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**Fortieth 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****Regional and subregional cooperation in South Asia, East
Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific****Note by the Secretariat****I. Introduction: overview of main trends**

1. According to recent estimates by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Asia has the world's largest market for opiates and amphetamine-type and prescription stimulants. In 2014, approximately 10 million users lived in Asia, accounting for approximately 58 per cent (10.2 million) of all users of opiates in the world (17.4 million). With regard to amphetamine-type and prescription stimulants, in 2014 Asia was home to 19.8 million users, representing roughly 55 per cent of the global total (35.7 million).
2. Opiates and amphetamine-type stimulants, in particular methamphetamine, continue to be the two major illicit drug threats in the region of Asia and the Pacific. Most indicators suggest that the illicit manufacture, traffic in and use of methamphetamine in pill and crystalline form have expanded rapidly in recent years. Meanwhile, Asia continued to account for almost all opium poppy cultivation in the world in 2015, with nearly 90 per cent of the global total.
3. The market for methamphetamine in East and South-East Asia continued to grow rapidly. Between 2009 and 2014, the quantities of methamphetamine seized in East and South-East Asia almost quadrupled. Furthermore, the region accounted for the majority of methamphetamine seizures reported worldwide in 2014, alongside

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North America. Preliminary data for 2015 also indicate further increases in methamphetamine seizures in the region.

4. The vast majority of the methamphetamine found in East and South-East Asia is produced and trafficked within the region. However, the growing and firmly established methamphetamine markets in the region have attracted international drug trafficking syndicates, and recent increases in seizures of methamphetamine originating in other regions have been observed.

5. There are indications that methamphetamine use is increasing in the Pacific island countries and territories, which do not have enough resources to address the problem. Transnational organized criminal groups, mainly from Asia and the Americas, continue to use the Pacific island countries and territories as hubs for the trans-shipment of illicit drugs, including cocaine and methamphetamine and its precursor chemicals, primarily en route to Australia and New Zealand.

6. A growing range of new psychoactive substances, including ketamine, piperazines, synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones continue to emerge on illicit drug markets across Asia and the Pacific, although, with the exception of ketamine, the use of these substances remains limited at present in comparison with major illicit drugs such as methamphetamine and heroin. However, increasing amounts of new psychoactive substances have been seized in East and South-East Asia and new types of such substances have been continually identified in recent years.

7. Following a consistent upward trend between 2006 and 2013, opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar and the Lao People's Democratic Republic has stabilized at high levels in the past three years. UNODC estimated that areas under opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar and the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 2015 were 55,500 ha and 5,700 ha, respectively — 61,200 ha in total in the Golden Triangle.

8. The most significant drug-related challenges facing the South Asia region are trafficking in Afghan heroin; the rise in methamphetamine manufacturing and trafficking; the diversion of controlled substances from licit to illicit channels; the smuggling of pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances; and insufficient capacity on the part of and coordination between various drug enforcement agencies in the region. Recent trends indicate the replacement of semi-synthetic drugs with synthetic drugs. There is evidence of an increase in abuse of pharmaceutical drugs containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and their diversion from licit to illicit channels. More recently, South Asia has been experiencing the impact of increasing use of the southern route, with larger than usual seizures of Afghan heroin, in particular in Sri Lanka.

9. South Asia continues to be a source of precursors, in particular ephedrine and pseudoephedrine for illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants in the region and in Oceania. The geographical location of India makes it vulnerable to the transit, trafficking and consumption of opium derivatives in various forms along the known trafficking routes. The major internal factors responsible are illicit cultivation of poppy and the diversion from licit opium sources to illicit production in interior areas.

10. Some countries in South Asia have large or growing pharmaceutical industries. India has an extensive pharmaceutical industrial base which is manufacturing a vast range of pharmaceutical products at highly competitive prices. Such preparations are easily trafficked, not only because of their easy availability but also because of their price competitiveness. The pharmaceutical industry is also vulnerable to diversions to illicit channels. Other countries in the region also receive smuggled pharmaceutical preparations from India, the most common being opioids such as dextropropoxyphene and benzodiazepines, codeine-based cough syrups, buprenorphine, pethidine and others. Pharmaceutical preparations containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are trafficked from India to Myanmar through its north-eastern states. The abuse of pharmaceutical drugs containing controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances is also becoming a problem in Bhutan, in particular the abuse of opioids such as dextropropoxyphene and benzodiazepines such as diazepam and nitrazepam. Bangladesh also has a thriving chemical and pharmaceutical industry.

11. The long borders of Bangladesh with India and with Myanmar to the east account for the vulnerability of that country to drug trafficking. Seizure figures for 2015 show an increase in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Methamphetamine in tablet form, known as “yaba”, smuggled from neighbouring Myanmar, has emerged as the major drug of abuse in the country. Trafficking in codeine-based cough syrups from India is another major cause of concern.

12. Maldives has emerged as a transit point for drugs being trafficked to other destinations. The geographical location of Maldives and the multiple sea routes around the country make it a vulnerable point for illegal shipments of precursor chemicals or drugs intended for other countries. Maldives has a relatively high proportion of young people, who constitute about one third of the total population. The availability of different types of drugs in Maldives has increased; heroin and hashish oil are the most common types of drugs being abused.

