

ODUMUNC 2010
Issue Brief for the
GA Third Committee Social, Cultural and Humanitarian (SOCHUM)



International cooperation against illegal drugs and narcotics

by **Anna Zakharova**
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"... Drug abuse is a time bomb ticking away in the heart of our civilization. We must now find measures to deal with it before it explodes and destroys us."

—Secretary-General Javier Pérez De Cuéllar (From remarks to the 17th Special Session of the General Assembly, 20 February 1990)

What are illegal drugs/narcotics?

Drugs or narcotics are toxic substances which can bring feelings of euphoria to the body, but they can also kill. The most widespread illegal narcotic substances include cannabis, cocaine, synthetic drugs and opiates (opium, morphine, heroin, codeine, fentanyl, etc.). For many years opiates were used as drugs against pain especially in Europe. Heroin, for example, was produced in Germany in the 1920s as medicine for cough yet nobody knew that it caused deep addiction after only the third dose, potentially causing death.

In 1972, brain researchers from Johns Hopkins University made a puzzling discovery concerning drug addiction. They found that the human brain's neurons had specific receptor sites for endorphins – feel-good chemicals naturally manufactured by our brain when the body experiences pain or stress. Endorphin levels go up when a person exercises, goes into labor, or is stressed out. Opiates have the same structure as endorphins; however, they are much stronger and can't be controlled by our brain, what causes abuse and then addiction.

Drug addiction is a problem for both rich and poor countries. Drug addicts are mostly people from 14 to 22 who suffer from social and economic problems or follow popular trends. These people can be considered a lost generation because narcotics damage them physically, mentally and socially and lead to degradation of personality. Thus drug addicts are not only draining on their society, but also potential criminals ready to do everything for the second dose – even murder. In addition, illegal drug trafficking triggers a variety of other problems such as crime and HIV/AIDS spread. It is estimated that more than 10 per cent of HIV infections worldwide are due to the use of contaminated drug injecting equipment.

Recent world drug trends

According to the *2008 World Drug Report*, the recent stabilization in the world drugs market is under threat. While only some 0.6 per cent of the planet's adult population can be classified as

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problem drug users (people with severe drug dependence), a surge in opium and coca cultivation and the risk of higher drug use in developing countries threaten to undermine recent progress in drug control.

Afghanistan has become a major producer of cannabis resin, perhaps exceeding Morocco. In developed countries, indoor cultivation is producing more potent strains of cannabis herb. The average level of the drug's psychoactive substance (THC) almost doubled on the US market between 1999 and 2006. There also has been a shift in major drug routes, particularly for cocaine. Because of high, steady demand for cocaine in Europe and more frequent seizures along traditional routes, drug traffickers have targeted West Africa. However, the Caribbean, Central America, and border regions of Mexico still suffer from the world's biggest coca producers, the Andean countries, and the biggest consumers, North America and Europe. Every year West Africa transits at least 50 tons of cocaine from the Andean countries, heading north where they are worth almost \$ 2 billion on the streets of European cities.

Afghanistan still remains the biggest producer of opium and currently supplies some 93 % of the world's opium. The value of the opiates produced and trafficked from Afghanistan was \$ 3.4 billion in 2008. Opium farmers receive approximately one quarter of this, while the rest goes to criminal groups and warlords who control the production and distribution of drugs. The combined income of traffickers and farmers is equivalent to 34 % of the licit Afghan gross domestic product. This money benefits terrorists and fuels corruption; whereas, weak governments have great difficulties facing the powerful drug barons. This has negative health, social and security consequences regionally and worldwide.

The situation today

On September 16, 2009 the White House released an annual list of countries who are major producers or transporters of illegal drugs. According to the statement, Bolivia, Burma and Venezuela have "failed demonstrably" to meet their obligations to fight drugs as promised under international agreements. Other countries on the list include Afghanistan, Colombia, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Bahamas, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Jamaica, Laos, Panama, Paraguay and Peru.

Nevertheless, today there is a high level of international consensus on drug control. Adherence to the three main United Nations conventions is now almost universal, about 95 % of all

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countries. Thanks to this international cooperation, opium production has become 70 % lower than a century ago. If opiate use had remained the same as in the early years of the 20th century, the world would have approximately 90 million opiate users, rather than the 17 million which we have today. However, cocaine use grew last century. Moreover, there are new, widely abused synthetic drugs which did not even exist a century ago.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is a global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime. UNODC was established to assist the UN in better addressing a coordinated, comprehensive response to the interrelated issues of illicit trafficking in and abuse of drugs, crime prevention and criminal justice, international terrorism, and corruption. UNODC operates in all regions of the world through an extensive network of field offices. UNODC relies on voluntary contributions, mainly from Governments, for 90 per cent of its budget.

These goals of UNODC are pursued through three primary functions: research, guidance and support to governments including technical/financial assistance in the adoption and implementation of various crime-, drug-, terrorism-, and corruption-related conventions, treaties and protocols.

In pursuing its objectives, UNODC makes every effort to integrate and mainstream the gender perspective, particularly in its projects for the provision of alternative livelihoods, as well as those against human trafficking. Nevertheless, despite the hard work of UNODC, the problem of illegal drugs and narcotics still remains threatening and requires even more cooperation to enhance effectiveness of UNODC efforts.

Why cooperation is not effective enough?

Lack of security enables criminal activity to thrive. It is no coincidence that illicit drugs are grown in parts of Afghanistan and Colombia largely uncontrolled by the central government. It is also no coincidence that routes for smuggling drugs, people, money and arms follow the path of least resistance – where border controls and law enforcement are weak, officials are corrupt and seizure rates poor.

