

Record-high opium production in Afghanistan creates multiple challenges for region and beyond, UN warns

Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan reached a record-high last year, leading to unprecedented levels of potential heroin on the world market, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)) said in a new report released on Monday.

The report noted [opium cultivation](#) increased by 63 per cent; from 201,000 hectares in 2016 to an estimated 328,000 hectares in 2017.

UNODC said that it would be possible to produce between 550 and 900 tons of export-quality heroin from the poppies harvested throughout the country during 2017.

The report highlighted that the record level of cultivation creates multiple challenges for the country and its neighbours, as opiate-based illegal drugs make their way across the Afghan border.

Poppy production and illicit trafficking of opiates also fuel political instability, and increase funding to terrorist groups in Afghanistan who profit from the trade.

The report revealed that the record-high production led to a rapid expansion of the illegal economy in 2017. Being worth between \$4.1 billion to \$6.6 billion in 2017 – or 20 and 32 per cent of gross domestic product – the value of the opiate-based economy exceeded by far, the value of Afghanistan's legal exports of goods and services during 2016.

Opium poppy production has become so engrained in the livelihood of many Afghans, that it is often the main source of income for not only farmers, but also many local and migrant workers hired as day-labourers on farms. In 2017, opium poppy weeding and harvesting provided the equivalent of up to 354,000 full-time jobs to rural areas.

The report concluded that addressing the opiate problem in Afghanistan remains a shared responsibility. Reducing production, requires an international approach that targets the supply chain of opiates at every stage; from source to destination.

‘Done right,’ expanded partnerships can deliver more sustainable results – deputy UN chief

Cooperation over development is critical in delivering the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UN deputy chief said on Monday, calling for strengthened “multi-stakeholder” partnerships, and better policy coordination.

Speaking at the [Development Cooperation Forum](#) – a high-level meeting seeking greater [policy coherence](#) – Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed said that “done right,” such partnerships can deliver better and more sustainable results.

“They can take inclusiveness to a new level,” she said.

In her remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General also underlined the importance of leveraging the investment, innovation, and technological know-how of the private sector.

“Three years into the [2030 Agenda], diverse efforts offer much for us to learn, particularly on how to do this best in different contexts,” said Ms. Mohammed, highlighting also the potential of so-called blended financing.

In doing so, she called for public-private partnerships and investment agreements to be accompanied by solid legal and regulatory frameworks, as well as transparent accounting, and adequate risk-management measures.

Speaking alongside Ms. Mohammed, Marie Chatardova, the President of the Economic and Social Council, called on all actors engaged in the field of development to encourage candid discussion over strengthening partnerships.

“Let us not be shy to challenge each other’s ideas. I am convinced that an open discussion will lead to a richer set of ideas and policy recommendations,” she said.

She also called on the participants to explore how different actors can learn from each other to achieve lasting results in the “ever-changing” development landscape.

Also at the opening, Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, outlined the findings of a new report on trends and progress made in the field of international development cooperation.

Some of the key highlights, he said, included the need for development cooperation to become more “risk informed” as well as strengthening the link between development cooperation and climate action.

He also said that official development assistance (ODA), while limited within the means of implementation overall, remained a distinct and vital source of development finance.

“The [Development Cooperation Forum] should discuss specific steps to ensure that ODA commitments are met, to bring more assistance to least-developed countries and countries in special situations, and to strengthen effective allocation and use of ODA,” he said.

Realistic solutions must form basis of Global Compact for migration – UN conference

Reflecting the reality of life on the ground for millions of migrants fleeing their homes must form the basis of the upcoming United Nations-backed Global Compact for migration, a hearing on the key issue was told on Monday.

The preparatory conference at UN Headquarters in New York, was the fifth and final hearing on the compact; with a focus on existing practices for safe, orderly and regular migration. The General Assembly is due to hold an intergovernmental conference with a view to adopting it later this year.

At Monday’s session, entitled *Migration – What’s Really Going On: Lessons from the field*, Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly, recalled the impact of past discussions which had focused around topics such as such as people smuggling and trafficking; national and regional perspectives, and misinformation over migration.

“They have allowed us to take a break from the politics – and focus, instead, on the realities,” he said. “[Migration affects all of society](#) – so all of society is needed, to respond,” he stressed.

While indicating that the needs and rights of migrants must be balanced with those of States and communities, he pointed out that migration is nothing new.

“We have centuries of policies and practices...trials and errors...successes and failures to learn from,” he said.

He spoke of the need for policies that enabled development, safeguarded human rights and ensured security, inviting all present to share ideas, solutions, experiences and opinions.

“You are the reality checks; the sounding boards; the sources of information,

as we head into the final stages of negotiation,” he concluded.

Speaking next, Louise Arbour, Secretary-General of the Intergovernmental Conference on International Migration, painted a picture of migration as “highly time-bound and context specific,” saying that the Global Compact should allow for “sufficient flexibility to calibrate policies to continuously evolving context and reality.”

She flagged that many migrant workers face discrimination and exploitative working conditions, despite most empirical evidence suggesting that immigrants do not depress wages and living standards of native workers.

“Tailor made in-context [specific solutions are required](#),” she stressed. Adding, “The Compact should provide a compendium of desirable initiatives, anchored in human rights in response to the interest and the circumstances of all concerned.”

In his remarks, William Lacy Swing, Director General of the [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM), highlighted the importance of successful stakeholder partnerships.

He said the Global Forum on Migration and Development, offered a clear structure for policy-makers, practitioners, migrant organizations and the private sector, among others.

