



UNITED NATIONS
Office on Drugs and Crime

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WORLD DRUG REPORT

Volume 1: Analysis



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Preface

Drugs are everywhere, say alarmed parents. *The drug problem is out of control*, cries the media. *Legalize drugs to reduce crime*, say some commentators.

Such exasperation is understandable in the many communities where illicit drugs cause crime, illness, violence and death. Yet, worldwide statistical evidence points to a different reality: drug control is working and the world drug problem is being contained.

This is true whether we look over the long term or even just over the past few years. Humanity has entered the 21st century with much lower levels of drug cultivation and drug addiction than 100 years earlier. Even more importantly, in the past few years, worldwide efforts to reduce the threat posed by illicit drugs have effectively reversed a quarter-century-long rise in drug abuse that, if left unchecked, could have become a global pandemic.

The illicit drug problem has three main elements: cultivation and production; trafficking and retailing; and consumption and abuse. We do not know as much as we would like about the middle link of this chain as the drug trade is notoriously hard to monitor. But, as this report shows, we do know a lot about the beginning and the end of the chain and can confidently make two points: (1) There is less land under coca and opium cultivation today than a few years ago, and significantly less than a century ago; (2) The severity of drug addiction has been contained. The number of addicts, especially those dependent on cocaine and heroin, has declined massively over the last century and, worldwide, has remained stable in the past few years.

Of course, the world drug control system is the sum of its parts and progress in one area can be offset by opposite trends elsewhere. Greater global success will depend on the commitment of all our societies to turn *containment* of the drug problem into a sustained *reduction* - everywhere. We are not there yet.

This *World Drug Report* demonstrates progress made in 2005, but also highlights some weak elements in the global drug control system - most notably heroin supply in Afghanistan, cocaine demand in Europe, and cannabis supply/demand everywhere. The main trends can be summarized as follows.

The world's *supply of opium* has shrunk, but in an unbalanced way. Within a few years, Asia's notorious Golden Triangle, once the world's narcotics epicentre, could become opium-free. But in Afghanistan, while the area under opium cultivation decreased in 2005, the country's drug situation remains vulnerable to reversal. This could happen as early as 2006.

In the past five years, the area under *coca cultivation* in the Andean countries has fallen by more than a quarter. In order for this trend to be sustainable, richer countries – the consumers of cocaine – need to invest more in helping Andean farmers to switch to licit crops. As this report points out, demand for cocaine is rising in Europe to alarming levels. I urge European Union governments not to ignore this peril. Too many professional, educated Europeans use cocaine, often denying their addiction, and drug abuse by celebrities is often presented uncritically by the media, leaving young people confused and vulnerable.

Trends in *cocaine trafficking* are hard to assess. Cocaine seizures have increased dramatically. Markets have been thrown into turmoil due to intensified coca eradication in the Andean countries and better law

enforcement worldwide. As crime cartels look for new trafficking routes, especially towards the European Union, countries in the Caribbean, West Africa and Central Africa are under attack. They need to be assisted, not least in their efforts to tackle corrupt and ineffective law enforcement.

Cannabis, which gets special attention in this report, is the world's most abused illicit drug. Global oversight of supply is impractical as it is a weed that grows under the most varied conditions, at many different latitudes and in many countries. National policies on cannabis vary and sometimes change from one year to the next. With supply virtually unlimited and demand subject to the vagaries of government policy, traffickers have invested heavily in increasing the potency – and therefore the market attractiveness — of cannabis. The result has been devastating: today, the characteristics of cannabis are no longer that different from those of other plant-based drugs such as cocaine and heroin.

With cannabis-related health damage increasing, it is fundamentally wrong for countries to make cannabis control dependent on which party is in government. Policy swings or reversals leave young people confused as to just how dangerous cannabis is. The cannabis pandemic, like other challenges to public health, requires consensus, and a stable and consistent engagement across society at large so countries can take appropriate and long-term remedial action.

After years of rapid increases, the market for *amphetamine-type stimulants* (ATS) is stabilizing. In some parts of the world, such as the United States, methamphetamine is considered drug public enemy number one. In other regions, notably Europe, synthetic psychoactive substances have lost some of their earlier appeal and been replaced by cocaine. Seizures have skyrocketed, demonstrating once again that the popularity of drugs in some countries tends to offset their decline elsewhere, causing the market to reorganize itself. It is encouraging to see law enforcement taking advantage of the disarray among traffickers.

The *World Drug Report* is a repository of statistics and not the place to formulate policy. But the data prompt a few inescapable conclusions. *First*, countries need to do more to reduce drug demand in general and to target ATS and cannabis in particular. The profile of the users of these drugs differs from that of those who use cocaine and heroin, and treatment appropriate to their needs is still not widely available. *Second*, there is an urgent need to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among injecting drug users, whether they are street addicts, sex slaves, or prison inmates.

Third, while drug market trends are moving in the right direction, more work is needed to ensure that these trends will be sustained. After so many years of drug control experience, we now know that a coherent, long-term strategy *can* reduce drug supply, demand and trafficking. If this does not happen, it will be because some nations fail to take the drug issue sufficiently seriously and pursue inadequate policies. In other words, each society faces the drug problem it deserves.

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