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ILLEGAL TRAFFIC

Memorandum by the Secretary-General

1. The Commission will recall that during its fifth session (104th meeting) it discussed the question of very large seizures of opium in Thailand, to which the representative of the United States of America had brought its attention (E/CN.7/210), wherein it was stated that there was reason to suspect that the opium came principally from Burma. The Commission referred to its debates on this question in paragraphs 46 and 47 of its report to the Economic and Social Council (E/1889 : E/CN.7/216).
2. The Secretary-General had previously, on 2 November 1950, transmitted a copy of the United States communication to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burma, and has now received from the Burmese Ambassador of Burma to the United States of America a note verbale dated 28 March 1951 relating to the matter, the relevant part of the text of which he accordingly has the honour to transmit to the Commission:

"In reference to the Secretary-General's note of November 2, 1950, to the address of the Foreign Minister of Burma on the subject of seizures in Thailand of opium allegedly of Burmese origin, the Ambassador of Burma to the United States of America has the honour to convey the following comments on behalf of the Government of the Union of Burma. The Government of the Union of Burma, and the Ambassador, trust that these comments will prove of value to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

"2. The allegation that all the opium seized in Thailand is produced in Burma will not bear examination. It is true that poppy cultivation is still practised in the Trans-Salween portion of the Shan State of the Union of Burma, but this practice is by no means confined to this area. It is a well-known fact that poppy cultivation exists in those parts of Yunnan,

Indo-China and Thailand which adjoin the Trans-Salween Shan State. Furthermore, the opium produced in the above-mentioned area of the Shan State is inferior to, and yields less prepared opium than, the opium of Chinese origin, and suffers in competition with the more popular latter variety. Consequently, the Government of the Union of Burma is compelled to repudiate any suggestion that all the opium seized in Thailand is produced in Burma. In fact, its own sources of information suggest that only about 10 per cent of the opium so seized is of Burmese origin. But it is probable that a considerable percentage is first smuggled into Burma and then into Thailand. The extremely long frontier presents severe obstacles to the Union Government's efforts to end this smuggling.

"3. It has been the consistent policy of the Government, both under the British Colonial regime and under the new independent regime, to bring about a progressive reduction in poppy cultivation, the final aim being to control and maintain production sufficient merely to meet the legitimate requirements of the country. By 1942, this campaign had made great headway, and poppy cultivation had been restricted to the Trans-Salween Shan State, those areas of the Kachin State of the Union of Burma known as the Hukawng Valley and the Triangle, and the Naga Hills. Furthermore, the opium grown in the Hukawng Valley, the Triangle and the Naga Hills is so inferior as to be fit only for local consumption. The remoteness of all these areas, the fact that opium represents an important cash crop to the local inhabitants, and the difficulty of providing them with a ready alternative means of raising money have contributed to make it impossible for the Government to put a stop to poppy cultivation in these areas. Furthermore, the disturbed conditions brought about by the Japanese invasion of Burma, and subsequently by internal strife, have unfortunately meant that the campaign against poppy cultivation has lost impetus, and in fact it has not been possible to determine with any accuracy the acreage under poppy cultivation in these areas in recent years. With the gradual return of normal conditions, the Government of the Union of Burma will be in a better position to devote more attention to this problem.

"4. As regards consumption within the country, the opium policy of the Government was revised, after the Second World War, to prohibit the sale

of opium for profit, and a programme which aimed at eliminating the opium habit within a period of five years was drawn up. The programme was to be implemented by

- (a) Opening clinics for treatment of addicts;
- (b) Strengthening the Staff of the Excise Department and ensuring their co-ordination and co-operation with similar staff of the neighbouring states so as to put an end to smuggling;
- (c) Suppression of poppy cultivation, at the same time providing the inhabitants with suitable alternative cash crops.

Unfortunately, the internal unrest within the country to which reference has already been made, has served as a set-back to this programme. However, a start has been made by the establishment of opium clinics in Rangoon and by the Government's refusal to issue opium for addicts except through these clinics. The opening of clinics in places other than Rangoon has, like the other measures proposed, had to be deferred. Other means to reduce smuggling and consumption such as the imposition of deterrent punishments, and the legal prohibition of the possession of opium consumption equipment and assembly of persons for consumption purposes, have been put into effect with, it is believed, good results.

"5. It remains the policy of the Government of the Union of Burma to eradicate the opium habit in the country as soon as possible by putting the measures mentioned earlier into effect. To this end, they would be only too glad to co-operate with the Governments of Yunnan, Indo China and Thailand, and with the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, with a view to finding ways and means of suppressing poppy cultivation and the smuggling of opium. As a first step, they would suggest that a United Nations Committee be established to supervise and co-ordinate the efforts of the governments concerned."

3. The Secretary-General desires to draw the Commission's attention particularly to paragraph 5 of this communication in which it was suggested that a United Nations Committee be established to supervise and co-ordinate the efforts of the Governments of Yunnan, Indo-China and Thailand with a view to suppressing poppy cultivation and the smuggling of opium.
