

IDPC ADVOCACY NOTE – THE UNITED NATIONS DRUG POLICY REVIEW, INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON THE ERADICATION OF ILLICIT CROPS AND ON ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) is a global network of NGOs and professional networks that specialise in issues related to illegal drugs. The Consortium aims to promote objective and open debate on the effectiveness, direction and content of drug policies at national and international level, and supports evidence-based policies that are effective in reducing drug-related harm and take a development-oriented and rights-based approach. It produces occasional briefing papers, disseminates the reports of its member organizations about particular drug-related matters, and offers expert consultancy services to policymakers and officials around the world.

BACKGROUND

In 1998, the world community gathered in New York for a United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) to review and strengthen the global drug control system. The outcome of that meeting, attended by political leaders from over 180 countries, was a political declaration that committed member states to work together towards “eliminating or reducing significantly the illicit cultivation of the coca bush, the cannabis plant and the opium poppy by the year 2008,” as well as “eliminating or significantly reducing the illicit manufacture, marketing and trafficking of psychotropic substances, including synthetic drugs, and the diversion of precursors,” and “achieving significant and measurable results in the field of demand reduction.” The UNGASS also agreed a series of action plans designed to meet those objectives, and agreed to conduct a high-level review of progress and achievements after 10 years. It is this 10-year review that is currently being conducted by member states and the lead UN agency, the Vienna-based United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

When member states gathered in March at the 2008 Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), they held a two-day thematic debate on the extent to which the objectives set in 1998 had been met, and the challenges that remain. While this debate fell some way short of a comprehensive review of the experience of the last 10 years, many of the government and UN speeches recognised that the hoped-for significant reductions in the supply of, and demand for, controlled drugs had not been achieved, and that new challenges had emerged that should be given more prominence within international agreements and action plans. At the 2008 CND, a process for completing the review, and for mapping out a way forward for the global drug control system, was agreed – culminating in a high-level political meeting to be held in Vienna in March 2009.

THE PROCESS

Member States have agreed that five working groups will be established, that will consider progress related to each of the action plans agreed in 1998. These working groups will cover, respectively:

- Supply reduction (manufacturing and trafficking); 23-25 June 2008 (3 days)
- Countering money-laundering and promoting judicial cooperation; 30 June-2 July 2008 (2 ½ days)
- International cooperation on the eradication of illicit crops and on alternative development; 2-4 July 2008 (2 ½ days)
- Drug demand reduction; 15-17 September 2008 (2 ½ days)
- Control of precursors and Amphetamine-Type Stimulants; 17-19 September 2008 (2 ½ days)

These groups will meet just once, and are open to all UN member state governments. NGOs cannot attend the working groups, but non-governmental experts can be included in any member state’s delegation to the meetings. Each working group will debate the contents of a discussion document produced by the UNODC, and will seek to bring forward proposed text on their specialist area by October 2008 for discussion at a series of intersessional meetings of the CND. In turn, these intersessional meetings will aim to bring forward materials for agreement at the political meeting in March 2009. While the final format of the outcome of that meeting is yet to be decided, it is likely that the focus will be on a political declaration. The outcome of the working groups is therefore crucial, and NGOs can influence this process by bringing forward ideas for the groups that cover their area of interest, and encouraging government delegates to introduce (and fight for) humane and effective policies and programmes to be incorporated into the forward programme. This note concentrates on the proceedings of the working group on international cooperation on the eradication of illicit crops and on alternative development.

WHAT TO ADVOCATE FOR

As noted, the Political Declaration signed at the 1998 UNGASS called on Member States “to develop strategies with a view to eliminate or significantly reduce the illicit cultivation of the coca bush, the cannabis plant and the opium poppy by 2008.” Ten years later, the international community remains no closer to reaching the objectives laid out in the 1998 political declaration, as even the UNODC has acknowledged. While the UNODC has reported a decline in the number of hectares of illicit coca cultivation, increased yields and improved cultivation and processing has resulted in a 19% increase in cocaine production since 1998. Meanwhile, reductions in opium poppy production in South-East Asia have been offset by the increase in production in Afghanistan; indeed, according to UNODC estimates, global illicit opium production doubled between 1998 to 2007. The Executive Director’s report on the *Action Plan*

on *International Cooperation on the Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development* presented at the 51st session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in March 2008 concludes: “Global illicit cultivation of coca bush and opium poppy could be described as largely unchanged in the past decade.”¹ The Executive Director’s report also points out that “there was little evidence that eradication reduces illicit cultivation in the long run” and that alternative development programs remain inadequate. Yet forced eradication efforts (including fumigation) -- and the enforcement of opium cultivation bans -- continue to be promoted by many member states, despite costing billions of dollars and creating serious negative consequences for legitimate economic and social development, and the human rights of affected communities. Among its many conclusions, the report encourages states to integrate alternative development strategies into broader national development programs.²