In addition, successes in supply reduction in one place tend to lead to increased drug production elsewhere. This has been observed in the Andean countries where production has shifted away from Peru and Bolivia towards Colombia. Also, drug policy is shifting to a more explicitly

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tolerant configuration in Europe and a few other countries, but retains its fierceness in most of the world.

UNODC faces the difficulties to come with the problem because UNODC's budget structure continues to be characterized by high levels of fragmentation between its two programs, the UN International Drug Control Program and the UN Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Program. The most common problems are related to the management of financial, human and physical resources in field offices. In financial management, areas of concern include the use of project resources, the assignment of office costs to projects, budget management and financial controls in respect of bank.

The best that UNODC interventions can do in this situation is to reduce the damaging consequences of drug use and drug control. Because no prevention, treatment or enforcement strategies have demonstrated ability to substantially affect the extent of drug use and addiction.

Despite all the progress achieved in overcoming this problem, drug trafficking and related organized crime remain grey areas that provide enormous amounts of money. UNODC urges Member States to tackle this problem more vigorously by ratifying and implementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; however, the problem will be solved only when corruption and organized crime is eliminated on the governmental and business level in all countries.

UN General Assembly and Afghanistan

After the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was overthrown, opium production has increased dramatically. The exploding drug trade in Afghanistan is both a symptom and a source of instability and corruption. It is not just a case of evil drug traffickers taking advantage of a good but ineffective government. The traffickers and their agents are all too often corrupt government officials themselves, who forge alliances of convenience with insurgent groups, including the Taliban, to protect their businesses and distribution routes that mainly go through Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and then through Russia as well as through Pakistan.

There are no quick solutions to tackling this growing plague. But that doesn't mean policymakers can't make progress in undercutting the drug trade. On 3 January 1980, a number of Member States of United Nations General Assembly requested an urgent meeting of the Security Council

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to consider the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security. The latest UN General Assembly resolution taken in 2007 called to tackle the challenges in Afghanistan including terrorist threat, the fight against narcotics, development of Afghan government institutions, the strengthening of the rule of law, etc.

According to this resolution the UN General Assembly must be focused on smart courses of action that yield long-term results – and away from using force that end up backfiring. However, there are many contradictions among members of the General Assembly concerning the way of dealing with the Afghanistan problem. The United States for example, advocate aerial spraying of crops, which means large-scale forced eradication. However, this policy will not work because it might cause a temporary dip in production, but it will also force prices higher, thereby increasing incentives to produce more the following year. Drug traffickers will get tremendous profits by selling at inflated prices, while farmers whose livelihoods are destroyed could be driven into the arms of insurgent groups.

Another superficially attractive solution that has been getting increasing attention is that of legalizing the production of opium for medicinal purposes. For example, Australia, France, India, Spain, and Turkey currently dominate the export market for licit opiates. However, these countries, with their effective law enforcement and an absence of widespread armed conflict, are much better placed to meet any such demand than conflict-ridden Afghanistan.

Consequently, this option would solve a problem that does not exist and fail to address several that do. A black market offers much higher profits for the illegal output of opium, thus it is more appealing for farmers. Moreover, in this case the Afghan government will face immense logistical challenges, particularly in the violent and lawless south, where opium production has exploded despite an absolute ban for the past six years.

In such a manner, most of the things the United States might do to improve the situation tend to make other aspects of the problem worse. Even if we make progress on one dimension, it tends to set us back in some other way. However, the problem is if the US tends to act more actively, other members including China tend to not be involved in this problem so deeply. Moreover, public support for the war is visibly waning in Europe (as it is in the United States). In addition, there is a basic contradiction between the Obama administration's decision to increase US force levels and its desire to get greater allied assistance.

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What to do?

In addition to governmental and business levels, the problem of illegal drug trafficking has to be solved in regional level starting from supply, trafficking and consumption of illegal drugs and narcotics. This must include border management, precursor chemicals, financial flows and drug abuse prevention and treatment. The international community needs to have solid understanding of key aspects of the drug chain, in particular the levels of illicit drug cultivation and production, and how drug use represents a public health issue.

Although they share many of the same concerns, a major distinction in perspective separates producer and consumer countries. Producers are especially concerned with economically appealing substitutes and assistance for law enforcement. But they typically resist programs with a “war on drugs” mentality, which they suspect would undermine their own control over their territory. Consumer countries are often loath to support stronger measures against drug consumption and expect producers to take the greatest initiatives.

Recommended Resources

BBC News, Prescription Drugs Overused. February 2001.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/1182115.stm>

Congressional Research Service, International Drug Control Policy Report.

<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34543.pdf>

General Assembly, 42nd plenary meeting 28 October 1993.

<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r012.htm>

Nick Grono and Joanna Nathan in The Christian Science Monitor, The Christian Science Monitor "Defeating Afghanistan's Drug Fix", International Crisis group, 31 May 2007.

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4877&l=1>

Parliamentary and Research Service, ILLEGAL DRUGS AND DRUG TRAFFICKING.

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/bp435-e.htm>

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Social and Humanitarian Assistance - International cooperation for narcotic drugs control.
<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/United-Nations/Social-and-Humanitarian-Assistance-INTERNATIONAL-COOPERATION-FOR-NARCOTIC-DRUGS-CONTROL.html>

UN General Assembly, Resolution 61/18 Adopted by the UN General Assembly: The Situation in Afghanistan, 24 January 2007, A/RES/61/18.
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,UNGA,,AFG,4562d8cf2,45f95f762,0.html>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Annual Report 2009.
http://www.unodc.org/documents/about-unodc/AR09_LORES.pdf

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc/annual-report.html>