

Under strict embargo until 10:00 AM 10 May 2017

Mekong ministers and UNODC announce new action plan to address regional drug challenges

Phnom Penh (Cambodia), 10 May 2017 – Ministers and officials from Mekong countries – Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam – and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have come together in Phnom Penh to endorse a new strategy to address regional drug challenges.

The Mekong region has a persistent and evolving drug problem. Alarming, production and trafficking of methamphetamine and heroin within and from the region are now estimated to generate over US \$40 billion annually, with the latest data showing that the flow of illicit drugs and precursor chemicals continues to rise across all six countries. National authorities have been candidly discussing the challenges and difficulties they have managing the situation, and the fact that in some parts of the region peace and stability are being undermined by the drug economy and trafficking. The situation related to methamphetamine is particularly difficult, with all six countries reporting rising use for several years in a row, and four of the six countries reporting seizures of significant production facilities in the past three years.

“The Mekong MOU is an important platform to address different drug-related challenges we face. The drug problem transcends all our borders and is truly regional and shared,” said H.E. Gen. Ke Kim Yan, Deputy Prime Minister of Cambodia and Chairman of the National Authority for Combating Drugs. “The new Mekong MOU Action Plan that we have agreed to today is owned by the six countries of the Mekong and reflects our commitment to work together.”

Significantly, the Mekong MOU is among the first regional cooperation platforms in the world to adopt the approach endorsed at the 2016 Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS). The new Action Plan will address drug-related challenges in the region by strengthening strategies and capacities across four thematic areas: drugs and health; law enforcement cooperation to address organized crime and improve border management; legal and judicial cooperation; and sustainable alternative development. Aldo Lale-Demoz, Deputy Executive Director of UNODC commented, “The Mekong MOU is a unique international cooperation and partnership framework that mirrors the UNGASS outcome document, adapting it to the regional reality. Other groups of states considering how to address the drug problem should look at what has been agreed to here today.”

“The Mekong is a complex expanding drug market, and it is clear that past approaches in the region have not been very responsive”, added Jeremy Douglas, Regional Representative of UNODC for Southeast Asia and the Pacific. “It is encouraging to see regional policy makers reflect on shortcomings of past policies and strategies, and to agree to a plan that re-focuses efforts to address negative impacts on communities and people.”

Ministers also endorsed the “Phnom Penh Joint Declaration on Effectively Addressing the Drug Problem in the Region” during the meeting. The Declaration reaffirms the determination to address drug challenges within the framework of the three international drug conventions, while connecting the Action Plan with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Post 2030 Development Agenda.

“Today is an important step as we rebalance the Mekong Action Plan in-line with the UNGASS of last year as well as the SDGs, but at the same time the countries and UNODC are aware that

political statements need to be translated into action", said Mr. Douglas. "We are committed to supporting an approach that will dampen market demand and reduce public health impacts of drug use, while changing the focus of enforcement towards countering serious organized crime."

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