13. Nepal continues to be a source country for trafficking in cannabis resin. Hashish is also trafficked to India by a number of land routes and by air from Kathmandu to various destinations in Europe; Hong Kong, China; Japan; Thailand; the Russian Federation; United States of America; and Canada. Heroin from South-West and South-East Asia is also smuggled into Nepal through its long porous border with India and through the international airport at Kathmandu. Evidence suggests that heroin is being smuggled from Pakistan, India and Myanmar to Kathmandu airport. Nepal is also being used as a transit country to smuggle heroin to destination markets such as the Netherlands, Hong Kong, China, China, Australia and others.

14. In Sri Lanka, cannabis and heroin are the major illicit drugs of abuse. Cannabis is the only plant-based drug which is illicitly cultivated in Sri Lanka, and now modern methods are being deployed to cultivate it. The trafficking of heroin into Sri Lanka has been steadily increasing, with sea routes — from South India (for Indian heroin) and from Pakistan (for Afghan-sourced heroin) — being reported as the main trafficking routes. Sri Lanka does not manufacture any synthetic drugs or precursor chemicals, but the use of amphetamine-type stimulants, including methamphetamine and “ecstasy”, and other synthetic drugs, such as lysergic acid diethylamide and ketamine, are being reported.

II. Detailed assessment of production and trafficking trends

15. Transnational criminal groups based in East and South-East Asia have significantly increased the scale of their methamphetamine production to meet growing demand in that region. A large number of clandestine synthetic drug manufacturing facilities, most of which manufacture methamphetamine, are dismantled each year in countries in East and South-East Asia.

16. Although most methamphetamine produced in East and South-East Asia stays in the region to meet the high demand, substantial amounts of methamphetamine manufactured in the region are continuously trafficked to countries in Oceania, in particular Australia and New Zealand. As a result, both Australia and New Zealand have recorded sharp increases in methamphetamine seizures since 2012, and Asia has been the major source for methamphetamine seized at the borders of the two countries in recent years.

17. Large and increasing amounts of methamphetamine in both pill and crystalline form originating from the Golden Triangle continue to be seized in the Mekong countries. For instance, a large majority of methamphetamine pills found in Thailand originate from along the border with Myanmar. Large amounts (90 per cent) of crystalline methamphetamine seized in Thailand also originate from the country. In addition, the Golden Triangle remains the major source of the methamphetamine pills seized in China.

18. For some years, crystalline methamphetamine has been trafficked from Africa, in particular West Africa, and Western Asia. Seizures of methamphetamine originating in Mexico have been reported in some parts of East and South-East Asia in recent years. Furthermore, in recent years transnational drug trafficking groups based in India and Pakistan have also been involved in trafficking illicit drugs, including methamphetamine, ketamine and heroin, into countries in East and South-East Asia.

19. In East and South-East Asia, crystalline methamphetamine seizures in 2014 reached their highest level within the past decade, having increased from 14 tons in 2013 to 19.4 tons in 2014, representing almost a threefold increase compared with 2006. Preliminary data for crystalline methamphetamine seizures in 2015 indicate that seizures of crystalline methamphetamine reached a new peak, nearly 34 tons. Several countries in the region reported record levels of crystalline methamphetamine seizures in that year.

20. Methamphetamine in pill form remains the primary drug of concern for countries in the Greater Mekong subregion. Preliminary data for 2015 indicate that the number of methamphetamine pill seizures in East and South-East Asia reached a new peak, 286 million pills, with the vast majority having been seized in the Mekong countries.

21. In recent years, substantial amounts of methamphetamine have been seized in China. In 2015, 36.6 tons of methamphetamine were seized, representing a 40 per cent increase compared with 2014 (25.9 tons) and an almost 90 per cent increase compared with 2013 (19.5 tons). In addition, the quantity of ketamine seized in China continues to rise. Multi-ton seizures of ketamine have been reported each

year since 2007 in the country. In 2015, 19.6 tons of ketamine were seized, marking a 75 per cent increase compared with 2014 (11.2 tons).

22. Recent data pertaining to registered drug users in China indicate the growing popularity of synthetic drugs in the country. In 2015, over 80 per cent of newly registered drug users (531,000) were using synthetic drugs, indicating that synthetic drugs may have replaced opiates as the primary drug group of concern in the country. The proportion of synthetic drug users among all registered drug users has been on the rise in the country in recent years, with an increase from 33 per cent in 2011 to 57 per cent in 2015.

23. The total number of arrests for drug-related offences in Cambodia increased by almost eighteen fold, from 394 in 2008 to 7,008 in 2015. As with the number of drug-related arrests, the number of treatment admissions for drug use has been increasing rapidly in Cambodia. For instance, between 2011 and 2015, there was an almost fivefold increase in the number of treatment admissions, from 1,011 to 4,959.

24. Over the past three years, some amounts of crystalline methamphetamine have been seized in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. At almost 142 kg, the amount of crystalline methamphetamine seized in the country in 2015 was the highest total ever reported in the country. In recent years, the number of drug-related arrests in the Lao People's Democratic Republic has risen rapidly. Between 2010 and 2015, there was a more than threefold increase in the number of drug-related arrests in the country.

25. Myanmar continues to be a major source of methamphetamine pills, crystalline methamphetamine, opium and heroin in South-East Asia, the majority of which are manufactured in Shan State in the eastern part of the country. Significant amounts of methamphetamine originating in Myanmar continue to be seized in neighbouring countries. Large quantities of methamphetamine have been seized in Myanmar over recent years and seizures of methamphetamine in both pill and crystalline form reached a new peak in 2015.

