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**Forty-third Meeting of Heads of  
National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies,  
Asia and the Pacific**

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Item 3 of the provisional agenda \*\*

**Major regional drug trafficking trends and  
countermeasures****Current situation with respect to regional and subregional  
cooperation in addressing and countering the world drug  
problem****Report by the Secretariat****I. Introduction**

1. The present report provides an analysis of the current situation concerning drug trafficking and other transnational crimes in South Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific and contains a description of the activities conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in those subregions. The South Asia subregion (covering Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka) encompasses post-conflict, least developed and middle-income countries; they face both common and unique challenges.
2. Threats arising from transnational organized crime in South-East Asia and the Pacific affect the subregions themselves, as well as neighbouring subregions such as East Asia and South Asia. At the same time, criminal networks operating in South-East Asia have achieved global reach, trafficking large quantities of high-profit methamphetamine, substantial consignments of illicit wildlife and forest products and an increasing range of counterfeit industrial goods. Those networks also continue to engage in the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons, mostly for the purposes of sexual and labour exploitation.
3. Displacement of organized criminal groups from neighbouring countries and regions has coincided with a significant shift in the regional drug market, marked by a massive expansion of methamphetamine trafficking, particularly emanating from northern Myanmar, with trafficking networks shipping the drug across South-East Asia to more distant and lucrative markets. At the same time, the amount of precursor chemicals seized remains very limited when compared with the volumes of drugs being illicitly produced and trafficked within and from the region.

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4. Uneven economic development and the demand for cheap labour are enabling organized criminal groups to traffic and smuggle large numbers of people within the region. Environmental crimes in South-East Asia illustrate the global reach of organized criminal groups and the transnational nature of illicit supply chains, and the region continues to play a key role in the transportation of high-value, highly endangered and illegally sourced wildlife and timber for the regional market but also for other parts of Asia and global markets. Organized criminal groups also appear to be increasingly targeting South-East Asia as a hub in the global supply chains of various fake goods, especially illicit tobacco products, and they are using the region to manufacture, repackage and distribute falsified medicines.
5. Although some illicit trade flows in South-East Asia cross borders clandestinely along jungle tracks or through unofficial seaports, most illegal commodities in the region are transported using the same infrastructure and routes as legitimate commerce. The dramatic expansion in some of these illicit flows in recent years has been facilitated in part by the freer movement of people, goods and capital across South-East Asia and to the rest of the world, partly assisted by free trade agreements and connectivity initiatives aimed at boosting trade and overall economic growth.
6. UNODC delivers technical assistance within the framework of the regional programme for South Asia for the period 2018–2021 and the regional programme for South-East Asia for the period 2014–2020, which provide the strategic scope of UNODC work, cooperation and partnership within the subregions and specified timeframes. The objective of the regional programmes is assisting Member States in effectively addressing their security, justice and health priorities on the basis of the rule of law and in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## **II. Organized crime and drug trafficking**

### **A. South-East Asia and the Pacific**

#### **1. Prevention of drug-related crime and trafficking in drugs**

7. The illicit drug market in East and South-East Asia is undergoing a profound transformation that is associated with a steep increase in the manufacturing of synthetic drugs, especially methamphetamine, particularly in northern Myanmar. However, the illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of heroin remains a significant public security and health problem in the Mekong region, as well as the neighbouring country of Malaysia. Heroin continues to be reported as the second most-frequently trafficked drug in East and South-East Asia.
8. To further expand the demand for methamphetamine in South-East Asia and neighbouring regions, transnational organized criminal groups are trafficking large amounts of both methamphetamine tablets and crystalline methamphetamine to markets in the region and, increasingly, to other parts of the world. The latest available data for 2018 show a substantial increase in the amount of methamphetamine seized, to 126 tonnes, compared with 82 tons in 2017.
9. Supply-side indicators suggest a notable decrease in heroin production in South-East Asia. Seizure data and other supply and demand indicators, such as decreases in the potential amount of opium for heroin and expert perceptions on heroin use, confirm this trend.
10. Drug trafficking groups are diversifying the types of chemicals and production methods, while the quantities of precursors seized remain far below supply. This could be the result of several factors, including changes in the average purity of the drug found in the region. In fact, the average purity of heroin at the retail (street) level in Australia and China has decreased recently. This indicates that organized criminal groups have been supplying inferior quality heroin to compensate for decreases in the availability of heroin originating in the Golden Triangle.

11. The region has been frequently reported as a source for synthetic opioids found in other parts of the world. However, several factors indicate that a regional market for synthetic opioids may be developing, including the persistent and considerable demand for traditional opiates such as heroin and an expanding market for new psychoactive substances.

12. The displacement of some ketamine manufacture from China to the drug-producing regions of Myanmar has followed a pattern similar to that seen with the migration of methamphetamine manufacture. Quantities of ketamine seized have declined in China and Hong Kong, China, since reaching their peak in 2015, while seizures in South-East Asia have increased.

13. According to the recent UNODC study, *Transnational Organized Crime in South-East Asia: Evolution, Growth and Impact*, the illicit market for methamphetamine (in both tablet and crystalline form) across the region and neighbouring countries, including Australia, Bangladesh and New Zealand, is estimated to be worth between \$0.3 and \$1.4 billion. By comparison, the total value of the regional retail sales of heroin in East and South-East Asia and Oceania (Australia and New Zealand) is approximately \$8.7–10.3 billion annually.

