5 December 2022

Original: English*

Report of the Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East on its fifty-fifth session, held in Ashgabat from 22 to 25 November 2022

I. Matters calling for action by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs or brought to its attention

A. Recommendations adopted by the Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East at its fifty-fifth session

1. At its fifty-fifth session, the Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East adopted the recommendations set forth below, which were made by its working groups. For the observations of the working groups that led to the recommendations, see section IV below.

1. Trends in drug trafficking and concealment methods, and in intelligence-led international cooperation

2. The following recommendations were made with regard to trends in drug trafficking and concealment methods, and in intelligence-led international cooperation:

(a) Governments are urged to increase collaborative efforts to build trust, cooperate and share information on concealment methods and other modi operandi of criminal networks to enhance targeted action. This can be achieved by making use of existing regional cooperation mechanisms to exchange drug-related intelligence, in particular the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC) and the Joint Planning Cell under the Triangular Initiative;

(b) Governments are encouraged to use advanced detection technology and increase law enforcement cooperation by means of intelligence-led operations, joint operations, backtracking investigations and controlled deliveries in order to apprehend the key actors behind criminal groups and disrupt their networks. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is requested to provide technical assistance and equipment-related support to countries;

^{*} Available only in Arabic, English and Russian, which are the working languages of the subsidiary body.





(c) Governments should consider increasing their participation in cooperation and capacity-building initiatives offered at the international level.

2. Synthetic drug production and trafficking, including the safe handling and disposal of synthetic drugs and their precursors

3. The following recommendations were made with regard to synthetic drug production and trafficking, including the safe handling and disposal of synthetic drugs and their precursors:

(a) Governments are encouraged to consider options for the safe disposal of drugs and chemicals, taking into account local contexts, including by coordinating among government agencies, collaborating with the private sector and educational institutions, evaluating the viability of using new, cost-effective disposal methods and making use of available capacity-building programmes to that end;

(b) Governments should consider adopting measures to mitigate the risk to first responders of handling synthetic drugs by making use of the Guidelines for the Safe Handling of Synthetic Opioids for Law Enforcement and Customs Officers;

(c) Governments should consider the possibility of strengthening cooperation in the area of cybersecurity and cryptocurrency among public-private partnerships involving the banking sector, postal companies and courier services, in order to disrupt the illegal trade in and shipment of synthetic drugs and the methods used to pay for those drugs;

(d) Governments should explore opportunities to build the capacity of their law enforcement agencies to undertake online investigations and track virtual currencies through programmes delivered under the UNODC Global Programme on Cybercrime;

(e) UNODC should consider supporting countries, where possible, in strengthening their capacity to safely dispose of seized drugs, chemicals and the precursors used in their illicit manufacture, through the provision of technical assistance and equipment-related support.

3. Alternatives to conviction and punishment for drug-related offences

4. The following recommendations were made with regard to alternatives to conviction and punishment for drug-related offences:

(a) Governments are encouraged to adopt a health-oriented approach, under which people with drug use disorders in contact with the criminal justice system are directed to treatment and care services as early as possible, in order to reduce the non-medical use of drugs and the incidence of drug-related offences and other crimes;

(b) Governments are encouraged to continue strengthening coordination among the health, education, justice and social sectors in order to ensure that the specific needs of individuals are met through appropriate programmes and interventions provided as alternatives to conviction and punishment;

(c) Governments are encouraged to conduct appropriate data collection in the health and justice systems in order to enhance monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of alternative measures for people with drug use disorders in contact with the criminal justice system.

4. Exchange of actionable intelligence and the role of regional cooperation platforms in facilitating such exchange

5. The following recommendations were made with regard to the exchange of actionable intelligence and the role of regional cooperation platforms in facilitating such exchange:

(a) Existing regional coordination mechanisms, such as CARICC and the Criminal Information Centre to Combat Drugs of the Gulf Cooperation Council,

should continue to promote and facilitate the exchange of actionable intelligence on drug trafficking at the operational level among constituent partners;

(b) Existing regional coordination mechanisms should continue their efforts to network with other regional intelligence-sharing platforms, including the Joint Planning Cell, in order to promote and facilitate the sharing of intelligence and joint operations both within and outside the region;

(c) Governments should encourage the formation of joint investigation teams in transnational drug trafficking cases in order to bring to justice criminal networks operating across jurisdictional boundaries.