26. In Brunei Darussalam, crystalline methamphetamine is the primary drug of concern, followed by cannabis. According to arrest and treatment data, the vast majority (94 per cent) of all drug users in the country in 2014 and 2015 were crystalline methamphetamine users. Although crystalline methamphetamine remains the primary drug of concern, cannabis, ketamine and nimetazepam (Erimin-5) are also widely used.

27. Substantial quantities of crystalline methamphetamine have been seized in Indonesia in recent years. In 2015, seizures of crystalline methamphetamine amounted to 4,420 kg, by far the largest amounts ever reported from Indonesia. At the same time, the number of methamphetamine-related arrests has been growing rapidly in recent years in Indonesia. For instance, between 2008 and 2015 the number of crystalline methamphetamine-related arrests nearly tripled, from 8,685 to 23,420.

28. In recent years, large amounts of crystalline methamphetamine have been seized in Japan. Seizures of crystalline methamphetamine increased sharply in 2013 compared with previous years, and since then have decreased but remain at high levels. According to data from the national police agency, in 2015 approximately 432 kg of crystalline methamphetamine were seized in Japan.

29. Large amounts of crystalline methamphetamine have been seized in Malaysia since 2009 and seizures of the drug in 2015 amounted to nearly 1.14 tons. Seizures of methamphetamine pills originating in the Golden Triangle have been stabilized in recent years in the country but remain at high levels. Large quantities of heroin are continuously being trafficked to Malaysia, and 742.8 kg of heroin were seized in 2015.

30. Crystalline methamphetamine remains the most problematic drug of use in the Philippines, and it appears that the market is rapidly growing in the country. Seizures of crystalline methamphetamine have re-emerged since 2013 in the Philippines. For instance, between 2009 and 2012 about 145 kg of the drug were seized on average per year; however, the amounts of the drug seized since 2013 in the country have increased to about 710 kg per year.

31. Crystalline methamphetamine accounts for most drug-related arrests and nearly all drug treatment admissions in the Republic of Korea. In recent years, the amounts of crystalline methamphetamine seized in the Republic of Korea have risen rapidly, indicating the possible expansion of the crystalline methamphetamine market in the country. Seizures of crystalline methamphetamine totalled 56.6 kg in 2015, marking four consecutive years of increases.

32. Heroin and methamphetamine remain the two most commonly abused drugs in Singapore. In 2015, a total of 3,338 drug abusers were arrested in the country, of whom 1,851 (55 per cent) used methamphetamine and 1,253 (38 per cent) used heroin. Large amounts of crystalline methamphetamine were seized in 2012 and 2013, and in 2015 approximately 15.6 kg of crystalline methamphetamine were seized in the country. While trafficking in new psychoactive substances is not a major problem in Singapore, it is certainly a growing problem.

33. In Australia, significant amounts of amphetamine-type stimulants (excluding methylenedioxymetamphetamine (MDMA)) have been seized at the border in recent years. For instance, 3,422.8 kg of amphetamine-type stimulants (excluding MDMA) were seized at the border in 2014-2015, and the figure represents an almost twofold increase compared with 2013-2014 (1,812.4 kg). At the same time, the amount of heroin detected at the Australian border (477 kg) increased in 2014-2015 by 168 per cent, and the majority of analysed heroin seizures in the country originate from South-East Asia, according to drug profiling data.

34. Heroin remains the primary drug of use in Viet Nam, and a total of 1,510 kg of heroin were seized in the country in 2015. Meanwhile, amphetamine-type stimulant use is on the rise, not only among young drug users in major cities, but also within groups of people living in industrialized zones, villages and communities. According to the Standing Office on Drugs Control of Viet Nam, the use of both forms of methamphetamine has increased in recent years.

35. Methamphetamine trafficking and use continues to be the main drug-related concern in Thailand, as evidenced by arrest, seizure and drug treatment data. In 2014 and 2015, seizures of both drugs have been stabilized at a lower level compared with 2013. The recent trends might be the result of intensified law enforcement efforts to stop flows of illicit drugs originating from Myanmar, which is the largest source of methamphetamine found in Thailand.

36. At the global level, in the period from 2008 to 2015 a total of 644 new psychoactive substances were reported by 102 countries and territories, including 30 in Asia, to the UNODC early warning advisory on new psychoactive substances. Some countries in Asia have been relatively more affected by the emergence of new psychoactive substances. For instance, in Japan there were 1,132 arrests related to new psychoactive substances in 2015, marking an almost 160 per cent increase compared with 2014 (403 arrests).

37. Global seizures of synthetic cathinones — including both scheduled and non-scheduled substances (namely, mephedrone) under the international drug control treaties — have been steadily increasing in recent years. Seizures of synthetic cathinones tripled between 2013 and 2014, reaching 1.3 tons, and the majority of them were seized in Europe. However, significant amounts of synthetic cathinones were seized in East and South-East Asia in 2014. For instance, in Hong Kong, China, alone 226 kg were seized in 2014.