14. Transnational criminal groups, mainly from Asia and the Americas, continue to use the Pacific island States and territories as hubs for the illicit trans-shipment of drugs, including cocaine and methamphetamine and its precursor chemicals, primarily en route to Australia and New Zealand. Increasingly, however, those States and territories are also a destination for those drugs.

## 2. Trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants

15. Trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation and for forced labour<sup>1</sup> are the most commonly detected forms of trafficking in persons in South-East Asia, but victims in the region may also be trafficked for forced begging, forced or sham marriages, organ removal or other forms of trafficking.<sup>2</sup> Most victims of trafficking for labour exploitation are forced to work in the construction, agriculture, manufacturing, hospitality or domestic sectors<sup>3</sup> and often come from the same place, speak the same language or share the same ethnic background as their traffickers.<sup>4</sup>

16. The majority of the flows within South-East Asia involve victims being trafficked from countries in the subregion, such as Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam, to countries including Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, as well as to destinations outside of the subregion, particularly Australia, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea and countries in North America and the Middle East.

17. Efforts to counter the smuggling of migrants are related not only to combating criminal activity but also to protecting the fundamental rights of migrants. The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing that Convention, and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration are designed to support international cooperation on governing international migration and to combat the smuggling of migrants.

<sup>1</sup> In article 2 of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) of the International Labour Organization, forced labour is defined as all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered him or herself voluntarily.

<sup>2</sup> See *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2018* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.IV.2).

<sup>3</sup> Counter Trafficking Data Collective, Global Data Hub on Human Trafficking. Available at [www.ctdatacollaborative.org/](http://www.ctdatacollaborative.org/).

<sup>4</sup> European Court of Auditors, *EU Support to Fight Human Trafficking in South/South-East Asia*, Special Report, No. 9 (Luxembourg, 2017); and Global Data Hub on Human Trafficking.

18. The UNODC Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific launched the Voluntary Reporting System on Migrant Smuggling and Related Conduct in 2013. It is a tool developed to assist participating States in sharing data and facilitating analysis of the phenomenon of the smuggling of migrants in Asia and the Pacific, with the aim of strengthening responses, using evidence-based data, among the 26 participating States and territories.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Illicit financial flows, money-laundering and asset recovery

19. Instances of money-laundering continue to rise across the Asia and the Pacific region in relation to both domestic predicate crimes and other transnational organized crimes. The vast majority of the financial gains from such crimes has to be “cleaned” to allow criminal networks to enjoy the benefits and to reinvest in other criminal activities.

20. To counter the growth in money-laundering, including the corresponding growth in the illicit cross-border movement of cash, UNODC is supporting jurisdictions to comply with relevant United Nations conventions and the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force on combating money-laundering and the financing of terrorism and proliferation. This includes assisting countries in preparing for the latest round of Task Force mutual evaluations and supporting those countries that have been evaluated and found not to have performed well. The Task Force operates the International Cooperation Review Group, a mechanism to bring poorly performing countries under review and establish action plans to improve the operational effectiveness of legal frameworks so that law enforcement entities can make better use of financial investigation techniques and activities to combat money-laundering prosecutions and asset forfeiture.

21. All countries in the Asia-Pacific region have been assessed recently by the Financial Action Task Force or will be shortly. Failure to meet the Task Force standards can lead to public listing as a jurisdiction with deficiencies in the countering of money-laundering and the financing of terrorism and, in the worst case, blacklisting, which can lead to a loss of access by a country to international banking relationships and a decline in overseas investment, not to mention general reputational loss. A small number of countries in the region are already under review by the Task Force or are destined for review. Through its Global Programme against Money-Laundering, Proceeds of Crime and the Financing of Terrorism, UNODC supports countries under review and seeks to mitigate the risks associated with blacklisting by supporting capacity-building in the area of countering money-laundering and the financing of terrorism and providing assistance in other areas where required.

### 4. Corruption

22. Across the Asia-Pacific region, corruption continues to facilitate and perpetuate transnational organized crimes, including the smuggling of drugs and chemicals, people, wildlife, natural resources and weapons and insurgents. These lucrative activities often involve organized criminal groups that do not hesitate to resort to bribery, intimidation and violence to facilitate their illegal transactions.

23. All States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have completed the first cycle of the Mechanism for the Review of Implementation of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, under which States parties’ implementation of chapters III and IV of the Convention are assessed. In 2018, Indonesia and Malaysia completed the second cycle, which focuses on chapters II

<sup>5</sup> Australia, Cambodia, Fiji, France, Indonesia, Japan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Maldives, Marshall Islands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Thailand, Turkey, Tuvalu, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Vanuatu, French Polynesia (reported by France), Hong Kong, China, New Caledonia (reported by France) and Norfolk Island (reported by Australia).

and V of the Convention. Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam are now either under review or finalizing their review under that cycle; the reviews of Brunei and Singapore are planned to start in 2020. Throughout the review process, the reviewing experts identified gaps and technical assistance needs, highlighting the need to improve the capacities of specialized anti-corruption and law enforcement authorities, improve the protection of witnesses and reporting persons, introduce liability of legal persons, criminalize illicit enrichment, trading in influence and bribery, and address corruption in the private sector and the laundering of proceedings of crime.

24. In 2018, UNODC worked with all 10 ASEAN member States and Timor-Leste to support the implementation of the Convention against Corruption and enhance the capacities of national anti-corruption bodies. Malaysia, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam updated their anti-corruption laws to reflect some of the recommendations arising from the Implementation Review Mechanism process. Indonesia indicted a company for corruption for the first time, after introducing corporate liability for corruption offences. Malaysia resolved a number of major corruption cases and initiated anti-corruption reforms that could have a positive impact throughout the entire ASEAN region.

