

**United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
announces major reduction in 2005 opium poppy cultivation in
Afghanistan**

UNODC Executive Director says one field out of five cultivated in 2004 were not replanted in 2005

Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime disclosed 2005 opium cultivation, eradication, and production estimates for Afghanistan in Kabul on 29 August, in a press Conference at the Presidential Palace (at 17.00 Kabul time).

According to the Report, opium cultivation has decreased by 21%, down from 131,000 ha in 2004 to 103,000 ha in 2005. Costa attributed this to the Government's success at persuading farmers to voluntarily refrain from poppy cultivation; to farmers' apprehension that the official ban on opium cultivation could be enforced via eradication; and to current market conditions in Afghanistan — farm-gate prices for raw opium remain relatively low, offering farmers less incentive.

Costa saw close links between the elimination of opium cultivation and freedom for the Afghan people: *"Democracy may never come of age in Afghanistan as long as violence remains the tool in dispute resolution, resource allocation depends on corrupt officials, and half of the national income is generated by opium,"* said the Executive Director, UNODC.

Production of Afghan opium in 2005 stands at 4,100 tonnes, only slightly less than the 4,200 tonnes produced in 2004. In 2005, favourable weather conditions also led to increased agricultural productivity, from 32 kg/ha in 2004 to 39kg/ha in 2005. As a result, Afghanistan remains the largest supplier of opium to the world, accounting for 87 percent of the world supplies. In terms of opium cultivation, however, Afghanistan's share in the global total dropped from 67 percent in 2004 to 63 percent in 2005.

About 4,007 hectares were eradicated by Provincial Governors in the spring of 2005, about 4% of the 2005 opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. The Central Government, under two separate eradication campaigns, destroyed opium crops in another 1,000 hectares. In total, in 2005 in Afghanistan over 5,000 hectares were eradicated, roughly 5% of this year's opium cultivation. *"The threat of eradication reinforced President Karzai's persuasion efforts,"* said Mr. Costa, *"and we all learned that crop destruction must be supported by assistance to farmers so as to develop licit economic activities in the countryside."*

UNODC is assisting the international community to commit additional resources in favour of rural development, a major deterrent to drug cultivation. *"500 million dollars have been committed to the Afghan countryside for 2005/06. The international community must have the wisdom to fight drugs and poverty simultaneously,"* said the Executive Director.

The decline in cultivation was uneven across the 34 provinces of Afghanistan, thus an indication that Provincial Governors were not all equally committed to the cause of drug control, in some cases actually being part of the problem. *“The fact that in certain provinces of Afghanistan, Nangarhar for example with its -93%, cultivation has all but disappeared, tell us that the opium economy can be contained,”* said Costa. *“Temporary gains can be made into permanent change by making sure food security and income generation programmes coincide with the destruction of opium crops.”*

UNODC recommendations for continued progress in Afghanistan include:

- The removal of corrupt governors in provinces where opium cultivation is not declining.
- The removal of government administration officials involved in the drug industry.
- Commitment by all newly elected members of the Afghan Parliament to abstain from the drug industry or to resign.
- Zero-tolerance policy towards warlords’ involvement in drug refining (labs) and trafficking.
- Extradition of major drug traffickers via international arrest warrants.
- Commitment by farming communities to refrain from drug cultivation as a condition for development assistance.

“UNODC is, and will remain committed to helping Afghanistan to free themselves from the slavery of drug production. We owe this also to the one-hundred-thousand of people who die annually, directly or indirectly, because of their addiction to Afghan opium,” says the Executive Director, UNODC.

The United Nations salute the commitment by President Karzai's administration in addressing the opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.

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