

## Forum: Economic and Social Council

### Issue: Combatting the production, consumption and global trade in illicit narcotic drugs

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#### Introduction

With the recent decriminalization of drug use in various nations, narcotic drugs are at the center of a heated debate. Often referred to as “opioid”, the term “narcotics” can be understood as a variety of substances that dull the senses and relieve pain. Though narcotics are often prescribed by doctors to treat pain, suppress cough and cure diarrhea as a measure of medical treatment, increasing dosages can easily lead to addiction as rising levels of dopamine give false senses of reward. The continuous increase in demand drove the development of illicit narcotic trade links over the years, evolving and expanding with the drive of transnational networks and technological advancements.



**Figure 1:** Drug Trade in Coachella Valley Contributing to the Spike in Meth Abuse (Banyan Treatment Center)

Seemingly far away from the daily lives of the general public, the highly addictive nature of narcotic drugs leads to large amounts of misuse and consequent overdoses. In the United States alone, an estimated 187 people die every day of opioid overdoses, most involving illicit versions of fentanyl (Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention, 2023). On a macro and societal scale, the underground market cultivates the act of exploitation and human trafficking. Other drawbacks may include the risk of fraud and possibility of violence. Illicit narcotic drugs not only pose a significant threat to individual well-being and public health, but also fuel transnational organized crime, undermine social and economic development, and contribute to instability in many regions across the globe. The multifaceted nature of this challenge requires nations to consider a wide array of strategies, from supply reduction and law enforcement to demand reduction, public health interventions, and international cooperation.

As nations deliberate on this pressing matter, it is essential to acknowledge the diverse factors that contribute to the production, consumption, and trade in illicit narcotic drugs, including socio-economic disparities, governance challenges, and the complex dynamics of transnational criminal networks. It is important to note the implications developed global networks, misuse of technological advancements and weak management can have on the maturation of sophisticated illicit drug markets. Furthermore, nations are reminded of the human rights implications and the need to approach this issue with sensitivity, ensuring that actions are grounded in principles of justice, equity, and respect for human dignity.

In the pursuit to address this issue, it is imperative for nations and governments to foster an environment of collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and evidence-based policy development. By engaging in constructive dialogue and leveraging collective expertise, delegates can work towards formulating effective strategies and interventions that encompass both supply and demand reduction, while also addressing the underlying root causes of drug production and trade.

The president looks forward to the fruitful discussions and meaningful outcomes that will emerge from the deliberations on this crucial matter.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

### **Narcotic**

A drug that induces sleep, dulls the senses, and relieves pain. In a legal context, the term is often used to refer to opium, heroin, and related substances.

### **Illicit Drugs**

Drugs that are unlawful to produce, possess, or distribute. This would include narcotic substances that are prohibited by law or legal only under the prescription of medical specialists.

### **Drug Abuse**

The excessive, compulsive, and chronic use of a drug, often leading to physical and psychological harm.

### **Drug Trafficking**

The illegal trade in controlled substances, including the production, transportation, and distribution of illicit drugs.

### **Drug Cartel**

A criminal organization involved in the production and distribution of narcotics, often operating across international borders.

### **Money Laundering**

The process of concealing the origins of illegally obtained money, typically from drug trafficking, by transferring it through legitimate businesses or financial institutions.

### **Drug Interdiction**

Efforts to prevent the production, trafficking, and distribution of illicit drugs through law enforcement and border control measures.

### **Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)**

A federal law enforcement agency within the United States Department of Justice responsible for combating drug trafficking and distribution.

## **Background**

### **Drug Use in Ancient Civilizations**

The use of opium, cannabis, and other psychoactive substances can be traced back to ancient civilisations in regions such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China, where they were used for medicinal, religious, and recreational purposes. As a specific example, opium has been known for millennia to relieve pain, first taking the form of Sumerian clay tablets in 2100 BC. In addition, in ancient Greece, the use of opium and other psychoactive substances was widespread, and the philosopher Plato is said to have used opium to enhance his thinking and creativity. Similarly, the ancient Egyptians used cannabis and other substances for medicinal and religious purposes.