II. Current situation with respect to regional and subregional cooperation

6. At its 1st meeting, on 22 November 2022, the Subcommission considered item 3 of its agenda, entitled "Current situation with respect to regional and subregional cooperation". For its consideration of the item, the Subcommission had before it the report of the Secretariat on the world situation with regard to drug trafficking (E/CN.7/2022/5) and the report of the Secretariat on the current situation with respect to regional and subregional cooperation (UNODC/SUBCOM/55/3/Add.1). In addition, country reports had been submitted by Azerbaijan, Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Türkiye and Turkmenistan (UNODC/SUBCOM/55/CRP.1–18).

7. The representative of the UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia made a statement, providing an overview of the drug situation in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, including with regard to drug-related regional threats. Meeting participants were briefed on the Strategic Stability Grid, which had been developed by UNODC in 2021 with the aim of addressing intersecting drug, crime and terrorism threats in and around Afghanistan. Information was also shared on the UNODC Programme for Central Asia 2022–2025 and on border security initiatives implemented in the region. Statements were made by the representatives of Iran (Islamic Republic of), Pakistan and Turkmenistan. Statements were also made by the observers for France and the Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior.

8. Many speakers reported on measures undertaken at the national, regional and international levels to counter trafficking in drugs and on related challenges.

9. Speakers highlighted that international cooperation was the cornerstone of efforts to address and counter the world drug problem. In the same vein, speakers stressed the importance of strengthened intelligence-led cooperation among national law enforcement agencies in countering drug trafficking and related crimes. It was noted that close partnerships with relevant regional and international organizations played an important role in that regard.

10. Some speakers noted that it was important to provide technical assistance to countries along the drug transit route, based on the principle of common and shared responsibility.

11. Some speakers emphasized the importance of implementing alternative development initiatives in poppy cultivation areas. The need to adopt an operational response to the diversion of precursor chemicals was also underscored. It was confirmed that international controlled deliveries were carried out in cases of trafficking in heroin.

12. It was noted that it was essential to facilitate the sharing of national best practices and lessons learned in developing and implementing initiatives aimed at the treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration of drug users.

13. Reference was made to the rising trend of drug trafficking through courier services and by air.

III. Implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Subcommission at its fifty-fourth session

14. At its 2nd meeting, on 22 November 2022, the Subcommission considered item 4 of its agenda, entitled "Implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Subcommission at its fifty-fourth session".

15. For its consideration of the item, the Subcommission had before it a note by the Secretariat on the implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Subcommission at its fifty-fourth session (UNODC/SUBCOM/55/4/Add.1), which had been prepared on the basis of information provided by Governments in response to a questionnaire sent to all States members of the Subcommission. The document reflected the replies received by the deadline from the Governments of Azerbaijan, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Turkmenistan. Responses to the questionnaire had also been received from Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan.

16. The Secretary of the Subcommission introduced the agenda item and provided a summary of the main issues related to the implementation of the recommendations referred to in the note.

17. A statement was made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The observers for France and CARICC also made statements.

18. Reference was made to security concerns in the region related to the increased production of methamphetamine in Afghanistan. The need for the strengthened exchange of operational information was highlighted. It was noted that the provision of technical assistance to countries in need, based on the principle of common and shared responsibility, was key to strengthening joint action to address and counter the world drug problem.

19. It was noted that synthetic drugs ordered online were shipped in multiple small quantities using express freight and postal services. It was also highlighted that 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) was the main synthetic drug consumed in some countries.

20. Information was shared on a recent regional operation coordinated by CARICC, which had been aimed at combating trafficking in new psychoactive substances and synthetic drugs in Central Asia. Meeting participants were briefed on the preparatory process and coordination mechanisms, the support provided with regard to related international and legal frameworks and the outcome of the operation. The need for unified regional action to curb the rapid proliferation of new psychoactive substances in Central Asia was underscored.

IV. Consideration of topics by working groups

21. At its 3rd to 6th meetings, on 23 and 24 November 2022, the Subcommission established working groups to examine the four topics under item 5 of its agenda, entitled "Consideration of topics by working groups". The observations made by the working groups after their consideration of the topics are presented below. For the recommendations made by the working groups and adopted by the Subcommission, see section I above.

