

**Forum:** Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

**Issue:** Decreasing the economic dependence of developing countries on illegal drug production and trade

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## INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “Drug trafficking is a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution, and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws”<sup>1</sup>. The UNODC has been monitoring the situation since 1997, with its most significant contribution towards the matter being the World Drug Report, a six-part publication outlining the resolution of the drug problem, which will be further analyzed in the next sections of the guide.

Over the years, the illicit drug trade has grown in popularity, reaching worryingly high numbers. It has drawn an impressive amount of people and countries into a persistent state of psychological and financial dependence. The drug problem has grown to such proportions that already existing approaches have to be reconsidered, with new prospects for solutions to account for its current forms.

A United Nations 1998 report named "Economic and Social Consequences of Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking", states that: "With estimates of \$100 billion to \$110 billion for heroin, \$110 billion to \$130 billion for cocaine, \$75 billion for cannabis and \$60 billion for synthetic drugs, the probable global figure for the total illicit drug industry would be approximately \$360 billion. Given the conservative bias in some of the estimates for individual substances, a turnover of around \$400 billion per annum is considered realistic."

When it solely comes to this year, it has been estimated that, by the 11th of May 2021, \$143 billion have already been spent on illegal drugs. It is a fact that the drug economy has now developed into a major sphere of influence in many developing countries. A 1993 study that gives evidence supporting this argument is that the informal sector in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), of which illicit drugs accumulate a significant part, ranges in numbers from 30% in Pakistan to even 70% in Bolivia. To add to that, it is estimated that in

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<sup>1</sup> “Drug Trafficking.” United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime, [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/index.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/index.html).

Bolivia 10% of workers are actively involved in the illicit drug trade, namely cocaine, generating up to \$700 million annually.

In order to find feasible solutions to reduce the economic dependency of LEDCs on drug trade, it is first of all important to understand the motives behind drug production and sale, which mostly come in the form of economic benefits including an increase in economic growth and employment. As mentioned earlier, growth in the economic department, as well as the increase in employment, are two aspects that greatly benefit from the illicit drug trade and production. However, it is important to mention that the greater part of drug export earnings still remains abroad. On the other end of the spectrum, not only does this phenomenon lead to overdependence on illegal action, but it also causes detrimental effects to the environment.



Figure 1. already-discovered illegal drug trafficking routes<sup>2</sup>

## DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

### Import

Buying or bringing in products from another country.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "Illegal Drug Trade." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 24 May 2021, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illegal\_drug\_trade.

## Illegal drug manufacture

In a criminal law context, drug "manufacturing" occurs when a person is engaged in some phase of the illegal drug production process. Those that supply such precursor chemicals, specialist facilities, or merely agree to assist in the production of drugs can be punished.<sup>4</sup>

## Money laundering

The act of moving money that has been obtained illegally through banks and other businesses to make it seem to have been obtained legally<sup>5</sup>

## Illegal drug trafficking

According to the United Nations and the Rule of Law, Drug trafficking is a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution, and sale of substances that are subject to drug prohibition laws<sup>6</sup>

## Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the most generally used metric of an economy's size. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the sum of all values contributed in a given economy. The value added is the difference between the value of the products and services produced and the value of the products and services required to produce them, also known as intermediate consumption.

## The Drug Problem

The illicit cultivation, production, manufacture, sale, demand, trafficking and distribution of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, including amphetamine-type stimulants, the diversion of precursors, and related criminal activities<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Import." *Cambridge Dictionary*, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/import](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/import).

<sup>4</sup> "Drug Cultivation and Manufacturing." *Findlaw*, 24 Jan. 2019, [www.findlaw.com/criminal/criminal-charges/drug-manufacturing-and-cultivation.html](http://www.findlaw.com/criminal/criminal-charges/drug-manufacturing-and-cultivation.html).

<sup>5</sup> "Launder." *Cambridge Dictionary*, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/laundry?q=laundry](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/laundry?q=laundry).