It is worth noting that the use of narcotic drugs in ancient civilisations was often tied to religious or spiritual practices, in which people showcase a sense of honor by using ritual opium or cannabis. Though some senior researchers are still dubious about the presence or discovery of narcotic drugs and their usage so early on in the developmental trajectory of the human race, other scientists are prompting fresh thinking on historical research in this niche field.



**Figure 2:** Alleged Poppy-Seed-Pod-Shaped Jugs Crafted 3000 Years Ago (Robert S. Merrillees)

### 19<sup>th</sup> Century Opium Wars

The Opium Wars between China and Britain (1839-1860) marked a significant upheaval, highlighting the geopolitical and economic dimensions of drug trafficking. The wars were sparked by the British East India Company's large-scale export of opium from India to China, and demands were high. The Chinese government's attempts to curb the opium trade led to armed conflict, resulting in decisive British victories and the signing of unequal treaties that forced China to open ports and cede territory to Britain. These conflicts facilitated the expansion of the opium trade and the influx of other Western goods into China, contributing to widespread opium addiction and social upheaval.

The Opium Wars underscored the exploitative nature of drug-related commerce, leaving a lasting impact on the global drug trade. The Opium Wars opened up a series of possibilities for the illicit drug market, establishing a prototype that leads the development of transnational networks involved in the production, trafficking and distribution of narcotic drugs.



**Figure 3:** Young Chinese Man Smoking Highly Addictive Opium During the Late Qing Dynasty (The Economist)

## Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century on an International Scale

The international community began to address the issue of drug trafficking through the establishment of the International Opium Commission in 1909 and the subsequent International Opium Convention of 1912, aimed at regulating the production and distribution of opium and other drugs. The two conventions were significant milestones in the global effort to regulate the use of opium and other narcotic drugs.

However, the complete ban of alcohol in the United States came out as more of a failure. The prohibition of alcohol in the 1920s led to the rise of organized crime and smuggling networks, laying the groundwork for the illicit drug trade that would emerge in subsequent decades.

## World War II and Its Aftermath

The post-World War II period saw the emergence of large-scale drug production and trafficking networks, particularly in regions such as Southeast Asia and Latin America. The rise of the global illicit drug trade was fueled by factors such as political instability, poverty, and the demand for narcotics in Western markets. To illustrate, various narcotics, including morphine and amphetamines, were used by military forces to manage pain, combat fatigue, and enhance alertness. Though these drugs played a crucial role in treating battlefield injuries and maintaining the performance of troops in combat situations, they laid the foundation of drug abuse and potential overdoses, increasing the demand for illicit drugs.

In the post-war era, narcotic drugs also had vital implications in which they helped soldiers deal with post-war trauma. The experiences of war, including combat trauma and the challenges of readjusting to civilian life, led to an increased risk of substance abuse among veterans. Many soldiers returning from the war faced physical and psychological traumas, and some turned to narcotics and other substances as a means of coping with their experiences.

## Globalization and Emergence of the Developing World

Linking back to the post-war era, the period brought significant social and economic changes, including urbanization, industrialization, and shifts in cultural norms. These changes, along with the availability of pharmaceuticals and changing social attitudes towards drug use, contributed to shifts in patterns of narcotic use in civilian populations.

Therefore, worldwide social and economic changes hinted at the rise of illicit drug trafficking and the spread of narcotics, including heroin, in various regions. Displacement, economic instability, and the reconfiguration of global power dynamics contributed to the emergence of illicit drug markets and the spread of narcotics in both war-torn and post-war societies.

With the constant emergence of powerful drug cartels in countries such as Mexico and Colombia, the international community is trying hard to increase law enforcement and drug interdiction efforts. The illicit drug trade remains a global challenge, with the emergence of new synthetic drugs, the continued influence of drug cartels, and the

complex interplay of geopolitical, social, and economic factors driving the production, trafficking, and consumption of illicit narcotics.