38. Since 2012, global ketamine seizures have increased significantly. The increase is attributable largely to the fact that in East and South-East Asia ketamine seizures more than doubled, from 6 tons to more than 12 tons, in 2014. In recent years, dismantled ketamine laboratories have been reported in East and South-East Asia. Preliminary data for 2015 indicate that more than 20 tons of ketamine were seized in the region, and the great majority of them in China and Hong Kong, China.

39. Opium poppy cultivation in the Golden Triangle rose each year until 2013, reaching 57,800 ha in that year, and then stabilized at high levels in 2014 and 2015. In 2015, the total area under opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar was 55,500 ha. The vast majority of cultivation took place in Shan State, accounting for 91 per cent of all cultivation nationwide. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, areas under opium poppy cultivation were estimated at 5,700 ha.

40. Trafficking in heroin continues to increase in some East and South-East Asian countries, possibly reflecting the resurgence of the Golden Triangle over the past few years. For instance, the amount of heroin seized in China increased from about 4.3 tons in 2008 to nearly 8.8 tons in 2015. Heroin seizures in East and South-East Asia also substantially increased to nearly 11 tons in 2015, from 5.2 tons in 2008.

41. Increasing amounts of cocaine have been seized in Asia in recent years. Seizures of cocaine tripled from an average of 0.4 tons over the period 1998-2008 to 1.5 tons per year over the period 2009-2014. In addition, there are indications that drug trafficking groups target several countries in South-East Asia as a transit for cocaine trafficking en route to Oceania, where cocaine seizures more than doubled, from an annual average of 0.5 tons over the period 1998-2008 to 1.2 tons over the period 2009-2014.

42. A number of countries in Asia are being targeted as both source and destination countries for amphetamine-type stimulant precursors, as there are large markets for amphetamine-type stimulants in the region. With a number of countries having tightened controls on the most commonly used precursors during the past couple of years, there are indications that drug traffickers are replacing traditional precursors (namely, pseudoephedrine) with alternative types of precursors and chemically modified precursors that are not under international control. For instance, approximately 2.2 tons of phenylacetic acid and 14.2 litres of 1-phenyl-2-propanone (P-2-P) were seized in Myanmar in 2014 and 2015.

43. In terms of quantities seized, cannabis is the major narcotic drug seized in India, although there are no estimates regarding the cultivation and production of cannabis. Substantial quantities of cannabis are trafficked to India from Nepal across its long, porous border. There is evidence of illicit cultivation of cannabis as well as its wild growth in the districts of Nepal which border India and in the interior districts of the country. Bangladesh has a long history and tradition of producing and consuming cannabis, which is the most common drug of abuse in Bangladesh. In addition to producing hashish for the domestic market, Nepal is a major source of hashish trafficking in India. In 2015, approximately 22 per cent of all the hashish seized in the country was reported to be of Nepalese origin. Hashish is often trafficked from India to overseas destinations in Europe and the Americas by means of courier parcels. The Sri Lankan authorities estimate the land area under cannabis cultivation to be nearly 500 ha. The abuse of cannabis has become significant in that country, as evidenced by the increase in the number of cannabis users.

44. The opium seized in India is suspected of being diverted from licitly cultivated opium in the country and also obtained from illicitly cultivated opium. There is also evidence of illicit opium poppy cultivation in Nepal, although there has been no extensive survey to determine this. However cultivation in small patches has been reported in remote hilly areas, to which enforcement agencies, given their limited resources, find it difficult to gain access. No illicit heroin manufacturing facility has been detected in Nepal as yet. India, after registering a decline in the quantities of heroin seized between 2007 and 2011, witnessed an increase in 2012 and 2013. In 2014, the seizure figures fell slightly, to 1,371 kg from 1,450 kg in 2013. In 2015, heroin seizures increased again to 1,461 kg. The Indian state of Punjab, which shares a border with Pakistan, continues to lead in heroin seizures and accounts for significant quantities of heroin of South-West Asian origin seized in India.

45. The heroin abused in Bangladesh is sold on the streets mostly in a crude and impure form. It is reddish or grey in colour, with the estimated purity not exceeding 5 per cent. Good-quality heroin sourced from the Golden Triangle area also enters the country through its south-eastern part, mostly for further shipment to Europe and the United States by sea. In 2015, the seizure of heroin showed an upward trend compared with the previous year, increasing from 84 kg seized in 2014 to 108.74 kg in 2015. There have been no reports of the domestic manufacture of heroin. In 2015, 2.92 kg of heroin and 2.5 kg of hashish oil were reported to have been seized in Maldives. Although in terms of quantity the seizures have declined in 2015 compared with 2013, the national drug trend indicates an increased demand among users for the two types of drugs. In 2015, seizures of heroin in Nepal witnessed an increase to 6.3 kg compared with the 3.8 kg seized in 2014. In 2015, 9.8 kg of opium were also seized in the country.

46. In addition to the established sea routes, the trafficking of drugs into Sri Lanka by air, largely through Colombo airport, has been reported. The majority of the heroin seized at the international airport at Katunayake has been via couriers from Pakistan who have used various methods to conceal it, including ingesting it and hiding it in their body cavities and in equipment or luggage.