25. In 2018 and 2019, UNODC also supported ASEAN countries in promoting integrity and preventing corruption within national public administrations, including law enforcement agencies. The very first regional workshop on promoting integrity reforms and addressing key elements of corruption prevention was organized in May 2019 and was attended by 60 practitioners from law enforcement, anti-corruption and oversight entities from all ASEAN member States. Participants in the workshop identified ASEAN countries' experiences in internal and external oversight accountability systems and the necessary steps to promote law enforcement reforms. An updated UNODC integrity checklist for law enforcement authorities, which also reflects the nexus between law enforcement corruption and gender, discrimination and trafficked persons, was developed and can be used by law enforcement agencies in the region to develop integrity reforms. It will be piloted with the Royal Thai Police in 2019 with UNODC support and could also be applied to other types of law enforcement agencies in the region (customs officials, judges, prosecutors and lawyers).

## 5. Cybercrime and cybersecurity

26. Cybercrime and cybersecurity are considered an essential matter by Member States and other international organizations. Cybercrime continues to grow in the Asia-Pacific region and is quickly evolving from an emerging threat to a criminal enterprise that could have a market value in excess of the illicit drug economy. Cybercrime incorporates a number of offences, including hacking, computer-related forgery and fraud-like phishing, as well as content offences such as disseminating online child sexual abuse material and copyright offences.

## 6. Terrorism and violent extremism

27. South-East Asia has been at continued risk of terrorist and violent extremist groups, some fuelled by local conflicts and separatist notions, others inspired by international terrorist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) and Al-Qaida. In recent years, attention has turned to the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters, who travel from their home countries to Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic to join terrorist groups (mainly ISIL/Da'esh, but also groups linked to Al-Qaida).

28. Of the estimated global total number of foreign terrorist fighters who travelled from their home countries to the Middle East (about 40,000 by 2015),<sup>6</sup> about 1,000

<sup>6</sup> UNODC, *Investigation, Prosecution and Adjudication of Foreign Terrorist Fighter Cases for South and South-East Asia* (Vienna, 2018), p. 5.

came from South-East Asia.<sup>7</sup> Some of the South-East Asian foreign terrorist fighters who joined ISIL formed a battalion which they named “Katibah Nusantara”. The battalion participated in the conflicts in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, including by committing heinous terrorist acts such as beheadings, and played active roles in radicalizing, recruiting, financing and training other individuals through interpersonal connections and through social media and messaging applications.

29. Other major concerns are the foreign terrorist fighters and their families (about 30 per cent are women and children) who are returning or who are still in the Middle East and want to return. Some of them will face criminal prosecutions and prison sentences upon return, while others will simply go back to their previous lives. The concerns revolve around those individuals with violent extremist mindsets bringing enhanced military capability and the motivation to conduct attacks in their home countries, neighbouring countries or any third countries where they might relocate. Their skills are likely to strengthen and inspire local terrorist groups.

30. Through several projects, UNODC has been actively supporting Governments in the region to enhance their law enforcement and criminal justice responses to terrorism, terrorism financing, foreign terrorist fighters and the prevention of violent extremism. This support consists of multi-agency capacity-building initiatives, tailored policy and legislative advice and regional and cross-regional workshops and conferences to strengthen cooperation. Enhancing collaboration and partnership between law enforcement and criminal justice agencies and civil society actors is another focus of the work of UNODC to address, in a holistic manner, the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism and terrorism. UNODC has made active contributions to ASEAN efforts towards the adoption of regional and national multi-stakeholder strategies and action plans on preventing and countering violent extremism. UNODC also provided advice to ASEAN member States on updating their national counter-terrorism legal frameworks in line with international law, including human rights and rule-of-law safeguards.

## **B. South Asia**

### **1. Prevention of drug-related crime and trafficking in drugs**

31. The South Asia region continued to face challenges related to trafficking in controlled substances, trafficking in persons, illicit financial flows, corruption, terrorism and drug use.

32. This can be attributed to two factors: (a) its geographical position between the world’s two largest areas of illicit opium production; and (b) its proximity to Central, South-East and South-West Asia and the Middle East, with good maritime connections through the Indian Ocean and porous land borders and weak bilateral and regional cooperation among law enforcement agencies. The region also experiences large migratory flows and, at the same time, it has good transport infrastructure and an advanced information technology sector, allowing for diversified clandestine operations through the Internet, broad use of the darknet and the forging of illegal travel documents.

33. There is potential for South Asia to be used as a source, transit and destination region for trafficking in persons, drugs, counterfeit products, wildlife and arms, as well as smuggling of migrants, corruption, traditional channels of informal or illicit money transfer and other illegal financial operations. The region also has a large youth population, among which there are high unemployment rates and acute social problems, making them easy targets for trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants, sexual exploitation and other forms of involvement in criminal activities, including violent extremism and terrorism. The scale of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons is growing in the light of the above factors, the size of the population

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

(one fifth of the global population), limited women's and children's rights and traditions of early marriage and bonded labour.

34. South Asia remains a target for traffickers smuggling illicitly produced opiates from Afghanistan to Europe and North America along the "alternate" southern route. This route has gained more prominence since 2018. In addition, coastal States in South Asia are vulnerable to maritime trafficking as a result of their exposure to trafficking routes across the Indian Ocean. Opiates, cannabis and amphetamine-type stimulants remain the main substances of concern in the region, with record levels of cannabis herb seized in Bangladesh and India during 2017.