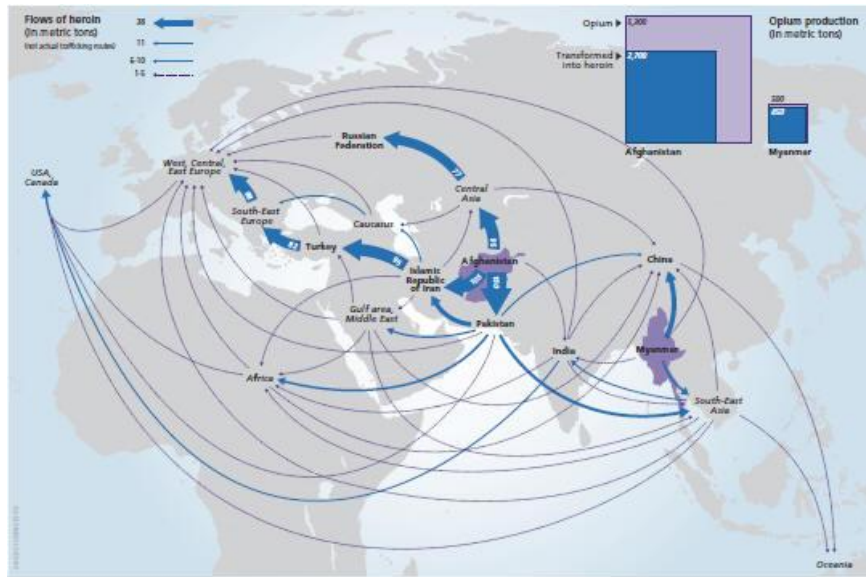


Figure 4: Global Heroin Flow From Asian Points of Origin (UNODC World Drug Report 2010)

## Major Parties Involved

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

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC in short) is a leading international organization under the United Nations that is dedicated to addressing the global drug trade through multifaceted efforts. It works to promote international cooperation and assist member states in implementing effective drug control measures, including initiatives to reduce drug demand, prevent abuse, and strengthen treatment and rehabilitation programs.

The UNODC also provides technical assistance to combat drug trafficking and smuggling, enhances law enforcement capacities, supports alternative development programs to reduce illicit crop cultivation, strengthens criminal justice systems and legal frameworks, conducts research on global drug trends, and fosters international cooperation among member states and law enforcement agencies. Through these comprehensive efforts, the organization seeks to advance security, public health, and the rule of law by addressing the complex challenges posed by the global drug trade.

### Drug Cartels and Trafficking Organisations

Drug cartels are large and composed of multiple trafficking organizations. It is essential for member states to consider the ways in which such organizations can be effectively tracked down and eliminated.

An example would be The Sinaloa Cartel based in Mexico. The Sinaloa Cartel is one of the most powerful drug trafficking organizations in the world, known for its involvement in the production and distribution of drugs such as

cocaine, marijuana, and methamphetamine. It operates across multiple countries and has been a dominant force in the global drug trade.

### **Drug Producers and Cultivators**

Drug producers are individuals or groups involved in the cultivation, production, or manufacturing of illicit drugs as a part of the primary sector of the economy. They play a crucial role in the global drug trade by providing the raw materials or finished products that form the basis of the illegal drug market.

Opium farming in Afghanistan would be a relevant example. Afghanistan is a major producer of opium, and numerous farmers in the country are involved in opium poppy cultivation. The raw opium is then processed into heroin, contributing to the global supply of illicit opioids.

### **Drug Consumers and Distributors**

In simple terms, drug consumers are people who take drugs, either for pharmaceutical reasons or substance abuse. Countries that use the most illicit drugs consist of the United States, Estonia, Belarus, Mongolia and more.

### **Money Laundering Networks**

Money laundering is the illegal process of hiding the origins of money obtained illegally by passing it through a complex system of banking transfers or other transactions.

An example of a money laundering network would be the Hawala Network. Hawala is an informal money transfer system used in various regions, particularly in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. While hawala has legitimate uses, it has also been exploited for money laundering, including in the context of the global drug trade.

## **Timeline of Events**

### **The International Opium Convention (1912)**

The International Opium Convention, the first international drug control treaty, is signed in The Hague. It aimed to regulate the global trade of opium and coca derivatives.

### **Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)**

The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs is adopted by the United Nations, establishing a comprehensive framework for international drug control. It aimed to combat drug abuse and illicit trafficking while ensuring access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

### **The Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act (1971)**

## **Concordia International School Shanghai Model United Nations XII**

The United States declared a "War on Drugs" with the passage of the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act, which consolidated and expanded existing drug control legislation.

### **The United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988)**

The United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances is adopted, focusing on international cooperation to combat drug trafficking and money laundering.