<sup>6</sup> Mohamed Rashid, Norul. "Drug Trafficking - United Nations and the Rule of Law." *United Nations*, United Nations, [www.un.org/ruleoflaw/thematic-areas/transnational-threats/drug-trafficking/#](http://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/thematic-areas/transnational-threats/drug-trafficking/#).

<sup>7</sup> "Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem." *UN ILibrary*, United Nations, 31 Dec. 2011, [www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210555838c003](http://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210555838c003).

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Illegal Drug History**

The concept of the illegal drug trade firstly emerged in China in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. China was considered an important trade target at the time, with opium trade being one of its main trade sources since 3000 B.C. Western Powers along with India saw the potential Chinese trade had at the time, aiming to seize the advantage over its government as soon as the 18th century. In 1838, the number of opium users in the country was estimated to range between 4 and 12 million. The Chinese government retaliated by imposing an import ban on opium in both 1814 and 1831.

The ban imposed by the Chinese government sparked controversy around the topic, with the British government actively favoring its principles of free trade, fair diplomatic recognition among all countries and states, as well as the merchants' requests being considered and ultimately supported. All this tension led to the Two Opium Wars, leading to the worsening of China's position and the obligation to pay large amounts of taxes for the opium they had destroyed.

In the US, a prohibition on the importation, transportation, production, and sale of alcohol from 1920 to 1933 was put in place but proved impossible to be enforced. Due to the significance of such a decision, a massive wave of reaction was created, with organized crime rising and the modern American Mafia taking action.

### **Modern Trade Routes in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs)**

Although substance use and abuse are more common in More Economically Developed Countries rather than LEDCS, illegal drug production, use, and trade are three sectors that have been detected vastly in regions like Africa, South America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.

#### **South America**

A region heavily involved in drug trading and trafficking over the past two decades has been South America. Having created a path to the United States as well as Europe for the passage of illegal drugs coming from Colombia through Central America, Mexico, and Caribbean countries, Venezuela has been perceived as a trade location by the United Nations since 2002. A recent study by the Abba Eban Institute showed an undiscovered route towards West Africa through Europe and North Africa, mainly used for cocaine smuggling for terrorist activities.

#### **Africa**

To connect the trade routes of South America to the ones in Western Africa, it is important to mention that money from transactions regarding cocaine produced in Colombia are, on many occasions, laundered by countries such as Senegal, Ghana, and Nigeria. A recent report from the Africa Economic Institute regarding the value of illegal drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau showed that their total value equals to double the value of their annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

## Asia

Illegal drug smuggling in Asia first appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the aforementioned events of China and its opium trade. After the end of the Cold War in 1991, Central Asia along with China and Russia developed and eventually thrived in the heroin trade, particularly since there was vast advancement in the development of illegal drug markets.

Large fields of activity when it comes to illicit drug trade consisted of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, or as they were called at the time in their drug trafficking involvement, the “Golden Crescent.” Having routes towards both Europe and the United States, it is logical to believe that other countries like Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos, the so-called Golden Triangle, look for other options in the rest of Asia and in Australia, without however passing upon the name of the U.S.

## Economic Effects of Illegal Drug Trade and Production in LEDCs

The effects that illegal drug trade and production have in the Less Economically Developed Countries of the world present two different sides of the spectrum. While the negative implications outweigh the advantages, it is fair to argue that this involvement has helped several countries in different aspects.

### Positive Effects

When referring to illegal drug trafficking, it is clear to understand that the problem would not present any logical benefits to society. However, since the topic is directly related to the economy of certain peoples and nations, it may present some “advantages” to a portion of the people involved. The so-called “benefits” of this kind of production/trade system for Less Economically Developed Countries focus on the indirect increase in employment due to the higher demand for foods and crops, as well as the import business of such products. It is important to mention, however, that since the advantages presented are not legally valid, the significance of these phenomena varies for each country.

