

PRESS RELEASE - UNODC Afghanistan
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Opium crop cultivation rises a record 36 per cent in Afghanistan

Kabul/Vienna, 13 November 2013 – UNODC - Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan rose 36 per cent in 2013, a record high, according to the 2013 Afghan opium survey released today in Kabul by the Ministry of Counter Narcotics and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Calling the news “sobering”, Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of UNODC, stressed that this situation poses a threat to health, stability and development in Afghanistan and beyond: “What is needed is an integrated, comprehensive response to the drug problem, embedded in a long-term security, development and institution-building agenda,” he said.

The area under cultivation rose to 209,000 ha from the previous year’s total of 154,000 ha, higher than the peak of 193,000 hectares reached in 2007. Also, two provinces, Balkh and Faryab, lost their poppy-free status, leaving 15 provinces poppy-free this year compared with 17 last year.

Opium production reached around 5,500 tons, up by almost a half from 2012 but lower than the record high of 7,400 tons in 2007, as the crop yield in the main cultivation areas of southern Afghanistan was affected by bad weather.

Although lower than in 2012, opium prices continued to lure farmers at around \$145 per kg, much higher than the prices fetched during the high yield years of 2006-2008. Farmers may have driven up cultivation by trying to shore up their assets as insurance against an uncertain future, which could ensue from the withdrawal of international troops next year. Worth around US\$ 950 million, or 4 per cent of national GDP in 2013, the farm-gate value of opium production increased by almost a third. Together with profits made by drug traffickers, the total value of the opium economy within Afghanistan was significantly higher, implying that the illicit economy will grow further while a slowdown of the legal economy is predicted in 2014.

“As we approach 2014 and the withdrawal of international forces from the country, Afghanistan, working with its many friends and allies in a spirit of shared responsibility, must make some very serious choices about the future it wants, and act accordingly,” stated Jean-Luc Lemahieu, UNODC Representative for the region.

The link between insecurity and opium cultivation observed in the country since 2007 was still evident in 2013; almost 90 per cent of opium poppy cultivation in 2013 remained confined to nine provinces in the southern and western regions, which include the most insurgency-ridden provinces in the country. Hilmand, Afghanistan’s principal poppy-producer since 2004 and responsible for nearly half of all cultivation, expanded the area under cultivation by 34 per cent, followed by Kandahar, which saw a 16 per cent rise.

Across the country, governor-led eradication decreased by 24 per cent to some 7,300 hectares. Badakhshan, the only poppy-growing province in the north-east, witnessed a 25 per cent increase in cultivation despite the eradication of almost 2,800 ha. During the 2013 eradication campaigns, the

number of casualties rose significantly, with 143 people killed this year compared with 102 fatalities in 2012.

“The narcotics issue in Afghanistan acts as a virus festering on a low immunity system of governance, while further reducing the little resistance remaining. If the aid, development and security actors are still reluctant to tackle the illicit economy in a serious manner now, all agendas will ultimately be defeated, not only counter narcotics”, said Jean-Luc Lemahieu, UNODC Representative for Afghanistan.

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