphetamine by 68 per cent and MDMA ("ecstasy") by 52 per cent. Likewise in Canada, the abuse of drugs, in particular cannabis, is declining. At the same time, Mexico is facing increasing abuse of cocaine and other drugs.

The widespread abuse of pharmaceuticals containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances is an increasing problem in the region.

South America

In 2008, potential cocaine manufacture increased in Peru to 302 tons and in Bolivia to 113 tons, accounting for 36 and 13 per cent respectively of potential global manufacture. In spite of these increases, the total potential manufacture of the region decreased from 994 tons in 2007 to 845 tons in 2008 (15 per cent lower) and constitutes the lowest output since 2003.

The overall decrease is attributed to the significant decrease of coca bush cultivation in Colombia, which accounts for 48.3 per cent of the area cultivated for the plant and experienced a decrease of manufacturing of 28 per cent. The total area of coca cultivation in South America decreased by 8 per cent to 167,000 ha in 2008. However, the area under illicit cultivation increased in Peru and Bolivia. In Bolivia the total area under illicit coca bush cultivation doubled between 2000 and 2008. In Peru the area of illicit coca cultivation has increased since 1999 by 45 per cent.

Cocaine seizures are on the rise compared to 2007 in all three main countries producing coca leaf (Bolivia: 45 per cent to 21.6 tons; Peru doubled to 16.8 tons; Colombia: 57 per cent to 198.4 tons) as well as in Argentina, Brazil and Ecuador. Seizures remained stable or decreased in Chile, Paraguay and Venezuela.

Though a number of Governments strengthened national measures to control ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, the increasing trend of diverting precursors to manufacture amphetamine-type



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stimulants (ATS) continued as well as the smuggling of ephedrine into Mexico. Moreover, the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs has emerged in the region.

In 2008, cannabis herb seizures increased in Bolivia (with 1,113 tons the seizures were more than two and a half times higher when compared to 2007), Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru. Seizures decreased in Brazil and Venezuela.

As a spill-over effect of drug trafficking, the abuse of illicit drugs is on the rise in some countries and the demand for treatment increased significantly in recent years. According to UNODC, almost 1 million people are treated annually for the abuse of illicit drugs. While in the region the need for a balanced approach to reduce illicit drug supply and tackle illicit drug problems is widely recognized, demand-reduction activities, including education, prevention and rehabilitation remain underdeveloped in some countries.

ASIA

East and South-East Asia

After tremendous progress in the past, countries in the region faced setbacks in reducing illicit opium poppy cultivation in 2008, with a 3.3 per cent increase compared to the preceding year. Trafficking in methamphetamine and the illicit manufacture of MDMA (“ecstasy”) also increased. For the first time in recent years, the illicit manufacture of gamma-Hydroxybutyric acid (GHB) was reported.

In China, new types of products containing mixtures of synthetic drugs were seized, for instance tablets consisting of methaqualone and ephedrine were seized in the region of Inner Mongolia. Mixtures of GHB, MDMA and ketamine in bottles labeled “traditional cough medicine” were seized in the region of Guangxi.

Drug traffickers are increasingly using social networking websites to recruit South-East Asian women to work as “mules”. The targets are obviously single women between the ages of 20 and 30 without criminal records who are unemployed or work in clerical, sales and service jobs.

The illicit manufacture, trafficking and abuse of ketamine, a substance not under international control, is becoming a major problem in many countries. In China, 44 laboratories manufacturing the drug were dismantled in 2007.

In 2008, most of the countries in East and South-East Asia continued to report seizures of methamphetamine. In 2008, China seized 6.2 tons and the Philippines seized 855 kg of methamphetamine (compared with 369 kg in 2007), while Thailand seized 22 million tablets of methamphetamine in 2008, a significant increase over 2007, when 14 million tablets were seized.



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Seizures of cannabis plants increased significantly in the Philippines (from 2.5 million in 2007 to about 4 million in 2008) as did seizures of cannabis (from 1.2 tons in 2007 to 3.7 tons in 2008). Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea reported the seizure of the largest quantities of cannabis in recent years.

South Asia

Seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants show that trafficking in these substances may be increasing in South Asia. The region has also become a location for their manufacture. A number of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories have been discovered in India in recent years. India has emerged as one of the main sources of drugs sold through illegal Internet pharmacies, where orders placed abroad are dispatched to buyers using courier and postal services, which have become a common means of smuggling drugs abroad.

Trafficking in cannabis remains widespread throughout the region. In 2008, Indian authorities seized 103 tons of cannabis herb and 4.1 tons of cannabis resin. In Bangladesh, 2.3 tons of cannabis herb were seized; in Nepal, more than 7 tons and in Sri Lanka more than 37 tons.

The widespread abuse of pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs, e.g. codeine, is an ongoing problem in Bangladesh.

Low-grade heroin base (“brown sugar”) on the Indian illicit market was suspected of having been diverted from licit cultivation. However, according to Indian authorities, an increasing proportion of heroin seized in the country originated in Afghanistan, which indicates that India is being used as a transit area.