35. Drug-related challenges facing South Asia include heroin trafficking, the rise of methamphetamine trafficking and manufacture and the smuggling of pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Synthetic drugs are now replacing the natural and semi-synthetic drugs that have been abused over decades. Prescription drugs and over-the-counter pharmaceutical preparations such as codeine-based cough syrups, diazepam and Proxyvon are being trafficked and abused.

36. India and Myanmar reported the detection of a few amphetamine laboratories to UNODC over the period 2013–2017. While the precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants seized in both countries were mainly ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, smaller quantities of 1-phenyl-2-propanone (P-2-P) and phenylacetic acid were also seized, providing indirect evidence that some amphetamine manufacture may also have taken place there, in addition to the probably more significant manufacture of methamphetamine.

37. There has been a thirtyfold increase in the amounts of methamphetamine pills (known as "yaba") seized in Bangladesh since 2011, with over 53 million tablets seized in 2018. The amounts of illicitly produced opiates seized throughout the region have been increasing and there was an upward trend in the amount of heroin seized in Bangladesh in 2018. It is estimated that the increase in supply has significantly affected use and addiction rates. Seizures of "yaba" increased significantly in 2018 compared with 2017, while the amounts of cocaine and cannabis seized decreasing during the same period. The Government conducted a countrywide anti-drug operation in 2018, focusing on border areas to halt the influx of drugs with the aim of destroying the routes and sources of "yaba". Throughout the nationwide raid that took place from mid-May 2018 to July 2018, Bangladesh law enforcement authorities arrested nearly 35,000 drug-related suspects and in all of 2018, 437 alleged traders were killed.

38. In 2018, the Government of Bangladesh amended the Narcotics Control Act to provide for the death sentence or life imprisonment as punishment for producing, trading in or using several narcotics, including "yaba", heroin and cocaine. The Government is planning a comprehensive project to implement forensic testing facilities all over the country to identify drug users. The diversion of controlled substances, particularly ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, from licit to illicit channels has continued, as has the smuggling of pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, notably codeine-based cough syrups (which remains a considerable challenge in Bangladesh, Bhutan and India), and of synthetic opioids such as tramadol (which has been encountered in significant quantities across the region and was scheduled as a narcotic drug in some countries of the region in 2018). Furthermore, several jurisdictions in South Asia are considering making use of the death penalty for drug-related offences.

39. In Sri Lanka, there was an increase of 43 per cent in the amount of heroin seized in 2018; that increase has continued in 2019. Police also seized cannabis, popularly known as "Kerala ganja", believed to be brought in from India in many cases. Cannabis has become a serious social challenge in the war-affected region in the north. Heroin is reportedly being trafficked from Afghanistan through Pakistan, and Sri Lanka may have become a transit hub for the drug trade in the region: the detection of 22 tons of narcotics, including more than 1 ton of heroin by Combined Task Force 150 at sea and the nearly 600 kg of heroin detected onshore by law enforcement and security

forces in Sri Lanka in the first two months of 2019 indicate the sheer magnitude of the problem.

40. The Government of Sri Lanka intends to end its long-standing moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

41. In Bhutan, marijuana, Proxylon and Nitrosun continue to be the most commonly trafficked and abused drugs. The number of people arrested in connection with drug trafficking increased from 712 in 2014 to 1,190 in 2018, with unemployed youth (1,650) forming the biggest group of those arrested, followed by students (595) and private sector employees (429).

42. In Nepal, the amounts of cannabis and hashish seized have increased significantly. The data show that smuggling of prescription drugs into the Kathmandu valley in recent times is on the rise. Traffickers have reportedly switched to trafficking in pharmaceutical drugs instead of in drugs such as cannabis resin and heroin, owing to lenient punishment for trafficking in controlled pharmaceutical drugs. Youths account for the largest proportion of end users of prescription drugs, as such drugs are more accessible and affordable to users.

43. Heroin and cannabis resin oil are the most commonly used drugs in Maldives, but lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA, commonly known as “ecstasy”) and other synthetic drugs have been found in recent years. In 2019, the Maldives Customs Service seized 111 grams of “ecstasy” from five different postal packages. There has been a spike in cases of attempted drug smuggling through the post. There were 68 seizures from postal packages in 2018, including 1.74 kg of drugs concealed in parcels during March and April last year.

44. In India, between August 2018 and August 2019, there has been an increase in maritime trafficking in drugs, with the State of Gujarat emerging as a frequently used hub. India is also an emerging manufacturing centre for synthetic opioids, with over 100 kg of fentanyl seized in the country during the same period. Seizures of trafficked tramadol, codeine and Valium, among others, have shown that most of these pharmaceutical opioids reach West Africa illegally and most originate in South Asia, with India believed to be a major production hub. There is a threat of India emerging as a manufacturing centre of synthetic opioids such as fentanyl and tramadol. Tramadol seizures in India in 2017 and 2018 were reported in the western part of the country, in particular in the following three locations: (a) the State of Gujarat, which accounts for a third of the total turnover of the country’s pharmaceutical sector; (b) coastal areas and in the city of Mumbai (suggesting substantial trafficking in tramadol by sea); and (c) New Delhi, in particular at the airport. There was a seizure of 100 kg of heroin from a boat in Gujarat in March 2019 and the Combined Maritime Forces seized 3,100 kg of cannabis resin in January 2019 and 900 kg of heroin in December 2018. One of the largest seizures of pseudoephedrine was recorded in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, in May. A large seizure of 532 kg of heroin was recorded in Punjab in June (trafficked from Pakistan).