The illicit drug industry could be described as self-working, given its affluent process. Under normal circumstances in the system, traffickers, buyers, and users are easily found. Nowadays, the number of people drawn into illicit drug production and trade is steadily increasing. The demand increases each and every day, with sellers investing in the drug field generating outrageous amounts of money.

Employment is another aspect where drug production and trade have assisted. Due to the increase in demand, especially over the last years, numerous job opportunities have been formulated for unemployed workers looking for an alternative way of generating money to survive. When taking into account the working hands needed for their production, their delivery, their sales and buyings, and finally their consumption, it is clear to see how many working opportunities this industry consists of.

To understand the positive effects of illegal drug production and trade, here is a quote from a 1994 document published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime:

“One study estimates that the informal sector, of which illicit drugs play a prominent part, equals 50-70 percent of the official domestic product in Bolivia, 30-40 percent in Colombia, 30 percent in Pakistan, and 50 percent in Peru. In Bolivia, it is estimated that 10 percent of the working population is involved in the illicit coca trade, which generates between \$650 million and \$700 million annually. Between \$150 million and \$200 million of drug-related revenues stay in the country. In 1990, coca and cocaine exports from Bolivia amounted to an estimated 25 percent of the value of legal exports”.

### **Negative Effects**

While the issue may present a couple of positive effects, its drawbacks are of great significance. One of the most noticeable problems that come with this increase and growth in the industry is the overreliance on this sector, which ultimately leaves other economic sources being drawn away. This may have a detrimental effect on many other sectors of a country, as well as its economy as a whole since any possible false move in drug trade could lead to the collapse of its economy.

For the population in countries where drugs are produced, growing them is a real option when it comes to job opportunities. Due to the extremely low level of difficulty of the job, many unemployed workers get into business and after a while suffer from addiction. Since these countries lack the facilities, public health, and recovery programs that More Economically Developed Countries provide, the increased number of users is likely to be an unmanageable problem in countries with little resources.

Another severe problem of the drug economy is its damage on the environment. The stages of production of drugs like heroin and cocaine are devastating for the environment, with flora and fauna being destroyed. Examples like Peru and Bolivia support this belief, given their alarming environmental situation.