A. Trends in drug trafficking and concealment methods, and in intelligence-led international cooperation

22. The working group held two meetings, on 23 November. In its consideration of the topic in question, the working group made the following observations:

(a) Both methamphetamine and heroin continue to be produced in large quantities in Afghanistan. The ban on opium production in the country, which came

into force in 2021, is having no apparent impact on the levels of production of heroin or methamphetamine. Countries in Central Asia report that both of those drugs are typically transported through their countries to the Russian Federation and then on to other European destinations. Current restrictions on the movement of people and goods into the Russian Federation are expected to result in the use of alternative trafficking routes to European countries. Heroin and methamphetamine produced in Afghanistan were also transiting through the region;

(b) Large quantities of precursor chemicals are being shipped to Afghanistan from European and South Asian countries;

(c) Organized criminal groups are engaging in all methods of concealment using various means of transportation – containerized shipments, trucks and other motorized vehicles, trains, luggage, bodily concealment, courier parcels and mail, some of which are innovative, and are making increasing use of tactics and methodologies that require insider knowledge. Criminal groups are also continuing to employ more innovative concealment methods, including the concealment of heroin and methamphetamine in liquids and inside perishable fruit, vegetables and other raw foodstuffs. It was observed that the drugs are concealed mainly in the source countries;

(d) Border inspection posts must be adequately resourced with suitable detection equipment operated by well-trained officers in order to ensure effective and successful detection efforts;

(e) Seizures are often the direct result of intelligence-led investigations, tip-offs and other collaborative efforts, as well as risk profiling and targeting methods. Political changes in the region in 2021 resulted in the suspension of intelligence-sharing and cooperation activities, which is proving to be a significant obstacle to combating drug trafficking in the region, in particular through the Joint Planning Cell;

(f) Challenges to international operations include the existence of different legal systems and law enforcement practices, communication difficulties, the language barrier and a lack of funding and trust;

(g) The publication and sharing of information relating to concealment methodologies, trafficking routes and recent drug seizures had become routine in Central Asia through the work of CARICC;

(h) Challenges persist in law enforcement cooperation and mutual information-sharing, particularly in relation to the use of communication platforms and building the requisite trust needed for those platforms to function effectively.

B. Synthetic drug production and trafficking, including the safe handling and disposal of synthetic drugs and their precursors

23. The working group held one meeting, on 23 November 2022. In its consideration of the topic in question, the working group made the following observations:

(a) Synthetic drug markets in the region continue to thrive, with increased amounts of such drugs seized by national authorities in the region;

(b) There is growing evidence that organized criminal groups in the region continue to circumvent both existing border control arrangements and precursor regulatory frameworks to source chemicals for the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs. Local production in clandestine laboratories has been detected in most countries in recent years;

(c) There is a lack of innovative legislative approaches to regulate non-scheduled precursors of synthetic drugs in some countries;

(d) Since 2021, the ability of countries in the region to proactively share intelligence on trafficking in and the production of synthetic drugs and their

precursors and to undertake international joint operations involving Afghanistan has been limited. Such operations, focused on precursors, had previously been conducted in the region;

(e) Diverse synthetic drug products have emerged on the illicit synthetic drug market in the region. Their safe handling is of key importance to ensure the safety of first responders, including law enforcement officers and health-care professionals. Guidelines for the Safe Handling of Synthetic Opioids for Law Enforcement and Customs Officers have been developed by UNODC;

(f) The safe disposal of seized drugs, chemicals and the precursors used in their illicit manufacture, as well as the dismantling of clandestine laboratories, are a challenge in the region. Capacity-building programmes and cost-effective alternative disposal methods exist that could be adapted to the local context, and UNODC offers technical support to interested parties;

(g) UNODC and the International Narcotics Control Board have developed tools to increase knowledge, capacity and cooperation in order to enhance responses to the production of and trafficking in synthetic drugs and their precursors. Examples include the United Nations Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs and the Project Ion Incident Communication System (IONICS);

(h) Cybercrime and cryptocurrencies pose a specific challenge with regard to trafficking in synthetic drugs. Capacity-building programmes are offered under the UNODC Global Programme on Cybercrime.

C. Alternatives to conviction and punishment for drug-related offences

24. The working group held one meeting, on 24 November. In its consideration of the topic in question, the working group made the following observations:

(a) Progress has been made in many countries in developing and implementing alternatives to conviction and punishment for drug-related offences at different stages of proceedings. Although countries cited examples of how they have reformed their laws and practices to avoid the use of imprisonment as a sanction for drug use, the process of referring people with drug use disorders to treatment services requires additional efforts in the region;

(b) A holistic approach to drug policy includes a comprehensive set of supply and demand reduction measures that are complementary and mutually reinforcing, including alternatives to conviction and punishment. In order to yield success, measures must be adapted and appropriate to the respective local context;

(c) Alternatives to conviction and punishment are provided for within the framework of the international drug control conventions. Non-custodial measures can be applied at various stages of the criminal justice process and are being applied in the region to varying degrees, particularly in relation to treatment as an alternative to imprisonment, in accordance with national legislation and policy;

(d) Alternatives to conviction and punishment are an integral part of comprehensive interventions aimed at addressing drug use and drug use disorders and include treatment, education, rehabilitation and social reintegration services.

