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United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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Ecstasy

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PREFACE

The findings of the *World Drug Report 2013* deliver important lessons for the forthcoming high-level review of the commitments that countries reaffirmed in 2009 on the measures for drug control. These measures are laid out in the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem.

At the global level, there has been an increase in the production and misuse of new psychoactive substances, that is, substances that are not under international control. The manufacture and use of substances that are under international control remain largely stable as compared with 2009, although trends in drug supply and demand have been unequal across regions and countries and across drug types. Member States that are party to the three international drug control Conventions, which were adopted to protect the health and welfare of mankind, remain committed to the drug control system. Evidence shows that while the system may not have eliminated the drug problem, it continues to ensure that it does not escalate to unmanageable proportions.

We have to admit that, globally, the demand for drugs has not been substantially reduced and that some challenges exist in the implementation of the drug control system, in the violence generated by trafficking in illicit drugs, in the fast evolving nature of new psychoactive substances, and in those national legislative measures which may result in a violation of human rights. The real issue is not to amend the Conventions, but to implement them according to their underlying spirit.

While intensified competition in trafficking in cocaine has led to growing levels of violence in Central America, the problem will not be resolved if drugs are legalized. Organized crime is highly adaptive. It will simply move to other businesses that are equally profitable and violent.

Countering the drug problem in full compliance with human rights standards requires an emphasis on the underlying spirit of the existing drug Conventions, which is about health. Advocacy for a stronger health perspective and an interconnected re-balancing of drug control efforts must take place. As experience has shown, neither supply reduction nor demand reduction on their own are able to solve the problem. For this reason, a more balanced approach in dealing with the drug problem is a necessity. This includes more serious efforts on prevention and treatment, not only in terms of political statements, but also in terms of funds dedicated for these purposes.

This year's World Drug Report shows the extent of the problem associated with new psychoactive substances and the deadly impact they can have on their users. The issue of new psychoactive substances is one that the international

community will review at the high-level session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in 2014. As is the case with traditional drugs, international action against these substances must focus on addressing both supply and demand. The paucity of knowledge on the adverse impacts and risks to public health and safety, coupled with the fact that new psychoactive substances are not under international control, underscores the importance of innovative prevention measures and sharing of good practices between countries.

The multitude of new psychoactive substances and the speed with which they have emerged in all regions of the world is one of the most notable trends in drug markets over the past five years. While the existing international control system is equipped to deal with the emergence of new substances that pose a threat to public health, it is currently required to provide a response commensurate with the unprecedented fast evolving nature of the phenomenon of new psychoactive substances. Some countries have adopted innovative approaches to curb the rise of these substances, but the global nature of the problem requires a response based on international cooperation and universal coverage. Such a response should make use of all the relevant provisions of the existing international drug Conventions. In addition, in strengthening the international control system, a systematic evaluation of the appropriateness of some of the innovative approaches at the national level should be encouraged.

The detection and identification of emerging substances is a fundamental step in assessing the potential health risks of new psychoactive substances and, as such, scientific, epidemiological, forensic and toxicological information on these substances needs to be collected, updated and disseminated. As requested by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in its resolution 56/4 on enhancing international cooperation in the identification and reporting of new psychoactive substances, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is ready to assist the international community by building a global early warning mechanism that will provide Governments with the necessary information on new psychoactive substances, particularly scientific data that are essential in the development and implementation of evidence-based responses.

As we approach 2014 and the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan, that country requires concerted efforts on the part of the international community. The United Nations, and particularly UNODC, will need to provide far greater assistance to bring counter-narcotic programmes into the mainstream of social and economic development strategies so as to successfully curb the current cultivation and production of opium and the worrying

high use of opiates among the Afghan population. UNODC is working to achieve this through its country programme, one of its largest in the world, as well as its integrated regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries.

The trends in new emerging routes for trafficking of drugs and in the production of illicit substances indicate that the continent of Africa is increasingly becoming vulnerable to the drug trade and organized crime, although data from the African region is scarce. While this may further fuel political and economic instability in many countries in the region, it can also lead to an increase in the local availability and consumption of illicit substances. This, therefore, requires the international community to invest in evidence-informed interventions for the prevention of drug use, the treatment of drug dependence, the successful interdiction of illicit substances and the suppression of organized crime. The international community also needs to make the necessary resources available to monitor the drug situation in Africa.

Regarding people who inject drugs and who live with HIV, the *World Drug Report 2013* shows that there have been some improvements. Those countries which implemented a comprehensive set of HIV interventions were able to achieve a reduction in high-risk behaviours and in the transmission of HIV and other blood-borne infections. This holds the promise that countries can achieve the targets set out in the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action by implementing and expanding prevention and treatment services for people who inject drugs. However,

there is still an immense task ahead to achieve the commitment made by the General Assembly in the 2011 Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Intensifying Our Efforts to Eliminate HIV and AIDS, which sets out the target of reducing new HIV infections by 50 per cent among people who inject drugs. This warrants significant scaling up of evidence-based HIV interventions in countries where the epidemic is driven by injecting drug use.

Illicit drugs continue to jeopardize the health and welfare of people throughout the world. They represent a clear threat to the stability and security of entire regions and to economic and social development. In so many ways, illicit drugs, crime and development are bound to each other. Drug dependence is often exacerbated by low social and economic development, and drug trafficking, along with many other forms of transnational organized crime, undermines human development. We must break this destructive cycle in order to protect the right of people to a healthy way of life and to promote sustainable economic growth and greater security and stability. It is, therefore, important that drugs are addressed when developing the post-2015 development agenda.



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CONTENTS

PREFACE	iii
EXPLANATORY NOTES	vii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ix

1. RECENT STATISTICS AND TREND ANALYSIS OF ILLICIT DRUG MARKETS

A. Extent of illicit drug use and health consequences	1
B. Overview of trends related to drug supply indicators, by drug type and region	17
C. Cannabis market	24
D. Illicit opiate market	30
E. Cocaine market	37
F. The market for amphetamine-type stimulants	49
G. Conclusion	57

2. NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

A. Introduction	59
B. New psychoactive substances: concepts and definitions	60
C. The recent emergence and spread of new psychoactive substances	67
D. Conclusions and future course of action	113

ANNEX I	i
Maps and tables on drug demand	
ANNEX II	vii
Maps and tables on drug supply	
ANNEX III	
Regional groupings	xv
GLOSSARY	xvii

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