47. South Asia has been witnessing an increase in seizures of cocaine compared with the past few years. The trend of increasing seizures seems to have returned in 2015, with cocaine seizures in India witnessing a steep increase to 113 kg — the

highest quantity of cocaine seized since 2007. Trafficking in approximately 5.8 kg of liquid cocaine was reported in Bangladesh in 2015. In 2013, Maldivian agencies recorded the first ever cocaine seizure in the country, which amounted to about 3.37 kg. In 2014, the biggest seizure of cocaine, amounting to 13 kg, was recorded in the country. Local authorities believe that the cocaine seized in Maldives seems to have originated in Brazil and was possibly intended for onward trafficking to other countries. The first case of cocaine trafficking in Nepal was booked in 2012 and since then there has been an increase in the seizures of cocaine in the country. In 2015, 11 kg of cocaine were seized in Nepal, which is double the quantity seized in 2014 (5.5 kg), making it the highest quantity of cocaine seized to date in Nepal.

48. In India, trafficking in amphetamine-type stimulants, as well as its illicit manufacturing, appear to be increasing and have emerged as a challenge for law enforcement agencies. The quantities of amphetamine-type stimulants seized as well as the number of cases of seizure in India have been rising steadily over the past few years. Although the quantities of amphetamine-type stimulants seized and the number of cases booked declined in 2015 compared with the previous year, the trend indicates an overall increase in trafficking in amphetamine-type stimulants and a decline in one year should not be seen as a reverse or as stopping the trend. Attempts to set up clandestine facilities in India to manufacture amphetamine-type stimulants and other illicit drugs were also reported in 2015. The agencies believe that India is being targeted by criminal networks for the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants and trafficking for other markets.

49. A total of 89 kg of methaqualone were seized in India in 2015, compared with 54 kg seized in 2014, thus registering a growth of 65 per cent on a year-to-year basis. The seizures of methaqualone have shown a great variance, with quantities as low as 5 kg in 2009 and rising to 26 kg in 2012 before registering a dramatic increase to 3,205 kg in 2013. Methaqualone is often trafficked from India through courier parcels to Canada, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Australia, Ethiopia and South-East Asia. In Bangladesh, methamphetamine tablets (known as “yaba”) are smuggled from Myanmar across the south-eastern border. The quantities seized by Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies have been increasing consistently over the past five years. In 2015, 19.5 million tablets were seized in Bangladesh, which is believed to be the highest amount since 2009.

50. Proximity to Myanmar and a surge in domestic demand have made Bangladesh into a big market for “yaba”. Most of the consignments travel from the China-Myanmar border to Yangon and enter Bangladesh directly by sea. Fishing boats are often used for smuggling “yaba” from Myanmar. It has been reported other drugs of abuse, such as cannabis, buprenorphine and tranquillizers, are smuggled from Bangladesh to Myanmar as a barter exchange instead of “yaba”. Occasionally, in Bangladesh, eggs, medicines, toilet preparations, fuel and fertilizers are also reported to be exchanged for “yaba”.

51. Codeine-based cough syrups are widely abused in Bangladesh and are smuggled in large quantities into the country through various land routes as well as the maritime route through the Sundarbans. Although Bangladesh has banned the production and sale of such syrups in its territory, they are smuggled from India, where they are legal. Easy availability, fewer perceived risks and compatibility with both the smoking and non-smoking population has led to its popularity among drug users in Bangladesh. Buprenorphine is one of the major injecting drugs of abuse in

Bangladesh and the most popular. In 2015, around 68,000 capsules of Spasmoproxyvon, a pharmaceutical preparation containing dextropropoxyphene, were seized in Bhutan. Spasmoproxyvon is believed to be trafficked from India, although its manufacture and sale have been banned by that country since 2013.

52. Opioids such as buprenorphine, the benzodiazepine class of drugs, including diazepam and nitrazepam, and codeine-based pharmaceutical preparations, are the most common pharmaceutical drugs trafficked and abused in Nepal. These are reported to be smuggled into Nepal from India through various land routes across porous borders. Around 18,950 ampoules of buprenorphine and 25,000 ampoules of diazepam were seized in the country in 2015, compared with 37,000 ampoules of buprenorphine and 44,495 ampoules of diazepam seized in 2014.

53. In Sri Lanka, the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs such as benzodiazepines including diazepam, clonazepam and others, as well as of barbiturates, prescription opioids such as Tramadol and codeine-based preparations has been reported. In 2014, seizures of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine in India declined sharply to 1,330 kg, from 6,655 kg seized in 2013. The declining trend in seizures continued in 2015, which witnessed a further drop by 38 per cent to 827 kg. However, seizures of pharmaceutical preparations containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine trafficked from India to Myanmar for the extraction of the precursors continued to be reported by Indian drug law enforcement agencies.

54. Bangladesh has emerged as a source and transit location for methamphetamine precursors such as ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. Nepal is not a producer of any of the scheduled chemical precursors, but it imports various precursor chemicals, such as sulphuric acid, hydrochloric acid, acetic anhydride, ethyl ether and ephedrine, for industrial purposes. These precursors are produced under a licence issued by a competent authority. There is a strong possibility that Nepal is serving as a transit route for precursor traffic as it shares its borders with India and China, two significant precursor-producing countries.

55. India continues to be a source country for trafficking in ketamine, mainly to destinations in South-East Asia. Ketamine is also reported to be trafficked to destinations in Africa and the United Kingdom. The use of courier parcels as well as human carriers is the most commonly reported modus operandi.