D. Exchange of actionable intelligence and the role of regional cooperation platforms in facilitating such exchange

25. The working group held one meeting, on 24 November. In its consideration of the topic in question, the working group made the following observations:

(a) There is a need to continue to foster and strengthen cooperation between countries, UNODC and regional organizations in order to achieve the goal of effective

control of drug trafficking. The use of regional cooperation arrangements and agencies has continued to prove an effective means of combating drug trafficking;

(b) The role of CARICC in facilitating the sharing of actionable intelligence and subsequent joint operational activity, both within and outside the region, was highlighted as an excellent example of a successful regional intelligence-sharing platform. Other regional intelligence-sharing arrangements were also cited as useful platforms that countries in the region work with to share intelligence. These include the Criminal Information Centre to Combat Drugs of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Triangular Initiative of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, with the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan continuing to share intelligence bilaterally;

(c) The exchange of actionable intelligence is important to facilitate law enforcement decision-making and to conduct successful intelligence-led operations targeting the organized criminal groups responsible for transnational drug trafficking;

(d) Joint operations between countries in the region are a useful but under-used tool in drug control. Reference was made to the achievements of the Joint Planning Cell under the Triangular Initiative. The need to share actionable intelligence despite political differences was recognized. Case studies showed that intelligence-sharing with other countries led to successful international operations that resulted in significant drug seizures;

(e) National inter-agency coordination continues to be improved by countries in the region to successfully combat drug trafficking. Such coordination is a necessary precondition for strong bilateral and regional cooperation.

V. Follow-up on the implementation at the national, regional and international levels of all commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the world drug problem, and preparations for the midterm review in 2024

26. At its 2nd meeting, on 22 November 2022, the Subcommission discussed agenda item 6, entitled "Follow-up on the implementation at the national, regional and international levels of all commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the world drug problem, and preparations for the midterm review in 2024". For its consideration of the item, the meeting had before it the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem, the outcome document of the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem", and the 2019 Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening Our Actions at the National, Regional and International Levels to Accelerate the Implementation of Our Joint Commitments to Address and Counter the World Drug Problem.

27. The Secretary of the Subcommission made a presentation to introduce the agenda item, informing participants of the work carried out by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, focusing in particular on the outcome of its sixty-fifth regular session, held in March 2022.

28. Information was also shared on the access and availability initiative launched by the Chair of the Commission, which was aimed at scaling up the implementation of the international drug policy commitments on improving the availability of and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

29. The Subcommission was further informed about the multi-year workplan for the period 2019–2023, adopted by the Commission in 2019 as a follow-up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, with a view to accelerating the implementation of all international drug policy commitments through the organization of thematic

discussions to foster a dialogue and exchange on good practices, challenges and lessons learned.

30. Information was shared on the thematic discussions held on 21 and 22 September 2022 on the topic "Responses not in conformity with the three international drug control conventions and not in conformity with applicable international human rights obligations pose a challenge to the implementation of joint commitments based on the principle of common and shared responsibility".

31. A statement was made by the representative of Pakistan. The observer for CARICC also made a statement.

32. One speaker shared information on the challenges encountered in the implementation of international drug policy commitments, such as the rampant cultivation and production of conventional and synthetic drugs in the region, challenges related to international cooperation, insufficient infrastructure and limited capacity. Meeting participants were also briefed on national initiatives undertaken to fulfil drug policy commitments, including with regard to the normative framework, supply reduction, demand reduction, alternative development, proportionate sentencing and juvenile justice.

33. The need for research and development initiatives for the design of advanced detection technologies was stressed. The importance of strengthening the technical capacity of affected countries to address and counter the drug problem, including through existing mechanisms of international organizations, was highlighted.

34. It was also underscored that streamlining the existing legal framework and procedures was essential for accelerating international cooperation. Regional cooperation was regarded as an integral part of the fight against drug trafficking.

VI. Organization of the fifty-sixth session of the Subcommission

35. At its 8th meeting, on 25 November 2022, the Subcommission considered agenda item 7, entitled "Organization of the fifty-sixth session of the Subcommission".

36. For its consideration of item 7, the Subcommission had before it a draft provisional agenda for its fifty-sixth session (UNODC/SUBCOM/55/5, annex). The Secretary made an introductory statement outlining action to be taken for the organization of that session.

37. The Chair invited delegations of States interested in hosting the fifty-sixth session to contact the Secretariat in order to determine the venue as early as possible and thus facilitate preparations.