45. There was an increase in the illicit cultivation of opium poppy from 2016 to 2018. Diversion of precursor chemicals continued to be a concern during 2018 and 2019, and one of the country’s biggest seizures, of over 1,800 kg of pseudoephedrine, was made in May 2019.

46. In April 2018, under the Narcotics and Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985, India introduced more restrictive control measures for tramadol. The Act gives more powers to law enforcement entities and enables authorities to enter the premises of tramadol laboratories and prosecute those who manufacture tramadol without permission.

## **2. Trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants**

47. South Asia includes countries that are source, transit and destination countries for trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation, forced labour and organ removal.

48. According to the *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2018*, in South Asia, female victims accounted for 59 per cent of the total detected victims. Of all the detected victims of trafficking, 50 per cent had been trafficked for sexual exploitation, 49 per cent for forced labour and 1 per cent for other forms of exploitation. Information on trafficking flows into South Asia is drawn from data from Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Victims from South Asia have been detected in more than 40 countries around the world. The main destinations appear to be the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council in the Middle East.

49. The region faces an increase in trafficking in children for the purposes of slavery, domestic servitude, child marriage, illegal adoption and the production of child sexual abuse materials linked to the expansion of the use of the Internet across the region. Although the region records most instances of trafficking for forced labour and sexual exploitation, there have been increasing media and anecdotal reports regarding new and emerging forms of trafficking in persons for the purposes of forced surrogacy, fraudulent marriages (for the purpose of exploitation), sex tourism, forced begging, medical drug testing and organ removal.

50. While most countries in the region have some legislation in place to criminalize commercial sexual exploitation, the exploitation of children and forced labour, some lack provisions on and procedures for dealing with trafficking in persons as a criminal offence and as foreseen in the Organized Crime Convention and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, supplementing that Convention. Law enforcement entities have limited experience in detecting and investigating cases of trafficking in persons and have not been provided with assistance through means of international cooperation.

51. The most recent assessment made by UNODC under its global project on Addressing Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants point to a close link between the smuggling of migrants and irregular migratory flows in South Asia. Some data generated through the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime suggest that most of the irregular migration to Europe, North America and Australia from the regions covered by the Process is managed by profit-seeking criminals. Evidence-based knowledge on the smuggling of migrants and irregular migration is both scattered and weak as there is no regional reporting system or mechanism in place yet. Although irregular migration from South Asia to far-away destinations is in most cases facilitated by smugglers, irregular migration within South Asia also appears, to a significant extent, to be facilitated by them.

### **3. Illicit financial flows, money-laundering and asset recovery**

52. Combating money-laundering and the financing of terrorism is emerging as a pivotal global focus for South Asian countries.

53. One of the activities of UNODC in the region is a regional project on combating money-laundering that covers Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka. It is being implemented to assess priority needs in the countries on issues related to the combating of money-laundering and training is being conducted in line with capacity-building needs.

### **4. Corruption**

54. There are no current studies and limited research on patterns of corruption in South Asia. In some cases, corruption is deeply rooted in the political and economic infrastructure of the State. All South Asian countries have ratified the Organized Crime Convention to build their legal and institutional frameworks to respond to existing and emerging corruption challenges. Many of them have enacted laws that criminalize most forms of corruption. However, legislation is often not properly enforced owing to insufficient capacity, impunity, special privileges and lack of political will and practical strategies (including delays and lack of investigation or

prosecution of crimes), which remain major obstacles in the fight against corruption in the region.

## **5. Terrorism and violent extremism**

55. The South Asian region currently faces a grave security threat owing to increasing extremism and terrorist activities.

56. The recent terror attacks in Sri Lanka have posed a threat to the security, stability and development of the countries in the region.

57. The region requires an enhancement of the capacities of central authorities and prosecutors in managing mutual legal assistance requests effectively, including the preservation of electronic evidence.

58. The Internet also facilitates terrorism by making borders more porous, information and communication more easily available and less expensive and the movement of funds considerably easier across jurisdictions.

59. Although the issue of foreign terrorist fighters is not a new phenomenon, the escalation of the issue in relation to their return from conflicts in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic is alarming national authorities. Foreign terrorist fighters are now considered one of the main forms of material support to terrorist groups through electronic and tangible funding, an increasing amount of vulnerabilities are becoming exposed through the development of new technologies involving factors such as anonymity with new payment methods and encrypted electronic footprints.

## **III. Drug abuse prevention and treatment**

### **A. South-East Asia and the Pacific**

#### **1. Prevention of drug abuse**

60. UNODC continues to support countries in line with the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016 and with the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem. In this regard, UNODC has supported countries in the region on a wide range of topics covering drug abuse prevention, drug dependence treatment and HIV prevention for people who use drugs and people in prisons.

#### **2. Treatment and recovery**

61. In April 2018, UNODC organized a high-level mission to Indonesia that was undertaken by the UNODC Goodwill Ambassador for the Rule of Law, Princess Bajrakitiyabha Mahidol. The main objective of the mission was to gather support for the scale-up of the implementation of the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) throughout South-East Asia. The other part of the mission involved a courtesy visit to the ASEAN secretariat. A key component of the implementation of the Bangkok Rules encompasses improved health services in prisons and ensuring networks are in place for adherence to HIV and drug dependence treatment post-release.