III. International cooperation

A. Regional conferences and meetings on drug control

56. The thirty-seventh Meeting of the Senior Officials on Drug Matters of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its related meetings were held in Bangkok from 24 to 27 August 2016. Participating countries discussed regional drug policies, including the ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities against Illicit Drugs 2016-2025.

57. The first ASEAN Drug Monitoring Network operational workshop was held in Bangkok from 24 to 26 February 2016 on the theme “Promoting effective drug monitoring cooperation at the ASEAN level”. The workshop was the first activity under the workplan of the Network, which was established as a regional mechanism

for collecting, analysing and reporting information on drugs and drug abuse across ASEAN countries.

58. The twentieth Asia-Pacific Operational Drug Enforcement Conference was held in Tokyo from 16 to 18 February 2016 to discuss the current drug situation in the Asia-Pacific region. The aim of the conference was to strengthen international cooperation, with a special focus on transnational drug trafficking groups based outside the region that are increasingly trafficking drugs into the region.

59. The sixteenth ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime and its related meetings were held in Jakarta from 22 to 27 May 2016, with the participation of 10 ASEAN member countries, their partners and UNODC, to discuss ways to address significant transnational crimes, including drug trafficking, and to promote ASEAN cooperation in fighting transnational crime.

60. The eighth Asia Forensic Science Network Annual Meeting and Symposium was organized in Bangkok in August 2016. At the meeting, forensic experts from Asia discussed how forensic institutions in Asia can better collaborate to address synthetic drug issues.

61. The twenty-fifth Anti-Drug Liaison Officials' Meeting for International Cooperation was held in Jeju, Republic of Korea, from 22 to 24 September 2015. The meeting was attended by representatives of 21 countries from Asia and the Pacific and Europe, as well as UNODC. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss various illicit drug issues reported in the region, including increases in attempts to traffic drugs through airports and seaports and the rapid emergence of new psychoactive substances.

62. In order to facilitate criminal intelligence collection, analysis and information-sharing related to illicit drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organized crime between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives and Sri Lanka and to improve inter-agency regional cooperation between law enforcement agencies in this region, in 2015 UNODC facilitated the creation of the South Asian Regional Intelligence and Coordination Centre on Transnational Organized Crime. To this end, two expert group meetings were held with key government counterparts from the region to deliberate on the proposed options for the creation of such a platform for intelligence and information exchange. The endorsement of the Centre by member States is being pursued. Once it is operational, it will also allow better linkages between the South Asia region and other regional and global platforms for better information exchange to combat organized crimes.

63. With the aim of identifying, detecting and countering new psychoactive substances, the UNODC Office for South Asia organized two regional capacity-building workshops in 2015 and 2016 for law enforcement officers and forensic experts.

B. Cooperation between the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Governments of the region

64. At the subregional level, UNODC support for the partnership in the framework of the 1993 Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control in the Greater Mekong

Subregion continues to play a critical role in enhancing subregional cooperation on drug control matters. The second Greater Mekong subregion drug enforcement conference was held on 26 and 27 July 2016 in Siem Reap, Cambodia. During the conference, representatives of Mekong countries and UNODC discussed measures to facilitate joint operations to address drug trafficking attempts occurring at borders in consideration of the standard operating procedures on multilateral operations, developed in 2014.

65. Under the mechanism of the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding, the Senior Officials Committee Meeting was held in Krabi, Thailand, from 23 to 25 May 2016. Aimed at reviewing overall progress in the Memorandum of Understanding process, the meeting was also a venue to assist signatory States in adjusting direction and policy accordingly, in accordance with the responsibilities of UNODC as Secretariat of the mechanism.

66. Signatories to the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding organized a high-level briefing in the margins of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in April 2016. The briefing was to update the international community on the current drug situation in the region and the relevance of the memorandum of understanding.

67. UNODC organized a workshop for six countries covered by the Mekong memorandum of understanding in Bangkok on 13 and 14 July 2016 to discuss evidence-based strategies on drug use prevention. The workshop — the first of its kind — follows the commitment made by the six countries to align drug prevention strategies with the International Standards on Drug Use Prevention.

68. The UNODC global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme organized the annual SMART regional workshop in Beijing in September 2015. The workshop was attended by all ASEAN member States and neighbouring countries in East Asia and the Pacific, as well as international organizations, including the World Health Organization and the World Customs Organization, and provided an opportunity to discuss emerging trends in illicit synthetic drug markets, such as synthetic drug trafficking facilitated by the Internet and increases in ketamine use in a few countries in the region.

69. A conference on the theme “Enhancing border management in ASEAN: towards a more interconnected and safer ASEAN community” was held in Bangkok in April 2016, co-chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand and the UNODC Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific. At the conference, representatives of ASEAN member States and UNODC discussed the regional integration agenda and supporting processes, transnational crime challenges and vulnerabilities, including drug and precursor trafficking, and the need to strengthen policies, institutions, systems and operational mechanisms that protect border crossings.

70. In April 2016, chiefs of drug control authorities from China, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand, together with UNODC, conducted a threat assessment of the Mekong River, one of the most vulnerable areas for drug and precursor trafficking affecting the region. In-depth inspections were conducted to assess threats of illicit drug and precursor trafficking as well as capabilities and gaps of relevant national authorities along the river.

