

PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until: 14:00 GMT on 24 June

World Drug Report 2009 Highlights Links Between Drugs and Crime Opiates, cocaine and cannabis markets flat or decreasing, synthetic drugs on the rise UNODC Director calls for greater investment in drug treatment and crime control

WASHINGTON, 24 June 2009 (UNODC) – The *World Drug Report 2009*, launched today by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), shows that global markets for cocaine, opiates and cannabis are steady or in decline, while production and use of synthetic drugs is feared to be increasing in the developing world.

The 314-page Report, prepared for World Drug Day on 26th June, was launched in Washington DC by UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa, and the newly appointed Director of the US Office of National Drug Control Policy, Gil Kerlikowske.

A downward trend in major markets

Opium cultivation in Afghanistan, where 93 percent of the world's opium is grown, declined by 19 percent in 2008. Colombia, which produces half of the world's cocaine, saw an 18 percent decline in cultivation and a staggering 28 percent decline in production compared to 2007. Global coca production, at 845 tons, is at a five year low, despite some increases in cultivation in Peru and Bolivia.

Cannabis remains the most widely cultivated and used drug around the world, although estimates are less precise. Data also show that it is more harmful than commonly believed. The average THC content (the harmful component) of hydroponic marijuana in North America almost doubled in the past decade. This has major health implications as evidenced by a significant rise in the number of people seeking treatment.

In terms of consumption, the world's biggest markets for cannabis (North America, Oceania, and Western Europe), cocaine (North America and some parts of Western Europe) and opiates (South East Asia and Western Europe) are all flat or down. Data is less clear for developing countries.

Probable rise in use and production of synthetic drugs in the developing world

News on synthetic drugs – amphetamines, methamphetamine and ecstasy – is mixed. Use has levelled off in developed countries. In the developing world, there is concern that production and consumption may be growing, although the data is limited.

What was once a cottage industry has become big business. Industrial-sized laboratories in South East Asia – particularly in the Greater Mekong Sub-region – are producing massive quantities of methamphetamine tablets, and crystal meth and other substances like Ketamine.

Some countries in the European Union are the main suppliers of ecstasy; Canada has become a major trafficking hub for meth and ecstasy.

Use of the amphetamine Captagon has sky-rocketed in the Near and Middle East. In 2007, Saudi Arabia seized one third of all amphetamine group substances in the world, greater than the combined total of China and the United States.

Trafficking routes are shifting

“The \$50 billion global cocaine market is undergoing seismic shifts,” said Mr. Costa. “Purity levels and seizures (in main consumer countries) are down, prices are up, and consumption patterns are in flux. This may help explain the gruesome upsurge of violence in countries like Mexico. In Central America, cartels are fighting for a shrinking market,” he said.

In West Africa, a decline in seizures seems to reflect lower cocaine flows after five years of rapid growth. “International efforts are paying off,” said Mr. Costa. Yet drug-related violence and political instability continue, especially in Guinea-Bissau. “As long as demand for drugs persists, weak countries will always be targeted by traffickers. If Europe really wants to help Africa, it should curb its appetite for cocaine,” said the UN’s top drug control official.

While 41 percent of the world’s cocaine is being seized (mostly in Colombia), only one fifth (19 percent) of all opiates are being intercepted. Iran and Pakistan are most badly affected by drug trafficking, and they also seize the most opiates (opium, morphine and heroin). In 2007, Iran seized 84% of the world’s opium, and 28% of all heroin. Pakistan ranked second in terms of heroin (and morphine) seizures.

To improve information sharing and carry out joint counter-narcotics operations, UNODC has developed a Triangular Initiative among Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. “The more opium is seized in Afghanistan’s neighbourhood, the less heroin on the streets of Europe. And vice versa, the less heroin is consumed in the West, the more stability there will be in West Asia,” said Mr. Costa who will bring this message to a G8 ministerial outreach conference on Afghanistan in Trieste on 27 June.

No trade-off between public health and public security

The Report pays special attention to the impact of drug-related crime, and what to do about it.

In the Preface to the report, Mr. Costa explores the debate over repealing drug controls. He acknowledges that controls have generated an illicit black market of macro-economic proportions that uses violence and corruption. Yet, he warns that legalizing drugs as a way of removing this threat – as some have suggested – would be “an historic mistake.” “Illicit drugs pose a danger to health. That’s why drugs are, and must remain, controlled,” said the head of UNODC.

“Proponents of legalization can’t have it both ways,” said Mr. Costa. “A free market for drugs would unleash a drug epidemic, while a regulated one would create a parallel criminal market. Legalization is not a magic wand that would suppress both mafias and drug abuse,” said Mr. Costa. “Societies should not have to choose between protecting public health or public security: they can, and should do both,” he said. He therefore called for more resources for drug prevention and treatment, and stronger measures to fight drug-related crime.

The Director of the US Office of National Drug Control Policy, Gil Kerlikowske, said: “The *World Drug Report 2009* demonstrates that drugs are a problem that touches every nation. All of us have a responsibility to address drug abuse within our societies. Internationally, the Obama Administration is committed to expanding demand reduction initiatives to ensure that all those struggling to overcome addiction, especially in developing countries, have access to effective treatment programs. We have learned a great deal about the disease of drug addiction and know that treatment works. Through comprehensive and effective enforcement, education, prevention, and treatment we will be successful in reducing illicit drug use and its devastating consequences.”

How to improve drug control

The Report provides a number of recommendations on how to improve drug control.

First, drug use should be treated as an illness. “People who take drugs need medical help, not criminal retribution,” said Mr. Costa. He appealed for universal access to drug treatment. Since people with serious drug problems provide the bulk of drug demand, treating this problem is one of the best ways of shrinking the market.

Second, he called for “an end to the tragedy of cities out of control.” In the same way that most illicit cultivation takes place in regions out of government control, most drugs are sold in city neighbourhoods where public order has broken down. “Housing, jobs, education, public services, and recreation can make communities less vulnerable to drugs and crime,” said Mr. Costa.

Third, governments must enforce international agreements against organized crime. International crime-fighting instruments like the United Nations Conventions against organized crime and corruption are not being used. “Therefore, too many states have crime problems of their own making,” said the head of UNODC. In particular, he said “current instruments to tackle money laundering and cyber-crime are inadequate.”

Fourth, he called for greater efficiency in law enforcement. He encouraged police to focus on the small number of high profile, high volume, and violent criminals instead of the large volumes of petty offenders. In some countries, the ratio of people imprisoned for drug use compared to drug trafficking is 5:1. “This is a waste of money for the police, and a waste of lives for those thrown in jail. Go after the piranhas, not the minnows,” said Mr. Costa.

In an effort to improve transparency and the quality of drug data, this year UNODC has introduced ranges into country-level estimates used in the *World Drug Report*. For many regions, and for some drugs (like ATS and cannabis) the ranges are relatively wide since information is more limited. “I urge governments to gather more information. This will provide a clearer picture of drug trends, and, as a result, improve drug control,” said Mr. Costa.

For TV producers, a B-roll is available.

Still pictures available for newspapers.

More information on the *World Drug Report 2009* is available at www.unodc.org

UNODC is leading the **World Drug Campaign 2009** to raise awareness about the major challenge that illicit drugs represent to society as a whole, and especially to the young. The goal of the campaign is to mobilize support and to inspire people to act against drug abuse and trafficking. The campaign encourages young people to put their health first and not to take drugs (<http://www.unodc.org/drugs/>).

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