

## **MCN/UNODC 2012 Survey of Commercial Cannabis Cultivation and Production launched**

**Kabul, 10 September 2013 (UNODC)** – The Ministry of Counter Narcotics and UNODC 2012 Survey of Commercial Cannabis Cultivation and Production, covering 16 provinces where commercial cannabis cultivation had been observed or reported in past surveys, was released today in Kabul.

Data shows that the total area under commercial cannabis cultivation in 2012 was estimated at 10,000 hectares, or 17% less than in 2011. However, 2012 figures only include commercial, mono-crop cannabis cultivation, as the small-scale “kitchen garden” cultivation of cannabis, often for localized and/or personal use, was not captured by the survey tool. Yet, the “kitchen garden” cultivation accounts for only a small percentage of total production not necessarily affecting the total with any significance.

The decrease in cultivation may seem in contradiction with the overall perception that the illicit economy has gained in importance over recent years. The reduction is due to diverse reasons, such as in the Uruzgan province, which witnessed a dramatic decline of cultivation from more than 1,000 hectares in 2011 to less than 100 hectares in 2012. According to reports from the field, the reason for the reduction was a strictly enforced ban by provincial authorities, which was imposed because cannabis fields seemed to have been used by insurgent groups as hiding places. Most of the cannabis cultivations seems to be concentrated in the south (54%), and to lesser extend in the east and north of the country.

Growing cannabis remains lucrative despite a downward correction in prices observed since the peak in 2011. In 2012, farmers potentially achieved a gross income of US\$ 6,400 per hectare from cannabis resin, which exceeds the gross income from opium (US\$ 4,600 per hectare) in the same year. Limitations for farmers to move from opium to cannabis relate to water access, the long vegetation cycle making double cropping near impossible, and the summer season of planting which competes with food crops and vegetables indispensable for the farmer families.

"This again indicates that a farmer decides on planting licit or illicit crops in a holistic way including as much family needs, food security, access to markets, access to non-farm income, as there is risk. Only an 'opium farmer', or a 'cannabis farmer' or even a 'wheat farmer' simply does not exist. Agriculture should be seen as one and measures against illicit crops as an integrated part of an agricultural policy.", pointed out Mr. Jean-Luc Lemahieu, UNODC Regional Representative.

Case to the point is that the licit agricultural production this year is at a high and this is not different for the cannabis yields. Despite the drop in acreage, more cannabis powder (garda) could be extracted from the fields compared to the previous year (136 kg/ha in 2012, compared to 112 kg/ha for 2011). The potential production is estimated at 1,400 tons, an increase of 21%.

"While it is nice to bring some positive news out of Afghanistan, complacency would be very misplaced at a time where the illicit economy seems thriving. Too many aid actors consider illicit crops as alien to their work and prefer to have nothing to do with it. This negatively affects the implementation of the national drug control policy, artificially compartmentalizes agriculture as if a farmer's brain can be split in two halves, a licit and an illicit one, and finally bounces back through insecurity and corruption impacting the aid provided.", added Mr. Lemahieu.

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