71. In May 2016, UNODC and the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control of Myanmar jointly conducted a threat assessment in areas along the Myanmar-India border to assess the extent of two-way trafficking channels: illicit drugs from Myanmar to India and precursors from India to Myanmar. The assessment team visited several key provinces of Myanmar located on trafficking routes to conduct in-depth analysis with a view to providing necessary assistance to strengthen capacities of relevant authorities in the assessed areas.

72. The second International Conference on Alternative Development was held in Bangkok in November 2015. The Conference worked to further the implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development, and to facilitate the sharing of best practices and research related to alternative development.

73. UNODC continued its efforts to strengthen the capacity of border liaison offices established across South-East Asia. On the basis of key findings from capacity assessments at several border liaison offices conducted in late 2015, UNODC has been providing technical assistance to enhance the collection and management of data, the development of intelligence, training and the sharing of information at such offices. Several border liaison offices were equipped with innovative field tablet technology, which allows officers to gain access to a wide array of law enforcement tools, including UNODC global e-learning training courses.

74. UNODC, in partnership with the World Customs Organization, has been implementing the Global Container Control Programme to strengthen the capacity of eight countries in South-East Asia — Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines — to better interdict illicit goods, including drugs and precursors, at seaports.

75. With support from UNODC, the Phu Son prison in Thai Nguyen province, Viet Nam, launched the first methadone maintenance therapy service unit for prisoners in the country in October 2015. The first methadone treatment service opened in the prison, it offers adequate treatment to the prisoners affected by drugs.

76. The first ever national drug use survey has been under way in Myanmar, where currently no official data are available on the number of drug users. In February 2016, plans for the survey were discussed at the first meeting of the national steering committee, which was recently established following consultations with the Ministry of Home Affairs. The committee is co-chaired by UNODC and the Myanmar Police Force and includes other key stakeholders from across the Government and national non-governmental organizations.

77. UNODC and the Government of Myanmar jointly conducted an overview of the Myanmar Police Force to better understand the operational mandates and challenges, and legal and reform debates, surrounding police and civilian law enforcement in Myanmar with the aim of identifying priorities and assistance needs. Through the study, areas where interventions are most likely to be successful have been identified, and they will be used to inform assistance to the police and civilian law enforcement in Myanmar.

78. In 2015, the Regional Office for South Asia conducted expert assessments on pharmaceutical drugs containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in

countries of South Asia. The key objectives were: (a) to assess the nature and extent of pharmaceutical abuse in the region; (b) to assess the adequacy of prevalent legal and policy regimes governing the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs in the region; and (c) to assess the organizational, regulatory and enforcement capacities of the concerned agencies and to identify the gaps in the legal regime and their organizational capacities.

79. Throughout 2014, 2015 and 2016, the Governments of Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka joined the container control and air cargo programmes to enhance capacities for countering illicit drug and precursor trafficking through seaports and airports.

80. In 2015, law enforcement and civil society workshops were held in New Delhi and Assam, India, with the aim of promoting support for HIV medical care and treatment and support for high-risk populations, in particular injecting drug users. The workshop also aimed to enhance partnerships between law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations.

81. In order to facilitate and establish a framework for cooperation between UNODC and the secretariat of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) on matters of drug control and crime prevention, a memorandum of understanding between the Regional Office for South Asia and the SAARC secretariat is under finalization and is likely to be signed in 2016/17. SAARC was launched in 1981 to promote regional development, with an emphasis on self-reliance. Its members are the countries covered by the UNODC Regional Office for South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka), as well as Afghanistan and Pakistan.

C. Bilateral cooperation and national efforts

82. On 27 September 2015, the Food and Drug Administration of China announced that it had placed 116 new psychoactive substances under control, effective 1 October 2015. The newly scheduled new psychoactive substances include 39 synthetic cannabinoids, 26 synthetic cathinones and 23 phenethylamines.

83. China continued its efforts to enhance the level of drug abuse treatment and rehabilitation. By the end of 2015, 228,000 drug abusers had received community-based drug treatment and 91,000 drug users had received rehabilitation services across the country. In addition, the Government of China developed and announced a workplan on community-based drug treatment and rehabilitation (2016-2020) to provide community-based treatment and rehabilitation services for a larger number of people.

84. In May 2016, Singapore amended the Misuse of Drugs Act, taking effect from 1 May 2016, moving 20 new psychoactive substances as well as a generic group of tryptamines from the fifth to the first schedule of the Act and classifying them as class A controlled drugs. Two other new psychoactive substances — MT-45 and *para*-methyl-4-methylaminorex (4,4'-DMAR) — were added to the first schedule. In addition, four new psychoactive substances, MDMB-CHMICA, THJ-018, NM-2201 (and its fluoro positional isomers in the pentyl group) and 5F-NNE1 (and its fluoro positional isomers in the pentyl group), were added to the fifth schedule.

85. The tenth Thailand-Viet Nam Bilateral Meeting on Drug Control Cooperation was organized by the Office of the Narcotics Control Board of Thailand on 29 and 30 March 2016. The two countries shared information about their current national drug situations and their efforts to address drug-related challenges. The two countries also agreed to conduct study visits on caffeine and precursor control, drug identification/analysis, seaport/airport interdiction and drug prevention and rehabilitation.

86. In September 2015, the China-Lao People's Democratic Republic Liaison and Coordination Meeting on Remote Monitoring and Alternative Development for the Cultivation of Opium Poppy was held in Yunnan, China, to promote sustainable development of alternative crop cultivation in the Golden Triangle.