Since 1998, considerable progress has been made in developing a greater understanding of the impact of and lessons learned from undertaking rural development in illicit drug producing areas. In depth reports such as *Alternative Development: A Global Thematic Evaluation* (2005), the *Thematic Evaluation of UNODC’s Alternative Development Initiatives* (2006), as well as the consultative process undertaken under the auspices of the EC/FAO/GTZ Project, *Development in a Drugs Environment: A Strategic Approach to Alternative Development*, constitute an improved body of knowledge from which evidence-based conclusions for the future can be drawn.³

IDPC members and supporters should therefore take any opportunity to encourage government delegates to the working group on international cooperation on the eradication of illicit crops and on alternative development, taking place July 2-4 in Vienna, to:

1. Call for an alternative livelihoods approach which puts socio-economic development and human rights protections at the core of international efforts. These efforts should be “main-streamed” into the broader development agendas of national and local governments, donor countries and the international financial institutions for both improving overall quality of life (access to health care, education, etc.) and promoting economic development to increase opportunities for employment and income generation.
2. Call for financial support and a long-term commitment to address the root causes that are driving illicit crop cultivation, such as armed conflict, human insecurity and poverty, in order to achieve sustainable alternatives for communities in the affected areas.
3. Stress the inextricable link between supply and demand in the global drugs markets and therefore the inherent limitations on achieving quick results in reducing illicit cultivation. Unrealistic expectations and targets should be avoided as these tend to build political pressure to apply repressive eradication strategies that lead to unsustainable results. Member states should also recognize the historical tendency of consumers to replace drugs produced with illicit crops with synthetic equivalents, which has resulted in neither decreased harms nor decreased scale of demand.
4. Call for local governments and international donors to work in collaboration with local communities and to treat farmers involved in the cultivation of drug-linked crops as partners in development; criminalisation of such farmers is an obstacle for involving them in a meaningful development process.
5. Stress that development assistance in illicit drugs environments should be undertaken in full compliance with the primary objectives of human rights protection, poverty alleviation, conflict resolution, peace building and enhancing human security.
6. Towards that end, call for an end to forced eradication (including aerial spraying) and for the adoption of the principle that development assistance should never be made conditional on reductions in illicit drug crop cultivation. Once alternative livelihoods are in place, governments can work with local community organizations and members to reduce and if possible eliminate crops destined for the illicit market.
7. Call for recognition of the traditional, cultural and beneficial attributes of the coca leaf and support its continued use for those ends. Towards that end, call for the “declassification” of coca; in other words, its removal from Schedule One of the 1961 Convention on Narcotic Drugs.
8. Call for a new approach to evaluating the impact of alternative livelihoods programs that ceases counting the number of hectares of crops eradicated and instead is based on human development indicators.
9. Call for an assessment of the impact of international trade agreements, high tariffs and national subsidy schemes to identify obstacles for legal agricultural products from illicit drug producing countries to enter the international market.
10. Call for clear statements on the need for an end to forced eradication and drug control conditionality and a focus on an alternative livelihoods approach in the political declaration to be adopted at the high-level meeting in Vienna in March 2009.

Further details, and relevant reports and analysis, on the 10-year review can be found on a special section of the IDPC website (www.idpc.info) or on a website created by TNI (www.ungassondrugs.org). If you have any questions or comments on this advocacy note, send them to IDPC at cy@internationaldrugpolicy.net.

1 E/CN.7/2008/2/Add.2, *The world drug problem, Fifth report of the Executive Director, Addendum, Action Plan on International Cooperation on the Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development* Commission on Narcotic Drugs, 51st session, Vienna, March 10 - 14, 2008.

2 See also *Preparations for the high-level segment of the 52nd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Open-ended intergovernmental working group on international cooperation on the eradication of illicit drug crops and on alternative development*, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/UNGASS/01-Preparations.html>.

3 *Alternative Development: a Global Thematic Evaluation; Final Synthesis Report* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.XI.13), 2005; UNODC, Independent Evaluation Unit, *Thematic Evaluation of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Alternative Development Initiatives*, November 2005; E/CN.7/2008/CRP.II, *Developing a Strategic Approach to Alternative Development, Complementary drug-related data and expertise to support the global assessment by Member States of the implementation of the declarations and measures adopted by the General Assembly at its twentieth special session*, Report by the European Commission (EC), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the German Society for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 27 February 2008.