

## **Main Messages for UNODC World Drug Report 2008**

Over the past few years, in its annual World Drug Report, UNODC has been reporting that the world drug situation has stabilized (or has been “contained”).

One in every twenty people (age 15-64) has tried drugs at least once in the past 12 months – that is less than 5 per cent of all adults. Problem drug users (people with severe drug dependence) are less than one tenth of this already low percentage: 26 million people, about 0.6 per cent of the planet’s adult population.

This year’s World Drug Report also shows progress that has been made in a century of drug control (since the Opium Commission first met in Shanghai in 1909 to control the opium trade).

However, the main message of this year’s World Drug Report is that containment is under threat: 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 had a record opium harvest in 2007: as a consequence, the world’s illegal opium production almost doubled since 2005. However, the problem is very localized. Most cultivation (80 per cent) took place in 5 southern provinces, which are the most unstable.

The same pattern is evident in Colombia, where coca cultivation increased by a quarter (27 per cent) in 2007, though remaining some 40 per cent below the peak reached in 2000. Coca leaf and cocaine production were highly concentrated: ten municipalities (5 per cent of the country’s 195) accounted for almost half of all cocaine production and for one third of the cultivation – and these regions are not under the control of the Government.

The world cannabis market is stable or even slightly down. Nevertheless, there are worrying trends: 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 psycho-active substance (Tetrahydrocannabinol, THC) almost doubled on the US market between 1999 and 2006, from 4.6 per cent to 8.8 per cent.

Use of amphetamine-type stimulants, like methamphetamine and ecstasy, has levelled off at the global level since the year 2000. Nonetheless, production and consumption remain a major problem in East and South-East Asia and markets are starting to develop in the Near and Middle East.

Because of steady demand for cocaine in Europe and improved interdiction along traditional routes, drug traffickers have targeted West Africa. The region’s health and security is at risk. States in the Caribbean, Central America and West Africa, as well as the border regions of Mexico, are caught in the cross-fire between the world’s biggest coca producers (the Andean countries) and biggest consumers (North America and Europe).

The World Drug Report 2008 discloses the fear – though not yet the evidence – of emerging markets for drugs in developing countries.

UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa has called for a stronger focus on health – the first principle of drug control. “Drug dependence is an illness that should be prevented and treated like any other”, he said. He also spoke out in favour of human rights of drug addicts and against the death penalty for drug-related crimes. “Although drugs kill, we should not kill because of drugs”, said the UNODC Executive Director.