87. The Government of Viet Nam has issued several regulations to support drug users in better integrating with communities. Those regulations include reducing income tax for businesses employing former drug users and creating a healthy environment for drug users to receive education and vocational training in medical, educational and social centres.

D. Conclusions and recommendations

88. Based on available data and information from Member States in Asia and the Pacific, it is evident that the region is vulnerable to the use and manufacture of and traffic in a wide range of illicit drugs and related precursor chemicals. In particular, the synthetic drug market in the region has been rapidly expanding over the past decade and, as a result, it is estimated that Asia-Pacific has become the region with the biggest synthetic drug market in the world.

89. In the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, it was recommended that, inter alia, the capacity of health, social and law enforcement and other criminal justice authorities to cooperate, within their mandates, be developed and strengthened, as appropriate. States reiterated their commitment to promoting the health, welfare and well-being of all individuals, families, communities and society as a whole and facilitating healthy lifestyles through effective, comprehensive, scientific evidence-based demand reduction initiatives at all levels, covering, in accordance with national legislation and the three international drug control conventions, prevention, early intervention, treatment, care, recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration measures, as well as initiatives and measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health and social consequences of drug abuse.

90. Potential heroin production in Afghanistan and the Golden Triangle also continued to increase and coincided with the increasing levels of opium poppy cultivation in both areas. The persistent demand for opiates coupled with the lack of development assistance and alternative income sources for opium poppy growers have been driving factors for the high levels of opium poppy cultivation in both Afghanistan and the Golden Triangle.

91. There is an urgent need to take into account the specific needs and circumstances faced by women and girls with regard to drugs. Women and girls are more likely to face obstacles and stigma in accessing health services when affected

by drug dependence and HIV, they are more vulnerable to exploitation and violence, are increasingly involved in drug trafficking as couriers, and often have unaddressed specific needs as imprisoned drug offenders.

92. Consideration could be given to increasing investments in promoting evidence-based research/approaches, including drug use surveys, thematic assessments (among women in prisons). The data collection and analysis mechanisms in the countries of the region need to be strengthened significantly and the epidemiological data should be collected on an ongoing basis and shared among various agencies dealing with drug matters. Governments must devise mechanisms to monitor consumer markets for pharmaceutical drugs containing narcotic drug and psychotropic substances and usage patterns and also conduct drug utilization reviews.

93. Substantial amounts of licitly produced precursor chemicals are being continuously diverted and trafficked within the region. Attributable in part to the booming chemical industry in the region, the wide availability of precursor chemicals for both synthetic drugs and opiates is a significant challenge for Member States in the region.

94. A rapid regional integration process is ongoing in Asia and the Pacific, in particular South-East Asia. Although the regional integration will bring positive economic development for the region, it may also make Member States in the region vulnerable to increased trafficking in illicit drugs and precursor chemicals.

95. Despite a number of strategies developed and the enhanced efforts of law enforcement agencies in Asia and the Pacific, the region is still highly vulnerable to threats posed by the use and manufacture of and traffic in illicit drugs and precursor chemicals. As long as there is high demand for illicit drugs in the region, transnational organized criminal groups will continue their illicit activities.

96. Internet-related drug trafficking, including by means of the darknet, has emerged as a major challenge for law enforcement agencies worldwide. A systematic capacity-building initiative for improving the knowledge and skills of law enforcement officers on this aspect is highly recommended.

97. Enhancing mechanisms for cross-border and regional cooperation on drug matters, including relevant bodies such as SAARC and the newly proposed South Asia Regional Intelligence and Coordination Centre.

98. Member States may wish to consider multilateral and multifaceted approaches to addressing challenges of illicit drugs and precursor chemicals in Asia and the Pacific, including:

(a) Increasing the capacity of national authorities to effectively gather and share data and information on production, use and trafficking of illicit drugs and precursor chemicals with a view to continuously monitoring rapid developments of the illicit drug markets at the national and regional levels;

(b) Enhancing knowledge and skills of law enforcement officers to better investigate and prosecute drug trafficking offences through the provision of appropriate training on drug and precursor trafficking, as well as specialized training initiatives;

(c) Enhancing drug and precursor identification and profiling capacities through the development of infrastructure, training, and networking, including engagement with the chemical industry;

(d) Enhancing mechanisms for cross-border and regional cooperation on drug matters, including relevant sectoral bodies of ASEAN, the Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control in the Greater Mekong Subregion and the Pacific Islands Forum secretariat mechanism;

(e) Strengthening the functions of the border liaison offices mechanism in order to interdict and act upon illegal movements of illicit drugs and precursors across land borders through enhanced cross-border and inter-agency cooperation;

(f) Developing similar approaches in selected ports by strengthening container control mechanisms and inter-agency cooperation, in order to improve interdiction capacity of maritime trafficking of illicit drugs and related precursors by relevant port authorities;

(g) Supporting the development of the capacity to collect, analyse and disseminate data on the extent, patterns and trends of drug use and on the related risk factors in the region, with regionally comparable methodologies and common indicators;

(h) Supporting the implementation of evidence-based drug use prevention policies and programmes;

(i) Transitioning, where applicable, from the model of compulsory drug treatment centres towards community and voluntary services, as such evidence-based approaches are more effective than incarceration to address the harmful consequences of drug abuse.
