



UNITED NATIONS
Office on Drugs and Crime

2008 WORLD DRUG REPORT



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4. METHODOLOGY

Preface

Indicators of the world drug situation remain favourable over the long-term, but there are recent warning signs that must be heeded.

A global and long-term perspective reveals that illicit drug use has been contained to less than 5% of the adult population (yearly incidence rate for people aged 15-64). In other words, less than one in every twenty people used illicit drugs at least once in the past 12 months. Problem drug users (people severely drug dependent) are limited to less than one tenth of this already low percentage: there may be 26 million of them, about 0.6% of the planet's adult population.

This is an impressive achievement when considered in the historical perspective of a century of drug control (reviewed in Chapter 2), or the decade since a special session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGASS) in 1998 which motivated countries to be more proactive in reducing drug supply and demand. It is also an undeniable success when compared to the consumption of tobacco or alcohol, addictive psychoactive drugs that are used by at least one quarter of the world's adult population, and cause millions of deaths every year. In the absence of the drug control system, illicit drug use may well have reached such levels, with devastating consequences for public health. In short, in terms of reducing demand, national and multilateral drug control seem to be working.

On the supply side, the story is different. This *Report* provides evidence of a surge in the supply of illicit drugs in 2007. Afghanistan had a record opium harvest, and world opium production (because of higher yields) almost doubled between 2005 and 2007. Coca cultivation increased in the Andean countries last year, although cocaine production remained stable because of lower yields per hectare. In the cannabis market, there are two worrying trends: Afghanistan has become a major producer of cannabis resin; in developed countries, indoor cultivation is producing more potent strains of cannabis herb.

The past few *World Drug Reports* have stated that the world drug problem is being contained in the sense that it had stabilized. This year's *Report* shows that containment is under threat. Urgent steps must be taken to prevent the unravelling of progress that has been made in the past few decades of drug control. Furthermore, containment should not be seen as an end in itself. Real success will only come when supply and demand actually go down (rather than level off), across the world. The current upsurge in supply together with the development of new trafficking routes (mostly through Africa) could eventually strengthen demand

where it already exists (mostly in developed countries) and create new markets for some of the world's deadliest substances (mostly in developing countries).

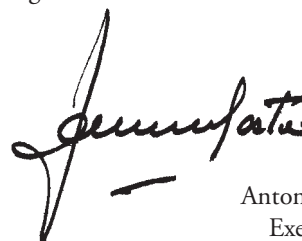
Progress is needed in three areas.

First, public *health* – the first principle of drug control – should be brought back to centre stage. Currently, the amount of resources and political support for public security and law enforcement far outweigh those devoted to public health. This must be re-balanced. Drug dependence is an illness that should be treated like any other. More resources are needed to prevent people from taking drugs, to treat those who are dependent, and to reduce the adverse health and social consequences of drug abuse.

Second, drug control should be looked at in the larger context of *crime prevention* and the rule of law in order to cut links between drug trafficking, organized crime, corruption and terrorism. Some of the world's biggest drug producing regions (in Afghanistan, Colombia, and Myanmar) are out of the control of the central government. Drug trafficking is undermining national security (for example in parts of Central America, the Caribbean, Mexico, and West Africa). Drug money is used as a lubricant for corruption, and a source of terrorist financing; in turn, corrupt officials and terrorists make drug production and trafficking easier.

Third, protecting public security and safeguarding public health should be done in a way that upholds *human rights* and human dignity. This year's 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides us with a useful reminder of the inalienable rights to life and a fair trial. Although drugs kill, we should not kill because of drugs. As we move forward, human rights should be a part of drug control.

In short, to hold the line and to further reduce the threat posed by drugs, more attention must be devoted to reducing demand for drugs, promoting security and development in the world's major drug producing regions, assisting states caught in the cross-fire of drug trafficking, and stemming the spread of drugs into countries in transition.



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United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Introduction

The United Nations *Office on Drugs and Crime* (UNODC) is a global leader in the multilateral effort against illicit drugs and international crime. The three pillars of its work programme are:

- Research and analytical work to increase knowledge and understanding of drugs and crime issues and expand the evidence-base for policy and operational decisions;
- Normative work to assist States in the ratification and implementation of the international treaties, the development of domestic legislation on drugs, crime and terrorism, and the provision of secretariat and substantive services to the treaty-based and governing bodies; and
- Field-based technical cooperation projects to enhance the capacity of States Members to counteract illicit drugs, crime and terrorism.

Recognizing the importance of comprehensive, factual and objective information in the field of international drug control, as well as the need to improve the evidence base available for policy making, the General Assembly entrusted UNODC with the mandate to publish “comprehensive and balanced information about the world drug problem” in 1998. UNODC has published such assessments annually since 1999.

This year, the Report retains the one-volume format introduced in 2007. Under the more synthetic format, the detailed seizures tables are available on UNODC’s website. A PDF file containing the detailed seizure tables is available for review and downloading at: www.unodc.org. The detailed seizure tables are also available on CD by request. CDs can be ordered via the following e-mail address: RAS@unodc.org

The Report continues to provide in depth trend analysis of the four main drug markets in its first section. In addition, to mark the one hundred year anniversary of the Shanghai Opium Commission, and one hundred years of international drug control, the Report contains an in-depth look at the development of the international drug control system. The Report also contains a small statistical annex which provides a detailed look at production, prices and consumption.

As in previous years, the present Report is based on data obtained primarily from the annual reports questionnaire (ARQ) sent by Governments to UNODC in 2007, supplemented by other sources when necessary and where available. Two of the main limitations herein are: (i) that ARQ reporting is not systematic enough, both in terms of number of countries responding and of content, and (ii) that most countries lack the adequate monitoring systems required to produce reliable, comprehensive and internationally comparable data. National monitoring systems are, however, improving and UNODC has contributed to this process.

Electronic copies of the *World Drug Report 2008* Report can be accessed via www.unodc.org.

Comments and feedback on the Report are welcome and can be sent to: RAS@unodc.org.

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