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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AFFAIRS

INPUT FOR PREPARATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL SESSION ON THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM SCHEDULED FOR 2016, UNGASS 2016

February 2015

Foreword

The Department of Political Affairs (DPA) is pleased to accept the invitation of the Chair of the 57th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), His Excellency Ambassador Khaled Shamaa, to submit input to the preparations for the 2016 General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS 2016).

Introduction

DPA's overall objective is to help "maintain international peace and security by assisting Member States, at their request, and other international and regional organizations to resolve potentially violent disputes or conflicts peacefully".¹ In working to deliver on this broad mandate, DPA is facing an increasingly complex and fluid strategic context. This is characterized by changing conflict dynamics and the increasing prominence of transnational non-state actors, including organized crime groups and drug trafficking syndicates, which represent major threats to peace and security in several areas where DPA works.

Since 2009, the Security Council has recognized the international peace and security implications of drug trafficking and organized crime more broadly, and has underscored the need to address this prevalent problem. In addition to including organized crime and drug trafficking in the mandates of a number of UN peace operations, the Council has held several thematic debates on drug trafficking and organized crime since 2009 and adopted a number of Presidential Statements, including most recently in June 2014 in the context of a briefing on Afghanistan. On 19 December 2014, the Council adopted Resolution 2195 on terrorism and cross-border crime, including drug trafficking, as threats to international peace and security.²

In order to develop an effective and comprehensive approach to the challenge of transnational organized crime and drug trafficking as threats to security and stability, the Secretary-General established, in March 2011, the UN System Task Force on transnational organized crime and drug trafficking, which is co-chaired by DPA and UNODC.

¹ Biennial Programme Budget for Political Affairs for 2014-2015, submitted to the General Assembly in May 2013, A/68/6 (Sect. 3), para. 3.1.

² S/RES/2195 (2014), 19 December 2014.

The challenge of organized crime including drug trafficking can be seen acutely in the context of DPA's Special Political Missions (SPMs), which operate in states and regions where narcotics are produced, transit, or are consumed, including in Central Asia and West Africa. However, no region is immune, and DPA recognizes the challenges narcotics present to all regions. The voices from the Americas are among the most forceful in the current international debate surrounding the drug control regime. For example, the Presidents of Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico wrote to the Secretary-General in 2012 asking for a review to take place as a matter of urgency, and hemispheric leaders under the aegis of the Organization of American States have emphasized the need for comprehensive approaches and innovation vis-à-vis the drug problem.

It is important to note at this juncture that organized crime syndicates are known to traffic in a multitude of commodities. However, drug trafficking represents the largest income for transnational organized crime groups globally according to UNODC estimates, hence the use in this paper of the term "drug trafficking syndicates", and the relevance of UNGASS 2016 to DPA's peace and security mandate.³

The Implications of Drug Trafficking for DPA's Mandate

A number of DPA **field-based Special Political Missions** currently have, or have had, mandates to assist Member States in addressing aspects of transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking. As an example, in its resolution extending the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) in 2014, the Security Council stresses "the challenges posed by the fight against drug trafficking in the search of solutions to the overall political and economic crisis in Guinea-Bissau, and requests the Secretary-General to ensure the relevant capacity within UNIOGBIS, continuing to provide an anti-drug component, including appropriate expertise."⁴ In another example, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is mandated to "promote (...) more coherent support by the international community to the Afghan Government's development and governance priorities, including through supporting (...) National Priority Programmes, mobilization of resources, coordination of international donors and organizations, and direction of contributions by the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, in particular for counter-narcotics activities (...)."⁵

DPA-led **regional offices** in Central Asia and West Africa are mandated to provide technical assistance to Member States and strengthen sub-regional capacities to address illicit trafficking, including through supporting the development of networks of experts, facilitating cross-border discussions, and convening regional stakeholders to address the threat.⁶ The United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa,

³ UNODC estimates that proceeds from illicit drugs represent some 20% of all crime proceeds. See UNODC, "Estimating Illicit Financial Flows Resulting from Drug Trafficking and Other Transnational Organized Crimes", 2011, Research Report.

⁴ S/Res/2186 (2014), 25 November 2014, para 10.

⁵ S/Res/2145 (2014), 17 March 2014, para 6a. Previous DPA-led missions with a mandate in this area include Sierra Leone, where UNIPSIL was tasked with "providing assistance to the Government in promoting good governance, the rule of law and human rights, including institutional reform; combating illicit drug trafficking and organized crime...". See S/Res/1941 (2010), 29 September 2010, para. 2(iv).

