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Addendum

Thematic debate on tools for enhancing the effectiveness of international drug control and international cooperation in the fight against illicit drugs, specifically: (a) data collection for effective drug control, including on the misuse of cyberspace and (b) strengthening of regional and cross-border cooperation, including data-sharing

1. At its 7th and 8th meetings, on 17 March 2009, the Commission considered agenda item 3, “Thematic debate on tools for enhancing the effectiveness of international drug control and international cooperation in the fight against illicit drugs, specifically: (a) data collection for effective drug control, including on the misuse of cyberspace and (b) strengthening of regional and cross-border cooperation, including data-sharing.”

Deliberations

Subtheme (a). Data collection for effective drug control, including on the misuse of cyberspace

2. The Deputy Director of the Division for Treaty Affairs of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) introduced the subtheme (a), “Data collection for effective drug control, including on the misuse of cyberspace”, and the Director of the Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs of UNODC gave an audio-visual presentation.

3. Statements were made by the representatives of Japan, Germany, Argentina (who also spoke on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are



members of the Group of 77 and China), Nigeria, the United States of America, Colombia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Thailand, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the Sudan.

4. Statements were also made by the observers for South Africa and Lebanon.

5. Speakers highlighted the need for accurate, reliable, relevant, timely and comparable data as such data were essential for forming an accurate picture of international drug markets, identifying trends in those markets, developing policies and programmes, and evaluating and monitoring policies and programmes. Several speakers recognized two important priorities in the area of data collection for effective drug control: the improvement of Member States' capacity to collect data on local and regional drug markets and the improvement of data collection tools at the international level to make them more relevant and simple while avoiding the duplication of efforts.

6. Several aspects were viewed as critical to enhancing the reliability of data collection and the objectivity of data sources. Among them, speakers highlighted the need to develop tools at the national level and noted that such a task was the responsibility of national authorities. The international community should support States that lacked capacity to improve their data collection systems.

7. Speakers were of the view that existing data collection tools at the international level needed to be reviewed to ensure that they were effective, both in terms of enabling Governments to provide statistics and in terms of collecting the most relevant information. In that connection, any new international data collection tool should:

(a) Be simple and streamlined in order to ensure an optimal response rate;

(b) Include a broad spectrum of indicators, thus enabling a comprehensive assessment of the illicit market for each drug, including indicators on cultivation, production, prices, purity and use;

(c) Collect data from a variety of sources, including health, social welfare, law enforcement and criminal justice services, and corrections, treatment and population-based sources;

(d) Build on existing national, regional and international systems and experiences, in order to avoid duplication of effort and make full use of existing data.

8. Several speakers stated that evidence-based assessments of international drug control continued to be limited owing to gaps in the data. Such gaps were related mainly to the lack of capacity, both technical and financial, in many Member States. Several speakers, while recognizing the fundamental problem of lack of capacity, suggested some ways forward, including by:

(a) Making better use of reliable supplementary data sources to improve coverage;

(b) Standardizing both data collection tools and indicators to improve comparability of data provided by Member States;

(c) Providing assistance to States hampered by capacity problems.

9. Many speakers recognized the need for transparency and for acknowledging that uncertainty existed with regard to data. Indicators of supply, such as price and purity, and indicators of demand, such as prevalence of use, were highlighted by many Member States as important and should be improved and their coverage increased. In that respect, emphasis was placed on the need to look at indicators and analyses that improved understanding of every relevant aspect of the entire drug chain, from financing to production, distribution and use.

10. Several speakers noted that a meaningful assessment of progress on drug control should be based on evidence-based data and information. A wide variety of sources of such data could be taken into account in order to monitor trends and the drug control situation. It was also pointed out that encouraging and developing the capacity of Member States to use those different indicators and to draw them from different sources required technical assistance.

11. It was stressed that those involved in the sale of illicit drugs through the Internet operated through States with comparatively weak Internet regulations. Cannabis seeds with a high content of tetrahydrocannabinol had been ordered through the Internet and distributed internationally through postal and courier services, demonstrating that measures to counter cybercrime required law enforcement and customs authorities to cooperate at the international level.

12. One speaker indicated that his country, owing to its competitive pharmaceutical industry, was being targeted as a source for the supply, through illicit Internet pharmacies, of preparations containing psychotropic substances.

Subtheme (b). Strengthening of regional and cross-border cooperation, including data-sharing

13. Members of the Secretariat introduced subtheme (b), “Strengthening of regional and cross-border cooperation, including data-sharing”.

14. Statements were made by the representatives of Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Nigeria, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Thailand and Pakistan.

15. Statements were also made by the observers for India and Belarus.

16. A representative of the Secretariat provided an overview of the tools that UNODC made available to enable, support and strengthen cross-border and regional cooperation. Specific reference was made to initiatives such as computer-based training, border liaison office programmes, container security programmes, the Paris Pact initiative, the Automated Donor Assistance Mechanism (ADAM), the Targeted Anti-trafficking Regional Communication, Expertise and Training (TAR CET initiative and the Rainbow Strategy targeting the flow of illicit opiates originating in Afghanistan.

