



UNITED NATIONS
*Office on Drugs and
Crime*

Uniting to Contain the Opium Menace; Multi-
national cooperation against a trans-national threat

Opening Remarks by Bernard Frahi, Chief,
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3rs Meeting of the Central and South Asia Counter Narcotics Security
Working Group

Vienna 28 November 2006

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to deliver this keynote address on behalf of Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Unfortunately Mr. Costa could not take part in this meeting as he was asked to represent the Secretary-General at a meeting in Moscow.

The Central and South Asia Counter Narcotics Security Working Group prides itself on giving a voice to the region. Today I think that voice is crying "help!".

Five years after the overthrow of the Taliban, Afghanistan is still plagued by instability. The main reason is opium.

In December last year, President Karzai stated that *either Afghan destroys opium, or opium destroys Afghanistan*. Unfortunately, it appears that we are getting closer to that second option.

According to UNODC, in 2006 opium cultivation in Afghanistan rose by almost 60 percent, to a staggering 165,000 hectares. At present, the opium harvest (6,100 tons) is being turned into over 800 tons of heroin and morphine worth \$3.1 billion, equivalent to half the national income. Drugs have become the country's largest employer, income-generator, export and capital investment — as well as the biggest source of problems, and not only in Afghanistan.

Most of this money is made by traffickers who use it to buy influence and impunity, thus weakening the government and the state, especially law enforcement. The public is losing hope and the coalition forces are becoming unwelcome. This is fertile ground for extremism, as history has proven.

Most of the opium is grown in the South, the Taleban's birth-place. In Helmand province opium cultivation rose an extraordinary 160% last year. In near-by provinces like Kandahar, Uruzgan and Farah, opium growers and traffickers prosper, protected by insurgents.

Drug trafficking is having a destabilizing effect on neighbouring States. Since Afghanistan is unable to deal with its massive opium problem, neighbouring States are bearing the brunt. The tri-border region between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan is becoming a new Golden Triangle. Drug use and HIV/AIDS is spreading in neighbouring States. And drug trafficking is fuelling organized crime along trafficking routes.

What can be done?

First and foremost, the Afghan government needs to enforce the law against corrupt officials, drug traffickers and opium landlords. The international community has trained police and prosecutors; it has constructed court houses and detention centres. Now the government has the obligation to use the judicial system, infant as it is, to impose the rule of law and re-establish confidence in the government. It also needs to lift the veil on corruption.

Mr. Costa has recently proposed the establishment of international list of the most wanted major drug traffickers in Afghanistan. Such a list would put a name and a face to men who are profiting from instability, and hold to account entities, institutions and criminal organizations which support these traffickers. Wanted individuals and entities would be subjects of Interpol Red Notices and targeted for international sanctions - including freezing assets, extradition, and a travel ban.

Second, Afghanistan's neighbours must prevent insurgents, weapons, money, intelligence and thousands of tons of chemical precursors (needed to produce heroin) from flowing into Afghanistan. This could not be possible on such a scale without collusion. Afghanistan is becoming the turf for proxy wars that could once again cause the country to implode. This must stop, or the whole region - and the wider world - will face the consequences.

Third, in Afghanistan improved security cannot be attained without destroying the opium trade. Opium money pays for weapons and fighters for the insurgency that the Coalition is trying to quash. Mr. Costa has called for NATO troops to be given the mandate and the means to help the Afghan army destroy the heroin labs, disband the opium bazaars, intercept the opium convoys and bring to justice the big traders. The argument is that counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency are two fronts of the same war. It will be interesting to see how the Afghanistan issue is addressed at this week's NATO Summit in Riga.

But security is only part of the equation. There must be carrots as well as sticks. Therefore. . .

Fourth, Afghanistan needs more development assistance. Only 13% of Afghan households have electricity. Less than one quarter of the population has access to clean water. Thus far development aid has been generous, but still well below per capita equivalents for other post-conflict situations. Poverty (namely daily earning of \$1-2) makes farmers vulnerable both to political extremists (who offer \$8-10 per day) and to the temptation of growing opium (earning \$4-6 a day). Therefore, aid money needs to increase in size and to flow faster, with lower overhead costs. Reducing poverty and reducing the opium supply go hand in hand.

Fifth, aid should not be used to grow more opium. Rather, aid should reward good performance. We therefore very much welcome the news last week of the decision by the Afghan Counter Narcotics Trust Fund to make development grants to provinces which eliminate poppy.

At the moment six provinces are opium free. The target should be to double that number next year, and to double the number again in 2008. By rewarding the good behavior of farmers who are committed to making their provinces opium-free, we show the people of Afghanistan that they can have a sustainable future without growing illicit crops. This could create momentum for development and hope instead of the current spiral of violence and despair. It could also help to isolate the drug lords and corrupt officials.

UNODC will certify whether or not the provinces are opium-free and therefore whether they qualify for grants. This is a major responsibility and recognition of the authoritative reputation of UNODC's crop surveys.

It may take a generation to rid Afghanistan of its opium, but it is a step-by-step process for which we must stay the course if Afghanistan is to regain stability and to significantly reduce the world's biggest supply of opium.

This leads me to my sixth point, namely the need for regional co-operation. The trafficking of Afghanistan's opium is a trans-national problem and therefore requires a multi-national response. Over the past three years, the UNODC-led Paris Pact initiative has helped to identify trafficking routes, strengthen expert-level counter narcotics cooperation, improve information exchange, and coordinate technical assistance designed to improve the capacity of states to contain the threat posed by Afghanistan's opium. Yesterday, at a meeting that many of you attended, we launched the Second Phase of the Paris Pact that should further strengthen and focus our work over the next three years. The worse the situation in Afghanistan becomes, the more we need such a Pact.

UNODC has also spear-headed the creation of intelligence-sharing centres in Central Asia and the Gulf region that should be operational within the next year or two. These centres, on the model of Europol, should strengthen the capacity of regional law-enforcement agencies to expose and break-up drug trafficking networks.

There is a seventh and final point that I want to raise, namely demand. There is a lot of talk about what to do about reducing the opium supply in Afghanistan and disrupting the trafficking routes. But there should also be greater attention to

reducing demand. A bitter irony of the war in Afghanistan is that Coalition nations assisting Afghanistan are also the biggest consumers of its heroin. Heroin addicts in rich Western states are partly funding the war that is killing Afghan civilians and NATO troops.

Therefore, even if no opium was harvested in Afghanistan next year and all the heroin being trafficked around the world was seized, there would still be a demand for heroin that would have to be satisfied by alternative sources and delivered by criminals. More attention must therefore be devoted to drug prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all have a vested interest in the security of Afghanistan and its neighbourhood. At UNODC, we are resolved to work with Afghanistan, and all those determined to help it build a better future, to reducing the supply of opium while providing sustainable livelihoods, blocking the trafficking routes, and reducing demand for Afghanistan's opiates.

This is a major task and a shared responsibility. We must work together. UNODC therefore compliments the Marshall Center and the United States Central Command for organizing this meeting and urges all participants to unite in their drug control efforts in order to contain the threat posed by Afghanistan's opium and to help Afghanistan and Central and South East Asia build a more stable future.

Thank you for your attention.