#### **3. HIV/AIDS**

62. Together with the United Nations Development Programme, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNODC hosted the Asia-Pacific Regional Expert Group Meeting on Reviewing Implementation of Commitments from the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on HIV and AIDS Beyond 2015 in Bangkok on 27 November 2018. The report on the outcome of the meeting contains a summary of

the efforts of Governments in the region to reach the 90–90–90 targets on HIV. The contributions from Governments and civil society were aimed at measuring progress within the region on HIV targets and the meeting was successful in facilitating the sharing of relevant information.

63. UNODC, together with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), launched a project on increasing the role of women in law enforcement. The aim of the project is to increase women's participation and leadership in law enforcement activities, including border management, as well as to strengthen the capacity of front-line officers in border locations to respond to the needs of women and girls in the context of cross-border crime and migrant smuggling. Complementing the main training curricula, law enforcement officers were trained on occupational health and safety, HIV and hepatitis and understanding the differences between drug use and drug dependence. Four training sessions were held in February and March 2019, in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Cambodia and Thailand, with a total of 248 participants trained.

## **B. South Asia**

### **1. Prevention of drug abuse; treatment and recovery**

64. The *World Drug Report 2019* reflects the availability of new and reliable data for 2019 on the extent of drug use in two countries with large populations, India and Nigeria. These reliable new data have significantly improved the accuracy of overall regional and global estimates of drug use.

65. From a health perspective, there is a risk of exponential growth in opiate use globally and, as a consequence, more deaths from overdose and increased levels of HIV infection. In general, access to treatment services for people affected by substance use disorders remains grossly inadequate.

66. In South Asia, health systems and providers of drug dependence treatment face challenges posed by new drugs as well as by cocktails of unknown combinations of drugs for which treatment is not available or has not yet been developed.

67. Furthermore, there are difficulties in tackling the harms, such as HIV and hepatitis C, associated with drug use, especially the abuse of drugs by injection, which affect not only communities but also prisons.

68. The most noteworthy development in terms of data on drug abuse in South Asia was the publication of the results of the National Survey on Substance Abuse in India in early 2019 (after a gap of over 15 years). About 86 per cent of the population in South Asia and 30 per cent of the population in Asia reside in India. The Survey findings revealed a higher prevalence of the use of opioids and opiates than previously estimated. The Survey was conducted in India in 2018 and involved interviews with more than 500,000 individuals across all 36 states and territories. As a result, the number of persons who inject drugs was estimated as 850,000, which is far higher than a previous estimate of 177,000 that was made in 2008 by the National AIDS Control Organization on the basis of mapping conducted in urbanized areas in 17 states.

69. To estimate the extent of and trends and patterns in the drug trade, as well as drug use in selected locations in India (bordering Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and Nepal), UNODC commissioned research, including a capacity assessment of law enforcement officers at border locations between India and Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. In addition, four country-level workshops were organized to bring drug user communities, non-governmental organizations and law enforcement agencies under one platform, with the aim of mainstreaming health and human rights as part of a comprehensive drug control programme.

## 2. HIV/AIDS

70. With regard to the comprehensive package for HIV prevention among drug users, Bangladesh, India and Nepal implement both needle-syringe programmes and opioid-substitution therapy, while only opioid-substitution therapy is available in Maldives. Sri Lanka does not have opioid-substitution therapy or needle-syringe programmes and Bhutan initiated its first opioid-substitution therapy in 2015. Wide gaps in the coverage and quality of services remain a cause for concern. Another cause for concern is the need to scale up services, which remains unmet. Female drug users remain a largely hidden and ignored group. Women who use and inject drugs often sustain their habit by sex work, exposing them to the risk of HIV infection and other health risks. The partners of male drug users and women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation are equally vulnerable to such risks.

71. In 2018, UNODC, under a joint United Nations initiative (the Unified Budget Results and Accountability Framework), implemented several activities in the State of Gujarat in India. To ascertain the prevalence of HIV, tuberculosis and other blood-borne viruses and related risk behaviours associated with HIV transmission in prison settings, and to assess the availability and accessibility of services for tuberculosis, HIV and AIDS prevention, care and treatment and suggest recommendations for a comprehensive action plan on tuberculosis, HIV and AIDS, UNODC initiated a behavioural and biological assessment of vulnerabilities to the acquisition of HIV, blood-borne viruses and tuberculosis among prison inmates in Gujarat. The assessment will enable evidence-based interventions and programming for a comprehensive package of HIV services, including the management of people who inject drugs in prison settings in Gujarat.

## IV. Alternative development

### A. South-East Asia and the Pacific

72. UNODC is working with the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on implementing sustainable alternative development programming, which is one of the nine pillars of the national drug control master plan. Current programming takes place in Houaphan Province, in areas on the border with Viet Nam. With the support of the programme, 331 families from four districts are currently making the change to coffee cultivation. The goal of the Houaphan alternative development programme is to establish a coffee cooperative able to export high-quality coffee to premium markets around the world. The farmers are in the process of establishing the Vanmai Cooperative and are expecting their first harvest in 2019.

73. UNODC continues to work with the Government of Myanmar to develop sustainable livelihood alternatives for opium-growing communities by supporting the introduction and cultivation of alternative permanent crops and establishing farmers' organizations that will enable participating farmers to independently cultivate, refine and market high-quality products that can be exported to prime international markets. Such programmes for the cultivation of alternative crops will help to combat the problem of deforestation related to opium poppy cultivation through enrichment and reforestation activities, which also have positive effects on the livelihoods of the beneficiary communities by protecting water sources and reducing erosion and soil degradation.