The smuggling of heroin into the Maldives is an ongoing problem and has contributed to a rise in drug abuse. Pharmaceutical preparations containing benzodiazepines are among the most widely abused in Bhutan.

West Asia

After peaking in 2007, illicit cultivation of opium poppy and the illicit production of opium decreased in 2008 and 2009. The number of Afghan provinces free of opium poppy and the total quantity of opium poppy seizures are on the rise. The Report notes that it is an opportune moment for the Afghan Government and the international community to give higher priority to improving governance and economic development and to step up support for legitimate alternative livelihoods for drug farmers. However, Afghanistan remains by far the largest illicit producer of heroin and other opiates and is becoming a major producer of cannabis.



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The magnitude of the drug problem poses a serious threat to the political, economic and social stability for countries in West Asia and other regions. As opiates are smuggled mainly through Iran (Islamic Republic of), Pakistan and countries in Central Asia, these countries are affected by a wide range of problems such as organized crime, corruption and high demand for opiates. As a result, Iran has the highest rate of opiate abuse worldwide.

Instability and political conflicts as well as weak border controls contribute to the spread of illicit cultivation and the smuggling of cannabis, for instance in Iraq and the Bekaa valley of Lebanon.

The Middle East has emerged as a market for drugs such as cocaine which was not abused beforehand to a significant extent. As a result, Jordan is faced with new drug smuggling trends, for example 25.4 kg cocaine from South America were seized in the country during the first four months of 2009.

Trafficking in and abuse of amphetamine-type stimulants is increasing in West Asia, in particular in the eastern Mediterranean and the Arabian Peninsula. In 2007, about 30 per cent of the global seizures of those substances were effected in the region with the most significant seizures taking place in Saudi Arabia (27 per cent). West Asia's share of global seizures of synthetic drugs, including Captagon, amphetamines and MDMA ("ecstasy") has risen from 1 to 25 per cent in recent years. Captagon, often containing amphetamine, has apparently become the drug of choice on the Arabian Peninsula. In 2008, the Middle East accounted for 73 per cent of global seizures.

Europe

The abuse of certain drugs is stable or declining in several countries. A decline in the abuse of cannabis and cocaine has been observed in the United Kingdom and Spain. The abuse of cocaine is stable or declining in Austria, Germany and Switzerland, whereas increasing in France and Ireland. Likewise, the abuse of amphetamines and MDMA ("ecstasy") is stabilizing or decreasing in Europe. In Denmark, Spain and, to a limited extent the United Kingdom, drug users are replacing those drugs with cocaine.

Europe remains the largest market for cannabis resin. Spain accounts for the largest total amount of global seizures of cannabis resin. Europe is the only region into which cannabis herb is smuggled from other regions, such as Africa and Asia, but illicit cannabis cultivation also takes place in many European countries. Albania, Bulgaria and Serbia are among the countries in Eastern Europe where illicit cultivation of cannabis takes place. In Germany, illicit cultivation both indoor and outdoor has increased, whereas in Switzerland there was a reduction in the total cultivation area. Law enforcement efforts in the Netherlands have resulted in a decline in quality and an increase in the prices of cannabis.

Europe continues to account for virtually all cocaine seizures outside the Americas. The number of seizures has decreased substantially in Western Europe, whereas in the past few years the smuggling of the drug through Eastern Europe has significantly increased with the largest seizure being 381 kg



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in Slovenia. Also, 164 kg of liquid cocaine were seized in Slovakia where a new modus operandi was used by diluting cocaine to form viscous fluid and poured into bottles that were declared as “red wine”.

The illicit market for opiates in Eastern Europe expanded, particularly in Albania, Belarus, Croatia, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, as well as in countries along the Balkan route. The United Kingdom, followed by Italy and Germany account for most of the heroin seized in Europe, which was mainly dispatched from the Netherlands, followed by Turkey, Belgium and Pakistan. In 2008, heroin accounted for 92 per cent of all seizures of opiates in Eastern and Central Europe. The drug is mainly smuggled by car and train, however it is increasingly being transported by air from Central and Eastern Europe to Western Europe.

Oceania

The demand for MDMA (“ecstasy”) in Australia has increased in recent years. Border seizures in that country accounted for 36 per cent of the global seizures in 2008. While Canada remained a significant source, traffickers have been obviously using new resources; Mauritius has recently emerged as an embarkation point, for example.

The smuggling of pharmaceutical preparations containing pseudoephedrine into New Zealand has been rising significantly. In 2008, the number of pseudoephedrine tablets seized was 13 times higher than in 2002. Apparently, most shipments are organized by Asian criminal groups based in New Zealand using Asian students and visitors as “receivers”. China has emerged as a major source of pseudoephedrine tablets seized in the country while Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Tonga, among other countries in the region, have been used for transit.

In spite of closer regional cooperation to address drug control issues, the low rate of accession by States in Oceania to the international drug control treaties and the geographical proximity of the region to illicit drug manufacturing in South-East Asia make the region more vulnerable to drug trafficking. The Board again urges the Governments in the regions to become party to the international drug control treaties.