⁶ Draft mandate of the United Nations Office for West Africa for 2014-2016 (S/2013/753). For Central Asia, see S/2007/279 and S/2007/280.

whose secretariat is the DPA-led UN Regional Office for Central Africa, has highlighted a range of cross-border threats to stability in the sub-region, including drug trafficking.⁷

Sanctions monitoring panels examine, among other things, the financing streams that can be used by individuals and entities to purchase weapons in violation of Security Council-imposed arms embargoes – including by groups that derive income from drug trafficking, such as opium by the Taliban and cannabis in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Panels may recommend the designation for sanctions (travel bans, asset freezes) of individuals and entities who engage in drug-trafficking and related activities.⁸

More generally, the drug trade can affect peace and security in five key ways:

- 1) **Undermining institutions of governance:** Proceeds from the drug trade have contributed, at times, to corrupting branches of government and influencing political campaigns. In several cases, the direct involvement of high-level officials in the drug trade has been reported, thereby further hampering good governance and the rule of law. Often, drug syndicates have resources that exceed those of the state. In West Africa, recent UNODC estimates have found \$1.25 billion of cocaine transiting through West Africa each year (price at wholesale in Europe); this can represent many times the GDP of countries in the region.⁹ In some contexts, drug networks have the capacity to challenge the state’s monopoly on the use of force or the provision of services to communities, which can undermine the legitimacy of the state.
- 2) **Increasing violence:** The drug trade has also fueled violence in several contexts. For example, in its most recent Regional Development Report on Latin America, the United Nations Development Programme focused on citizen security, highlighting that “most countries in the region have homicide rates which are much higher than for other regions and which are considered to be at epidemic levels by the World Health Organization”.¹⁰ Lethal violence increased between 2000 and 2010 throughout the region. While the sources of citizen insecurity are varied, organized crime and drug trafficking are elements contributing to the problem. Moreover, the fight against drug trafficking has become militarized in some contexts, and has increased the risk of cross-border spillover of conflict and civilian casualties.
- 3) **Reducing incentives for, and effectiveness of, mediation:** The proceeds from drug trafficking can become a major source of funding for non-state groups, often lowering the incentives for these groups to enter into ceasefires, peace agreements, or political settlements, and thereby protracting conflicts.

⁷ Report of the Secretary General to the General Assembly on Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, 28 August 2014 A/69/361, para. 10.

⁸ Although there is no sanctions monitoring panel associated with the Guinea-Bissau sanctions regime established pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2048 (2012), this resolution notes that such means of support or financing of individuals seeking to prevent the restoration of constitutional order or taking action that undermines stability in Guinea-Bissau, include financial streams derived from the “illicit cultivation, production and trafficking of narcotic drugs and their precursors originating in and transiting through” the country. See S/Res/2048 (2012), paras. 6-7.

⁹ UNODC, “Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment”, February 2013.

¹⁰ UNDP, “Regional Human Development Report 2013-2014 - Citizen Security with a Human Face: Evidence and Proposals for Latin America”, 2013, p. iii.

- 4) **Financing terrorism:** The Security Council has expressed concern that some terrorist groups benefit from cross-border crime, including from the trafficking of drugs, and held a high-level open debate on this subject on 19 December 2014.¹¹ As an illustration of the importance of opium for financing the Taliban, recent reports submitted to the sanctions committee established in 2011 pursuant to resolution 1988 by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team point out that Helmand Province – the centre of the production of opiate drugs in Afghanistan – is also generating substantial parts of the Taliban revenue.¹² The Monitoring Team reports that the group might have earned \$50 million from the opium poppy harvest of May 2014.¹³
- 5) **Reversing gains in peacebuilding:** Lastly, drug trafficking has the potential to undermine decades of collective peace and security efforts. West Africa, for example, has become a major transit and repackaging hub for cocaine and heroin flowing from the Latin American and Asian producing areas to European markets, in less than one-and-a-half decades. UNOWA has reported that insecurity in the region is compounded by a range of factors including “unhindered cross-border movements of armed groups and transnational organized crime”.¹⁴ Perversely, the security gains made by some states in the region may be providing drug traffickers with a level of stability that allows them to thrive.

Conclusion

From DPA’s perspective and in light of the increasingly destabilizing effect of transnational organized crime and drug trafficking on state and regional security, Member States may wish to hold a discussion on the possibility of including the peace and security implications of this threat in the agenda of UNGASS 2016. Indeed, the Special Session provides a valuable opportunity to exchange ideas and lessons learned on what has and has not worked in addressing the world drug problem, with implications for the work of the United Nations across its three pillars – namely development, human rights, and peace and security. We hope that the above contribution will prove helpful to Member States as they enter a period of intensive preparations for the Special Session, and we look forward to following, and, where possible, contributing to this important process.

¹¹ S/RES/2195 (2014), 19 December 2014, para 7.

¹² UN Security Council, “Fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, submitted pursuant to resolution 2160 (2014) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan,” S/2014/888, 11 December 2014.

¹³ UN Security Council, “Fourth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2082 (2012) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan,” S/2014/402, paras. 49-50.

¹⁴ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa,” S/2013/732, 11 December 2013, para. 8.