17. Several speakers referred to specific cross-border, multilateral, subregional and regional initiatives as examples of successful cooperation and information exchange in the fight against drug trafficking, such as Operation Channel, the West Africa Joint Operations initiative, the West African Drug Regulatory Authorities Network, the Drug Abuse Information Network for Asia and the Pacific, the Triangular Initiative among Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan and memorandums of understanding in support of specific cooperation efforts.

Those initiatives had yielded concrete results in terms of higher rates of interdiction for illicit drugs and chemical precursors, and several speakers expressed their willingness to continue and expand those initiatives. It was noted that the States most affected by the drug problem were in need of specialized technical equipment to enhance capacities and the effectiveness of drug control measures along borders.

18. Data-sharing was identified as a key element underpinning regional and cross-border cooperation. Speakers acknowledged the role of United Nations agencies in facilitating the exchange, collation and dissemination of data at the regional and global levels. Particular reference was made to the annual reports questionnaire and the biannual seizure reports mechanism, as well as to the role played by INCB in supporting the Pre-Export Notification Online (PEN Online) system for tracking precursor transactions. The interdiction of financial flows used by drug trafficking syndicates was also identified as an area that could benefit from international cooperation in data-sharing. Speakers underscored the importance of Member States having access to tools that support the exchange of information. Some speakers noted that States required technical and capacity-building assistance to strengthen agencies involved in collecting, analysing and sharing data.

19. It was observed that the growth of the global market for amphetamine-type stimulants called for increased cooperation between States in their efforts to curb trafficking in those substances, as well as their precursors and raw materials. National centres to monitor drug abuse were described as valuable for identifying emerging trends in drug markets and support was expressed for the global Synthetics Monitoring: Analysis, Report and Trends (SMART) programme. The potential for trafficking by sea was underscored, and mention was made of the need for intelligence-sharing concerning vessels suspected of being involved in trafficking. It was acknowledged that international efforts to strengthen controls needed to be complemented by similar measures at the national level.

20. The Chairperson of the Commission summarized the salient points of the thematic debate as follows:

(a) It was necessary to collect accurate, reliable, relevant, timely and comparable data for the development of international drug control policy;

(b) It was recognized that collecting data on the drug situation should be made a priority. The role of UNODC in providing global and regional estimates was acknowledged and the possibility of using other sources was mentioned;

(c) Existing international data collection tools needed to be reviewed to ensure that they enabled Governments to collect and provide relevant information;

(d) Data collection systems should be simple and streamlined in order to maximize the number of replies from States. Data collection systems should include a broad range of indicators, thus enabling a comprehensive assessment of the drug situation, including indicators on the prevalence of illicit drug use, cultivation, production, drug markets, prices and purity; data from law enforcement and criminal justice services should also be included;

(e) Data collection systems should be enhanced by building on existing national, regional and international systems and experiences;

(f) Given that a lack of capacity had led to gaps in data and in responses to existing instruments, resulting, in turn, in an incomplete understanding of the international situation with regard to illicit drugs, it was noted that technical cooperation was essential for enhancing data collection at the national, regional and international levels;

(g) International data collection efforts needed to be driven by Member States;

(h) Objective and reliable reports of regional and subregional organizations and academic institutions, among other sources of information, should be used in a transparent manner to supplement information made available by Member States;

(i) In order to effectively combat cybercrime, a relatively recent form of criminal activity not restricted by national boundaries, international cooperation needed to be further enhanced, including through the provision of technical assistance and training tools;

(j) The illegal sale of internationally controlled substances through the Internet, including through Internet pharmacies, posed a significant risk for youth and other groups and needed to be tackled. In that regard, the INCB Guidelines for Governments on Preventing the Illegal Sale of Internationally Controlled Substances through the Internet provided a useful tool for tackling the problem;

(k) It was important that States had access, through the UNODC technical assistance programme, to the tools that supported information exchange;

(l) The usefulness of PEN Online and of the TARCET initiative, in tackling the problem of precursors and in providing information was highlighted;

(m) Trafficking in amphetamine-type stimulants continued to pose a serious global threat and States supported the strengthening of measures to tackle that problem;

(n) International cooperation and data-sharing remained an essential element in the development of coherent and coordinated strategies to combat drug trafficking;

(o) The importance of cross-border, regional and international law enforcement operations to control drug trafficking was emphasized. The continued success of such operations highlighted the importance of cooperation at all levels and of information exchange;

(p) States emphasized the importance of building the capacity of those Government agencies involved in the interdiction of illicit drugs to collect, analyse and share data;

(q) Establishing national monitoring centres to monitor drug abuse would help support the identification of emerging trends in drug trafficking.