## Drug Use Continues to Rise

Global estimated number of people who use illicit drugs\*

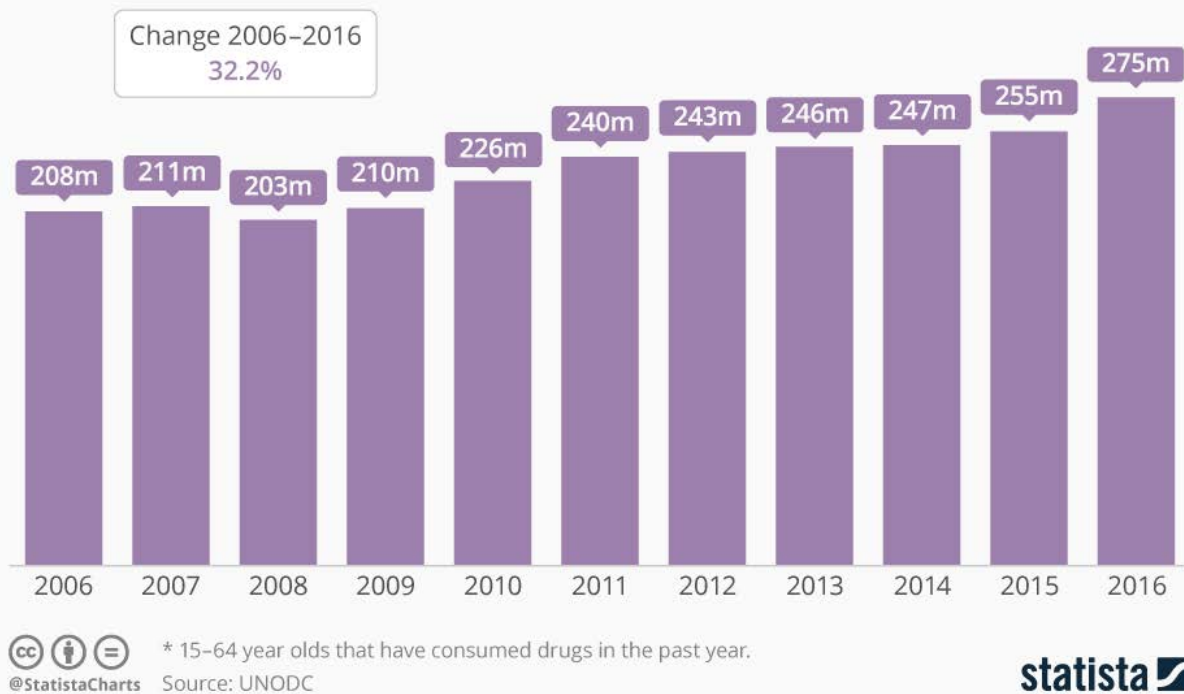


Figure 2. Drug Use Over the Years<sup>8</sup>

### Social Consequences of Drug Trafficking

Other than the “positive” and negative impact the issue possesses on the economy and development, social impact is also heavily noted. This particular impact could be divided into different categories, them being family, health, education, and environment, which was mentioned above.

#### Family Sector

<sup>8</sup> Armstrong, Martin, and Felix Richter. “Infographic: Drug Use Continues to Rise.” *Statista Infographics*, 27 June 2018, [www.statista.com/chart/14461/global-drug-users/](http://www.statista.com/chart/14461/global-drug-users/).

Family is considered as the first community humans are inducted to. Based on the type of relationships inside the family, a child is influenced in shaping his attitudes and values based on these of the parents and thus preventing or drifting him in the use of drugs and the active involvement in their illegal trade and production. Although family can be a source of substance misuse, it can also be an effective tool for prevention and recovery. This has led to an extra amount of weight put on the families in LEDCs, whose problems multiply when understanding that it is their obligation to educate their children correctly to stay away from the drug industry. It is particularly pressing when taking into consideration the often discouraging economical position they are at.

### **Health Sector**

The harmful effects of drug abuse on one's health are well-known, clinically proven, and published in various cases. In 1995, there were 532,000 drug-related emergency department visits in the United States, up from 404,000 in 1988, a 30 percent rise. In a more recent study, it was recorded that in 2019 itself, 70,630 people died due to drug-involved overdose, 32,301 more than the ones recorded in 2010. This obviously illustrates the scope of drug-related health issues, both for the addicts and for society as a whole.