74. In Myanmar, a total area of 985 hectares was used for alternative development activities, comprising 953 hectares of coffee, 17 hectares of tea and 15 hectares of avocado. A total of 1,073 beneficiary farmers benefited from long-term and day-to-day technical assistance on alternative development provided by UNODC. In the 2017/18 harvest, coffee farmers produced 30 tons of parchment coffee and exported 9 tons of green beans through the Green Gold Cooperative to a company based in France (Malongo), who paid \$36,000. The coffee was launched in the French

Parliament in March 2019. As part of the strategy to achieve Fairtrade certification in order to export coffee during the period 2018–2019, three technical training sessions related to Fairtrade were provided to 1,872 farmers in 2018. The 30-year community forest management plan has been finalized and approved by 4 of the 11 forest user groups.

## **B. South Asia**

75. UNODC has no alternative development activities in the region.

## **V. Regional cooperation initiatives**

### **A. South-East Asia and the Pacific**

76. The thirty-ninth meeting of the ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters was held in Brunei Darussalam from 28 to 30 August 2018. Participating countries reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening cooperation at the regional level in the framework of the ASEAN Workplan on Securing Communities Against Illicit Drugs 2016–2025.

77. The eighteenth ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime was held in Putrajaya, Malaysia, from 24 to 27 September 2018, with participants from 10 ASEAN member States, their partners and UNODC. Participants discussed ways to address transnational crimes, including drug trafficking. In addition, the representatives of the ASEAN member States reviewed the current implementation status of the Meeting's workplan.

78. The High-level Regional Conference on Precursor Control was held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, from 7 to 9 November 2018, to consider the deteriorating synthetic drug situation in the region and to negotiate a new strategy for addressing the diversion of and trafficking in precursor chemicals used in illicit drug production.

79. A new subregional action plan (revision XI) was developed under the 1993 Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control during two workshops in Bangkok in November 2018 and January 2019. The signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding (Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam and UNODC) agreed to the draft subregional action plan, which is in line with the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016 and which will guide activities under the Memorandum of Understanding from 2019 to 2021. The latest revision is expected to be formally endorsed during the upcoming 2019 Mekong Memorandum of Understanding Ministerial Meeting.

80. In July 2019, a new UNODC study entitled *Transnational Organized Crime in South-East Asia: Evolution, Growth and Impact* was launched. The study provides a baseline for understanding the mechanics of illicit trade, its size and implications and can be used as a basis for developing evidence-based strategic and programmatic responses. The report covers transnational organized crime flows and illicit contraband markets in South-East Asia and neighbouring regions, including in relation to drugs and precursor chemicals, trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, environmental crimes (wildlife and timber) and counterfeit goods, including falsified medicines.

81. As a non-State signatory and partner to the 1993 Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control, UNODC provides secretariat and technical support to the process in accordance with its framework. In 2018, the sharing of seizure data and intelligence was encouraged by providing a forum through which countries in the Mekong region were able to present national drug trafficking trends and connect those trends across borders. Consensus was reached on general trafficking trends in the

region; those findings informed the development of the recently published UNODC report on drug and precursor trafficking routes in the Mekong region.

82. The global Synthetic Monitoring: Analysis, Reporting and Trends (SMART) programme continues to support countries in South-East Asia and the Pacific to enhance data development capacity. At the 2019 annual workshop held in Singapore, countries were provided with support to generate data focusing on the prices of illicit drugs and precursor chemicals used in the manufacture of synthetic drugs. Moreover, *Synthetic Drugs in East and South-East Asia: Trends and Patterns of Amphetamine-type Stimulants and New Psychoactive Substances* was published in March 2019, which includes information on the latest synthetic drug market developments in the region.

83. Synthetic drug experts from ASEAN countries, Australia, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Timor-Leste and the United States of America, as well as the World Customs Organization (WCO) regional intelligence liaison offices for the Asia-Pacific region, gathered in Chiang Rai, Thailand, in August 2018, for the tenth regional SMART workshop for East and South-East Asia. Participants worked to clarify the synthetic drug situation in the region and highlighted several new developments, such as strong indications of a geographical shift in the manufacture of such drugs.

84. In 2018, a series of workshops was organized as part of the SMART programme, in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, to discuss strategies for improving the collection and reporting of drug data in the Pacific, which was based on the outcomes of a previous workshop series, in 2017. The 2018 workshop series was composed of discussion sessions that resulted in the agreed establishment of national coordination mechanisms focused on drug control for data-sharing and reporting purposes.

85. UNODC is working with the ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN member States through the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime to prevent the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons, alongside related initiatives undertaken as part of the Bali Process. Moreover, UNODC continues to support the Working Group on Illicit Trafficking of Wildlife and Timber of the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime, a platform that strengthens coordination mechanisms among law enforcement entities in ASEAN member States.

86. To support Thailand, as the Chair of ASEAN for 2019, UNODC is working with the Government of Thailand and ASEAN to advance border management as a cross-cutting solution to different forms of transnational crime that have a negative impact on ASEAN member States. It is envisaged that the roadmap and the implementation of the action plan will be a feature of future UNODC engagement with ASEAN under future Chairs of the Association.

87. Under the programme for preventing terrorism in 2018, four key regional conferences were organized, on topics including: (a) child recruitment and exploitation by terrorist and violent extremist groups, including juvenile justice; (b) public-private partnerships to prevent the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes; and (c) countering the financing of terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by non-State actors. In addition, research on foreign terrorist fighters and their travel patterns and on criminal justice responses to violent extremism in South-East Asia has been conducted in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. The research will result in policy recommendations on both topics, which are planned for publication in 2019.