He credited city mayors with developing tailor-made solutions to respond to migrants’ needs, saying “Local authorities are often the place where migrants can have their demands heard.”

Finally, he explained how private sector partnerships have solidified many migrants’ place in local labour markets.

“The sovereignty of States and multi-stakeholder engagement are not inconsistent and should not be seen as mutually exclusive,” he said. “In fact, multi-stakeholder partnerships can strengthen State sovereignty,” he added.

[National conversation reveals Libyans’ desire for ‘united and sovereign nation’: UN representative](#)

Conversations taking place across Libya indicate that citizens are “yearning for a united and sovereign nation,” the top United Nations official in the country told the Security Council in New York on Monday.

UN Special Representative Ghassan Salamé updated ambassadors on the National Conference which was launched in April, as a way of giving all Libyans a say in responding to the country's on-going crisis. So far it has been convened in 27 different locations.

It is part of [a UN Action Plan](#) that provides for amending the [Libyan Political Agreement](#); the stalled 2015 deal aimed at establishing a single national unity government, among other points.

Mr. Salamé reported that the process has drawn thousands of participants.

"Libyans from all political stripes and segments of society gathered to enter the political conversation, many for the first time with an enthusiasm that could not have been predicted," he said, speaking via teleconference.

"They have made it their own."

While elections must be held as soon as possible, the proper conditions must be in place – *Ghassan Salamé (UNSMIL)*

The National Conference will run through June and is expected to take place in more than 40 locations overall, including Libyan communities based overseas.

Special events focusing on the concerns of women, youth and internally displaced persons will also be held.

Mr. Salamé said some points of consensus have emerged which show why advancement of the political process is "so vital."

They include "a yearning for a united and sovereign nation and a common belief that, to achieve that, the state must be more decentralized."

The UN Action Plan also calls for the preparation of elections and the National Conference has revealed that Libyans want a vote which can unite the country, as well as the means to emerge successfully from transition.

"While elections must be held as soon as possible, the proper conditions must be in place," Mr. Salamé said, underscoring the need for a new round of voter registration; prior commitment to accepting the results; as well as sufficient funding and security arrangements.

Regarding the amending of the Libyan Political Agreement, the UN envoy said despite attempts to "reconcile various opinions," parties are unwilling to make concessions.

"By focusing on elections this year, amending the LPA rapidly shrinks in importance," he stated. "However, we must demand far more from the current Presidential Council in their final remaining months, both in terms of concretely preparing for the elections, and providing services to the people."

Mr. Salamé also briefed Council members on a new UN strategy to help Libya deal with armed groups who continue to have what he has described as a “perilous” influence on politics and the economy.

It involves direct engagement with these groups, in close consultation with the government.

While the strategy “will not unravel armed groups tomorrow”, he said it “will help the long process begin in earnest.”

[At global health forum, UN officials call for strong, people-focused health systems](#)

Everyone, everywhere must have equal access to quality health care, said top United Nations officials on Monday, urging greater focus on comprehensive health and well-being.

In a [video message](#) to the opening of the seventy-first session of the World Health Assembly in Geneva, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) reiterated that the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental human right.

The World Health Assembly is the highest decision-making body of the [World Health Organization](#), WHO. It determines the agency’s policies, supervises financial policies, and reviews and approves the proposed programme budget.

“We need strong resilient systems that place people at the centre,” said Mr. Guterres.

“Universal health coverage provides the foundation to help us overcome the inequities that continue to leave so many behind.”

Ensuring that everyone, everywhere has access to quality health care and services, is also vital for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), stressed the UN chief.

Universal health coverage provides the foundation to help us overcome the inequities that continue to leave so many behind –
Secretary-General António Guterres

In particular, [Sustainable Development Goal 3](#) (SDG 3), which has specific targets to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being at all stages in life.

In addition, health improvements feature prominently in many of the other ambitious Goals.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO's Director-General, also addressed the [Assembly](#), emphasizing the importance of universal health coverage, as illustrated by the ongoing Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The WHO chief outlined a number of initiatives at the UN health agency to advance universal coverage and [urged greater political commitment](#): "It's clear that the twin messages of health security and universal health coverage resonate loudly with world leaders," he said.

Mr. Tedros also highlighted critical upcoming events focussed on global health, including two high-level meetings; on non-communicable diseases and on tuberculosis at the upcoming session of the UN General Assembly which begins in September.

"The people who suffer from these diseases all over the world are relying on us: the people who cannot get the care they need; the people who cannot afford the care they need; the people who aren't even aware they are infected with a potentially deadly pathogen," he said.

"We owe it to them to ensure that we do not waste the opportunities."

DRC Ebola outbreak: Vaccination of health workers commences

Separately on Monday, WHO announced that the [vaccination of health workers in areas of the DRC effected by the Ebola virus](#), has begun.

Together with the Government and partner organizations, WHO is also preparing to start a so-called ring vaccination programme, whereby the contacts of confirmed cases and the contacts of those contacts will be offered immunization, using the experimental drug.

"We need to act fast to stop the spread of Ebola by protecting people at risk of being infected with the Ebola virus, identifying and ending all transmission chains and ensuring that all patients have rapid access to safe, high-quality care," said Peter Salama, the WHO Deputy Director-General for Emergency Preparedness and Response.

While the rVSV-ZEBOV Ebola vaccine is yet to be licensed, it was highly protective against Ebola in a major trial in 2015 in Guinea, said WHO.

Earlier results have been promising with the agency reporting that among the 5,837 people who received the vaccine, no positive cases were recorded nine days or more after vaccination.