**Figure 1. National Drug-Involved Overdose Deaths\*  
Number Among All Ages, by Gender, 1999-2019**

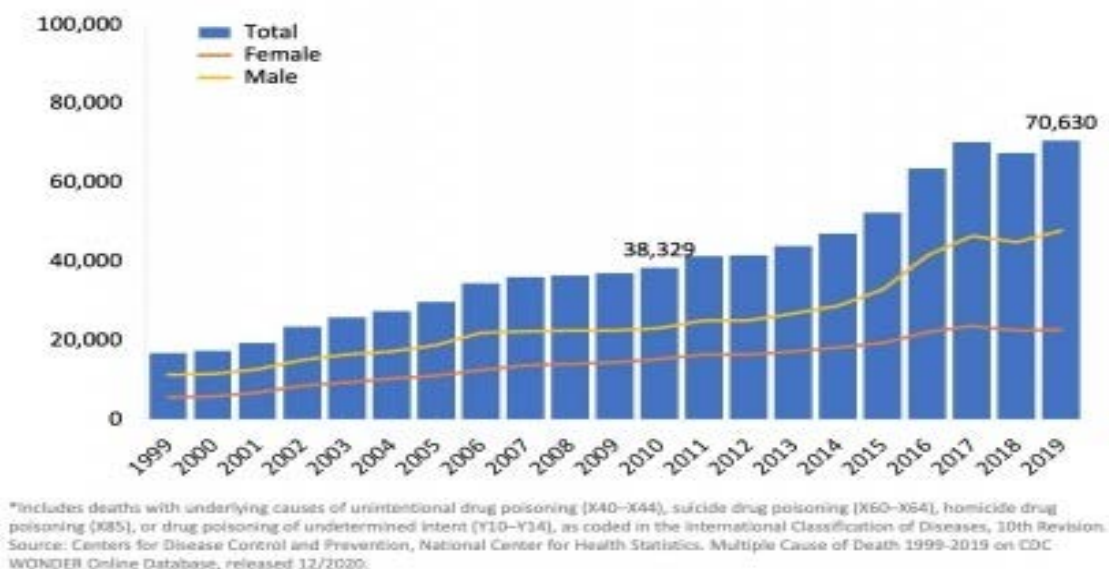


Figure 3. National drug-involved deaths in us over the past two decades<sup>9</sup>

## Education Sector

It is widely accepted that education is a critical point of action in the prevention of drug abuse. One of the most important ways to combat the drug crisis is through education. Learning valid behavior and ethics in school so as to prevent children from unfortunate circumstances and eventually entry into any negative situations, including the drugs industry, is incredibly vital. Sadly, statistically based data on the general efficacy and cost-effectiveness of different interventions are seldom available.

## Case studies on the effect of drug dependence

### The Example of Afghanistan

Nowadays, attention from the entirety of the global population is drawn to Afghanistan when referring to opium production and trade. While the British Empire produced and supplied significant amounts of opium back in the nineteenth century, Afghanistan was not heavily invested in the subject. Nevertheless, in recent years, the Golden Crescent

<sup>9</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. "Overdose Death Rates." *National Institute on Drug Abuse*, 25 Feb. 2021, [www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates](http://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates).

(Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran) and especially Afghanistan has developed into the larger producer and exporter of heroin and opium.

A study carried out in 2007 by the UNODC shows that Afghanistan is considered to produce more than 90% of the world's opium output. Since the Taliban's collapse in 2001, the quantity of land used to illegally produce opium in Afghanistan has steadily expanded, reaching numbers up to 193,000 hectares in 2007. In the same study it was reported that opium exports from Afghanistan to neighboring nations yield \$4 million in income.

To raise concerns around the issue, a similar survey carried out by the UNODC in accordance with the Afghan National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) in 2021 shows that the total area under opium cultivation had reached 224,000 hectares in 2020, as it concluded that the recent pandemic did not affect the opium season, rather than developed it. Nevertheless, it is expected that, due to the pandemic crisis and the problems it has caused to other economic sectors, opium production will increase in the next few years.

### **Colombia's Drug Barons**

Drug barons in Colombia consist of some of the most dangerous and wanted men by the United States Intelligence Office. Pablo Escobar, the most notable out of all members, started developing Colombia's cocaine business back in 1975. Since then, Colombia's cocaine industry reached extreme demand in the United States, with new routes and networks being discovered. Along with the later-developing Medellín Cartel, the two sides were characterized as "the worst of two evils" by the then president of Colombia, César Gaviria Trujillo.

Over the next two decades, the cocaine industry found extended routes in its research for pathways to the United States. Back in 2012, Colombian drug lords were caught in Venezuela, with local police working in accordance with the Venezuelan, Colombian, and US authorities, and were put into custody. The overall cases of arrests of such kinds of people originating from Colombia have been numerous, therefore causing many questions and concerns about the efficiency of drug trafficking and the barons of Colombia.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED**

### **United States of America**

The federal government is opposed to the illicit drug trade in the United States. Nevertheless, state laws differ widely and often dispute federal laws. Despite the US government's official stance against the drug trade, US government officials and funds have been involved in the drug business and were captured and prosecuted during the Iran-Contra scandal, accused of using the drug trade as a covert means of money for the Contras. Furthermore, the CIA is accused of organizing the 1980 Cocaine Coup in Bolivia in order to establish a military government.