## **B. South Asia**

88. The processes for sharing information between countries to foster international and regional cooperation through the South Asian Regional Intelligence and Coordination Centre were supported by the UNODC Regional Programme for South Asia. The aim of the Centre is to provide an effective coordination mechanism between law enforcement agencies of South Asia to share criminal intelligence on

various forms of organized crime. The initiative to establish the Centre has been welcomed by Member States from South Asia.

89. The Government of Sri Lanka agreed to host the South Asian Regional Intelligence and Coordination Centre in Colombo. Nepal and Sri Lanka have endorsed the foundation documents and other countries are at an advanced stage of endorsement; the preparations are well under way to make the Centre an effective mechanism for strengthening responses to trafficking in drugs, people and counterfeit goods in the South Asia region.

90. UNODC also supports interregional law enforcement cooperation between South Asian countries, in particular in the context of container control and the countering of illicit financial flows. The UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme in South Asia continues to strengthen international supply chain security by building the capacities of national border agencies to detect the use of sea, land and air cargo for illicit purposes.

91. A strategic regional meeting organized under the auspices of the Container Control Programme in Bangladesh in 2018 was attended by a broad range of participants. Also under the auspices of the Programme, equipment and resources were provided to and set up in the Air Cargo Control Unit at the Dhaka Customs House. An assessment mission to the Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu was conducted by experts from the Programme with a view to establishing an air cargo control unit.

92. A new programme office for the Global Maritime Crime Programme was opened in Sri Lanka, providing for new programming opportunities for South Asia and advanced interventions to counter maritime crime. Under the Global Maritime Crime Programme, national capacity-building initiatives in Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka, focusing on building maritime security responsiveness, were supported. Under the Programme, extensive Visit, Board, Search and Seizure training was conducted, to enhance drug interdiction and boarding training. Training was also provided to the Maldives Police on critical incident management and response on remote islands, enhancing law enforcement capability and response across the archipelago.

93. In 2018, regional cooperation between South Asian countries on drug control, especially to address the consequences of the Afghan opiate crisis, was enhanced. UNODC convened a three-day regional workshop in India for drug law enforcement entities and policymakers from South Asia to foster collective action and come up with recommendations to counter trafficking in opiates in South Asia. To mainstream health and human rights as part of the overall approach to drug control in South Asia, UNODC convened a regional consultation in New Delhi. The consultation was aimed at developing a comprehensive approach to address the drug problem in the region.

## **VI. Conclusions and recommendations**

### **A. Conclusions**

94. The South Asia region faces challenges to the rule of law and human security in the form of known and newly emerging forms of organized crime, as well as related governance and criminal justice responses.

95. Additional challenges are presented in the form of urbanization, combined with a rise in the slum-dwelling population in megacities, the large-scale movement of people within and between countries across the region, including those driven by conflict, natural disasters, the consequences of climate change, gender discrimination and gender-based violence, and varying country-specific governance challenges. Trafficking in persons and drug production and trafficking have prevailed in South Asia for a long time and they are taking new forms and routes.

96. Other crimes have compounded these threats; these crimes range from the production of and trafficking in both prescription and new drugs, including new psychoactive substances, to cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent crime and radicalization and violent extremism leading to terrorism. Suicides and psychological problems affecting young people are of increasing concern and are often connected to the use of illicit drugs. In order to address these threats, there is a need for multi-stakeholder responses and international and regional cooperation.

97. A combination of threats posed by the involvement of transnational organized criminal groups in the manufacture of, trafficking in and use of illicit drugs, trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants and environmental crimes such as trade in illegal timber, have been facilitated by the ease of money-laundering and a relatively weak border control framework. Identifying and responding to these challenges requires national capacity-building and international collaboration among Governments, including through cooperation between the public and private sectors.

## **B. Recommendations**

98. Member States may wish to consider taking multilateral approaches to addressing the challenges posed by organized crime, drug trafficking and terrorism in South and South-East Asia and the Pacific, such as through the following:

(a) Regular and rapid intelligence and operational data-sharing among law enforcement authorities and through joint operations in the region to effectively respond to illicit drug trafficking, terrorism and organized criminal groups;

(b) Fostering close cooperation through consultations between governments at all levels to promote mutual trust within governments in all programme areas;

(c) Promoting national ownership of the capacity-building of government authorities, specifically in countries with limited resources and assets, to investigate and prosecute drug trafficking and organized crime offences. This should be built through specialized training and appropriate initiatives aimed at bolstering national trainers and action plans;

(d) Focusing on dismantling organized criminal groups through special investigation techniques and dedicating time and resources, while moving away from a focus mainly on enforcement and operations that mostly target low-level criminal operatives;

(e) Strengthening national and international legal frameworks to respond to current developments in illicit drug markets and organized criminal groups;

(f) Adopting human rights-based approaches and considering the specific needs and circumstances of youth, women and girls when developing national legal frameworks to respond to drugs and organized crime problems;

(g) Enhancing forensic capacities and the knowledge base related to new psychoactive substances and the use of the darknet;

(h) Expanding drug use prevention interventions and drug treatment and rehabilitation facilities in South Asia;

(i) Enhancing testing capabilities and preventing and countering the diversion of precursor chemicals;

(j) Regularly updating and sharing the list of new substances and precursors used in the manufacture of illicit drugs.