38. The Subcommission held a discussion on possible topics to be considered by the working groups at its fifty-sixth session, under item 5 of the draft provisional agenda. A number of topics were proposed, including: precursor chemicals that form the basis for the production of opiates; alternative development initiatives to reduce opiate production; and the dark web and cryptocurrency used for the distribution of illicit drugs.

39. The Meeting took note of the proposals and requested the Secretariat to finalize the issues to be discussed by working groups prior to the fifty-sixth session. The Subcommission approved the following draft provisional agenda for its fifty-sixth session:

- 1. Election of officers.
- 2. Adoption of the agenda.
- 3. Current situation with respect to regional and subregional cooperation in addressing and countering the world drug problem.

- 4. Implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Subcommission at its fifty-fifth session.
- 5. Consideration of topics by working groups [to be determined].
- 6. Follow-up on the implementation at the national, regional and international levels of all commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the world drug problem and preparations for the midterm review in 2024.
- 7. Organization of the fifty-seventh session of the Subcommission.
- 8. Other business.
- 9. Adoption of the report of the Subcommission on its fifty-sixth session.

VII. Other business

40. The Secretary highlighted the information provided to the meeting on the dedicated secure website, including draft in-session reports, in light of the meeting being held in a paperless format.

VIII. Adoption of the report

41. At its 8th meeting, on 25 November 2022, the Subcommission adopted the report on its fifty-fifth session (UNODC/SUBCOM/55/L.1 and Add.1–7). The reports of the working groups and the recommendations contained therein, as orally revised, were also adopted.

IX. Organization of the fifty-fifth session of the Subcommission

A. Opening and duration of the session

42. The fifty-fifth session of the Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East was held in Ashgabat from 22 to 25 November 2022.

43. Welcome remarks were made by the Chair of the session. The session was addressed by the Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-fifth session and the Executive Director of UNODC, through video messages. Opening statements were made by the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Turkmenistan, the representative of the UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia and the Minister of the Interior of Turkmenistan.

B. Attendance

44. The following States members of the Subcommission were represented: Bahrain, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

45. The Russian Federation and France were represented by observers.

46. The Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior, CARICC, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia were also represented.

47. UNODC served as the secretariat of the session.

C. Election of officers

48. At its 1st meeting, on 22 November 2022, the Subcommission elected the following officers by acclamation:

Chair:	Geldimyrat Haldurdyyev (Turkmenistan)	
First Vice-Chair:	Aneeq Ur Rehman Malik (Pakistan)	
Second Vice-Chair:	Kibar Osmanov (Kyrgyzstan)	
Rapporteur:	Mohammad Narimani (Islamic Republic of Iran)	

D. Adoption of the agenda

- 49. Also at its 1st meeting, the Subcommission adopted the following agenda:
 - 1. Election of officers.
 - 2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
 - 3. Current situation with respect to regional and subregional cooperation.
 - 4. Implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Subcommission at its fifty-fourth session.
 - 5. Consideration of topics by working groups:
 - (a) Trends in drug trafficking and concealment methods, and in intelligence-led international cooperation;
 - (b) Synthetic drug production and trafficking, including the safe handling and disposal of synthetic drugs and their precursors;
 - (c) Alternatives to conviction or punishment for drug-related offences;
 - (d) Exchange of actionable intelligence and the role of regional cooperation platforms in facilitating such exchange.
 - 6. Follow-up on the implementation at the national, regional and international levels of all commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the world drug problem, and preparations for the midterm review in 2024.
 - 7. Organization of the fifty-sixth session of the Subcommission.
 - 8. Other business.
 - 9. Adoption of the report of the Subcommission on its fifty-fifth session.

E. Documentation

50. The documents before the Subcommission at its fifty-fifth session are listed in the annex to the present document.

Annex

List of documents before the Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East at its fifty-fifth session

Document number	Agenda item	Title or description
E/CN.7/2022/5	3	Report of the Secretariat on the world situation with regard to drug trafficking
UNODC/SUBCOM/55/1	2	Annotated provisional agenda
UNODC/SUBCOM/55/2	3	Note by the Secretariat transmitting the report on the world situation with regard to drug trafficking
UNODC/SUBCOM/55/3/Add.1	3	Report of the Secretariat on the current situation with respect to regional and subregional cooperation
UNODC/SUBCOM/55/4/Add.1	4	Note by the Secretariat on the implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Subcommission at its fifty-fourth session
UNODC/SUBCOM/55/5	7	Note by the Secretariat on the organization of the fifty-sixth session of the Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East
UNODC/SUBCOM/55/L.1 and Add.1–7	9	Draft report
UNODC/SUBCOM/55/CRP.1-18	3	Country reports