In 2013, the Organization of American States reported that cocaine trafficking in the United States produced \$34 billion in revenue. According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, illicit drugs were sold in the United States for \$100 billion in the same year.

### **Bolivia**

Bolivia is the world's third-largest producer of coca crops. The area under coca bush farming was projected to be 31,000 hectares in 2010, with the majority of it located in the Yungas and Chapare regions. Currently, total cultivation in the country is still well below levels seen in the early and mid-1990s, though it has again risen over the last two decades.

In 2008, President Evo Morales gave the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) three months to exit the country, blaming them for fueling rather than combating drug trafficking. Two years later, Russia decided to lend Bolivia \$100 million to help it purchase a range of Russian military helicopters to help with anti-drug operations. As a consequence, coca production in Bolivia decreased by 12% from 2010 to 27,200 hectares in 2011.

### **Colombia**

Colombia's illicit drug trade relates to the production and distribution of illegal drugs by Colombian criminal organizations. Colombia has had four main drug trafficking cartels and several "bandas criminales", else how referred to as BACRIMs, which have dominated several facets of Colombian society and politics.

One of the roots of the Colombian conflict is the Colombian government's attempts to curb the presence of drug-related criminal gangs. The Colombian conflict is a low-intensity battle between competing narco militant gangs, guerrillas, and drug cartels battling each other for power and against the Colombian government's efforts to combat them.

## **Afghanistan**

Since the start of the 21st century, Afghanistan has become the world's leading illegal drug manufacturer. Its heroin crops account for more than 90% of global illegal heroin output, as well as more than 95% of supply in Europe. In 2007, the export value of the country amounted to \$4 billion US dollars, with the land used for opium production surpassing that of Latin America. Opium manufacturing employed over 400,000 Afghans in 2017, which was more than the Afghan National Security Forces.

## **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**

“For two decades, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has been helping make the world safer from drugs, organized crime, corruption, and terrorism”

The UNODC is linked with the monitoring and researching of markets from the illegal drug industry, with the goal of forming a well-rounded view and understanding of their proceedings and dynamics.

One of the main actions taken by the UNODC is the World Drug Report, an annual publication providing a wealth of data and research to help the international community in carrying out operational advice on a range of Member States' commitments. Published in six separate booklets, the most recent publication, that being the World Drug Report 2020, addresses the world drug problem. Each booklet carries out a different mandate.

## **World Health Organisation (WHO)**

Based on the call for assistance on the issue by the Commission of the implementation by the Member States of the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action and their 2014 Joint Ministerial Statement, WHO's a role in the issue is the providence of an analysis on the impact of the world drug problem.

More analytically, the WHO states in a self-published document that their mandate includes the “prevention of drug use and treatment of drug use disorders; prevention and management of drug-related bloodborne infections, including HIV and viral hepatitis; and improved access to controlled medicines”. In the same document, however, which was published in 2016, the World Health Organization promises future actions to be taken towards the solution of the problem.

## **TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1839-1842	First Opium War takes place between the UK and the Qing dynasty in China, with the UK prevailing and forcing China to sell Indian grown opium
1856	The second Opium War takes place with France joining forces with the UK in their fight against China
1868	The UK Pharmacy Act is established, restricting opium sales and imports
January 23rd, 1912	The International Opium Convention takes place
1997	The First report of the annual World Drug Report is published by the World Health Organisation
March 11th-12th, 2009	The Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation is adopted by the World Health Organization as a counter to the World Drug Problem
March 13th-24th, 2014	A Joint Ministerial Statement of the High-Level Review by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

## **RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES, AND EVENTS**

### **Resolution 9(I), ECOSOC**

Resolution 9(I) was adopted in 1946 and called for the establishment of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), to assist the ECOSOC in supervising the implementation of international drug control treaties. Following its success, the General Assembly expanded the Commission's mandate and enabled it to function as the main body of the UNODC in 1991.