### **Office of National Drug Control Policy (2001)**

The United States establishes the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to coordinate drug control efforts and develop national drug control policy.

### **UNGASS 2016 (2016)**

The United Nations General Assembly holds a Special Session (UNGASS) on the world drug problem, leading to the adoption of a new outcome document that emphasizes a balanced approach to drug control, including prevention, treatment, and international cooperation.

## **Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

Efforts to address the production, consumption, and global trade in illicit narcotic drugs have been ongoing for many years, involving a range of strategies and initiatives at the national, regional, and international levels.

### **Supply-Side Reduction Efforts**

**Eradication Programs:** Many countries have implemented eradication programs to destroy illicit drug crops, such as coca plants in Colombia and opium poppy fields in Afghanistan. For example, the United States has provided support for aerial spraying of coca crops in Colombia as part of its efforts to reduce the supply of cocaine.

**Alternative Development:** Various initiatives have aimed to provide farmers in drug-producing regions with alternative livelihoods to reduce their reliance on illicit drug cultivation. For instance, programs in countries like Peru and Bolivia have promoted the cultivation of legal crops as an alternative to coca farming.

### **Demand-Side Reduction Efforts**

**Prevention and Treatment:** Governments and organizations have implemented prevention and treatment programs to address drug abuse and addiction. For example, the United States has invested in substance abuse prevention programs in schools and communities, while also expanding access to treatment for individuals with substance use disorders.

**Harm Reduction:** Some countries have adopted harm reduction strategies, including needle exchange programs and supervised injection sites, to reduce the negative health consequences of drug use. For instance, countries like



Canada and several European nations have implemented supervised injection facilities to provide a safe environment for drug users.

## International Cooperation and Agreements

**United Nations Conventions:** International agreements such as the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances have sought to promote global cooperation in addressing drug production, trafficking, and abuse. Member states have committed to aligning their domestic laws with these conventions and cooperating on law enforcement efforts.

**Bilateral and Multilateral Partnerships:** Countries have engaged in partnerships to combat the transnational nature of the drug trade. For example, the United States has collaborated with Mexico and other countries in the Western Hemisphere through initiatives like the Merida Initiative to enhance law enforcement cooperation and support efforts to disrupt drug trafficking organizations.

## Possible Solutions

### Supply-Side Solutions

**Alternative Livelihood Programs:** Implementing sustainable alternative livelihood programs for farmers involved in the cultivation of illicit drug crops. For example, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has supported alternative development projects in countries like Afghanistan, Colombia, and Peru, helping farmers transition to legal and sustainable agricultural activities.

**Crop Substitution Programs:** Encouraging and supporting farmers to replace illicit drug crops with legal and profitable alternatives. For instance, in Colombia, the National Comprehensive Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops has sought to replace coca cultivation with legal crops such as cacao and coffee.

### Demand-Side Solutions

**Comprehensive Drug Education and Prevention:** Implementing evidence-based drug education and prevention programs in schools and communities to reduce drug experimentation and initiation. For example, the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program in the United States aims to prevent drug use among youth through education and community engagement.

**Expansion of Treatment and Harm Reduction Services:** Increasing access to evidence-based treatment for substance use disorders and implementing harm reduction measures such as needle exchange programs and supervised injection sites. For instance, countries like Portugal have decriminalized drug use and invested in harm reduction services, leading to positive public health outcomes.

## International Cooperation and Policy

**Strengthening Law Enforcement and Border Control:** Enhancing international cooperation and coordination among law enforcement agencies to disrupt drug trafficking networks and interdict illicit drug shipments. For example, the United States has collaborated with Mexico through the Merida Initiative to improve law enforcement capacity and border security.

**Support for Governance and Rule of Law:** Providing assistance to countries to strengthen their criminal justice systems, combat corruption, and improve governance to address drug-related crime and trafficking. The European Union has supported rule of law and justice sector reform initiatives in drug-producing and transit countries.

### **Regulation and Legislation:**

**Regulating Drug Markets:** Exploring and implementing regulatory frameworks for the legal production, distribution, and sale of certain drugs as a means to reduce the influence of illicit drug markets. For example, the legalization of cannabis in several U.S. states and countries like Canada has aimed to shift cannabis production and sales from the illicit market to legal, regulated channels.

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