The CND examines and analyzes the global drug situation, taking into account the contraction in supply and demand. It takes initiative by making decisions and resolutions. The CND meets once a year to discuss and vote on a variety of decisions and resolutions. As the regulatory body of the United Nations drug program, the CND meets at a session near the end of every year to discuss financial and logistical matters.

### **Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs**

The 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs aims for the prohibition of the manufacture and supply of particular drugs not used in medical treatment or research. It led to the update of the Paris Convention to include the large number of synthetic drugs invented in the past 30 years since the Convention's implementation on July 13th, 1931. It was lastly amended in March 1972 and the changes came into force on 8 August 1975.

The aim of this Convention is to fight opioid trafficking through international cooperation. Its primary goal is to restrict opioid possession, consumption, trade, sale, import, export, and production to medicinal and research purposes only. Second, it fights the drug trade by enlisting international collaboration to stop and punish traffickers.

## **PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

### **National Crime Agency**

The National Crime Agency is a recently developed non-governmental organization located in the UK with its scope being the cooperation with partners from around the globe to take action and tackle the problem of illegal drugs reaching the UK. It has been perceived as one of the most significant involvements of an Agency in the lands of the UK when it comes to the drug trade

The NCA closely works with countries in regions such as South Africa, the Middle East, Europe, the Caribbean, and West Africa to intercept all shipments from reaching UK coastlines. The Agency works with partners such as Border Force, the Royal Navy, as well as other European and American authorities to handle the issue.

While the Agency does not possess a direct relation with Less Economically Developed Countries, it plays a significant role in the reduction of drug trafficking from them to such a developed country.

### **Extradition Treaty Between the US and Colombia**

In 1981, the US implemented an extradition treaty with Colombia. This allowed Colombia to extradite any Colombian trafficking squads suspected of drug trading to the US and put them on trial. This was a major issue for cartels in the country since any type of involvement in drug trade conversations with the US would lead to imprisonment. The then Colombian Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla and a number of Supreme Court Judges were vocal advocates of the extradition treaty.

However, a problem seemed to emerge with the “make or break” strategy of the cartel, leading to several conflicts inside the country and a lot of drug lords pushed out of the country and hiring other members to execute supporters of the extradition treaty.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

### **Advertising bans and other class-specific preventative measures**

It is important to establish preventative measures, including but not limited to advertising bans, to minimize the expansion of drug consumption. Such measures and policies, according to research, should include changes in price in order to affect the youth and low-income individuals and groups, the groups in greatest need of protection. As mentioned, therefore, Member States’ policy on drugs could include measures including advertising bans or generally class-specific measures.

### **Revision of applicable legal frameworks**

Some Member States have proposed either the decriminalization to the legalization of certain drugs. It is important to differentiate between legalizing and decriminalizing drugs; legalization

refers to the official authorization of behavior that is currently illegal, in this case, the production, distribution and sale of drugs, while decriminalization refers to the removal of some penalties or the deregulation of sectors pertaining to the aforementioned activities. Delegates should note that a mix could be followed, for example, a Member State could be in favor of legalizing or decriminalizing solely consumer use, while others also include drug production and trafficking.

### **Mainstreaming counternarcotics dimension in development programs**

It is important to include counternarcotics policies in any designed development programs, while also ensuring that this is not approached in a mechanical one-fits-all solution but in a result-oriented and adaptable manner. It is furthermore important to keep any expectations in the short run realistic, albeit the need for immediate improvements in that sector, to achieve the best results possible.

### **“Alternative Development” policies**

Alternative development essentially entails providing alternative income opportunities through reforms in the agricultural and other relevant sectors with the aim of redirecting people away from the production and trade of illicit drugs. Their purpose is essentially to counter the incentive provided to many farmers that choose to grow drug crops, the lack of any other sources of income.

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