NOTE

from : UK chair of regional formation on South-West Asia

to : Dublin group (meeting 17/18 December 1998)

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Subject : Situation report on South-West Asia
(1) Progress of work in the mini-Dublin Groups

Presentation of the national and regional situation regarding illicit narcotics production, consumption and trafficking in narcotics and psychotropic substances.

Iran

Drug Situation

1. Trafficking into/through Iran is still carried out over the Turkmen-Afghan-Pakistan border. There are reports of regular clashes along the border between law enforcement authorities and smugglers. In September 1998 12 smugglers were killed and 2 tonnes of opium and a kilo of morphine were seized. Concealed smuggling continues. For example, in one case a Tanzanian was arrested carrying 1.5kg of heroin in his stomach. Despite these problems, observers assess that the Iranian Government is committed to anti-narcotics efforts. It is claimed that the Government has invested 560 million dollars in physical obstructions on the Afghan border and that there were 30,000 men deployed to seal the smuggling routes. However, the law enforcement authorities are hampered by the long borders (1,925 kms) and a lack of specialist equipment, such as night vision glasses.

2. Within Iran itself it is estimated that the country now has 1.2 million drug users or addicts, mainly young people or those from the lower socio-economic groups. The main substances of abuse are opium, heroin and hashish. Rehabilitation centres continue to operate and are generally of a high standard.

3. A recent development has been the US decision to drop Iran from its list of major producers.

UNDCP Mission to Iran

4. A high-level 'Appraisal Mission' visited Iran in October 1998 to assess the general situation in the country. The group toured the border region and observed Iranian counter-narcotics activities. It was agreed that the Iranian authorities were taking seriously the threat from drug abuse and trafficking and had taken steps to fight such activities.
UNDCP Mission to Iran (continued)

The Mission concluded that Iran deserves outside assistance. Specific points that came out of the visit were:

(1) Iran wanted practical support from the international community and recognition of the steps being taken within the country. There was a willingness to cooperate with international authorities.

(2) Iranian seizures of narcotics accounted for 85% of world seizures of opiates (95% of Europe’s heroin supply originated in Afghanistan). The UNDCP Mission observed storage facilities and believed that the figures given were credible.

(3) There was an overwhelming concern about Afghanistan within Iran because of the flow of drugs from that country.

(4) Iran believed that it was doing better than other countries in the region to control the flow of narcotics. There might be a role for the Economic Cooperation Organisation.

(5) The main Iranian approach had been interdiction rather than investigation. Iran had invested heavily in men and money to control the border regions. But technical facilities were limited.

(6) Recent changes appeared to make Iranian law more severe, but in practice the changes made it more flexible. The UNDCP Mission suggested further revisions of the law to make it more compatible with the 1998 UN Drug Convention. This included greater penalties for trafficking in precursors and laboratory equipment, and provisions to deal with controlled deliveries and money laundering.

(7) The Mission made it clear that human rights were a factor that would affect international willingness to get involved in judicial cooperation.

(8) Until the narcotics problem could be tackled successfully in Afghanistan, there would have to be further attempts to seal the border. Iranian efforts deserved encouragement. UNDCP had approval to open a country office within Iran and to prepare a cooperation programme.
UNDCP Country Office in Iran

5. The role of the UNDCP Office in Iran would be to monitor drug trafficking on the Iranian border with Afghanistan and Pakistan. This would form part of a wider strategy to create a ‘security belt’ around Afghanistan. The Office would be tasked with developing a close working relationship with the Iranian authorities, with the overall aim of formulating a strategy for preventing the trafficking of drugs through Iran.

Pakistan

6. Despite concerted efforts towards eradication, there has been an increase in poppy planting in Dir of about 20% over the figures available for 1997 (420 hectares compared to 360 hectares). The message of crop eradication was once again made clear to local communities, who have accepted the need to participate in projects with UNDCP.

7. The Pakistan Narcotics Secretary, Mr Tariq Aziz, is keen to introduce legislation on money laundering. It is hoped that progress may be made in this area. The development of new law enforcement projects should result in an increase in the number of prosecutions and sentences of traffickers.

India

8. The mini-Dublin Group have noted that observers believed the situation in India was deteriorating steadily, both in terms of India’s growing importance as a drug trafficking route, and the increased level of drug abuse within the country. Heroin was still the major domestic drug of concern. India played a growing role as a transit country for drugs destined for North America and Europe, mainly from the Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent regions. Trafficking activity was focussed in the major cities, but there is particular concern about the growth of smuggling through sea ports.

9. The Indian Government has cleared a proposal to introduce an amendment to the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act 1995. This amendment adjusts sentencing structures and addresses inconsistencies in the areas of search and arrest. New money laundering legislation has been put forward, which includes some, but not all, of the Financial Action Task Force recommendations. It was hoped that this legislation would be approved in December at the next parliamentary session.
10. Two features of the proposed legislation are particularly welcome in that they would assist Indian law enforcement agencies. It would now be possible for assets to be frozen at the time of arrest, with confiscation following a conviction. Secondly, the legislation would provide a legal framework for controlled deliveries, hopefully ending the ad hoc nature of such activities.

Bangladesh

11. There is still some concern about drug traffickers taking advantage of Bangladesh’s close proximity to the drug producing areas, the weakness of law enforcement agencies and the easily accessible borders.

Nepal

12. Although there is no hard evidence to suggest that trafficking through Nepal is increasing, the recent confiscation of 70kgs of charas (raw opium) reinforces the concerns of the mini-Dublin Group. The quantity confiscated adds weight to the fear of Nepal being increasingly used as a transiting point and there remains some concern over the activities of traffickers from Europe, the US, India and Pakistan. It is the view of the mini-Dublin Group that Nepal’s open border with India, lax immigration laws and minimal resources could make the country a high risk.

13. The performance of Nepalese law enforcement agencies continues to improve with seizures of hashish having almost doubled in the last year.

Sri Lanka

14. Sri Lanka remains a staging post and transit point for narcotics leaving South West Asia heading for Western destinations. There is growing concern over the possible connection between LTTE and drugs trafficking, but there is no hard evidence to substantiate this. However, the LTTE remain strong and there has been an increase in the number of Sri Lankans arrested for drug trafficking in Europe. This has suggested to some members of the Group that the LTTE, the smuggling of people and drug trafficking may well be linked.

15. The Colombo Plan Bureau have suggested that the law enforcement agencies require more training, equipment and support.
SUBJECT: DUBLIN GROUP: BRUSSELS 17-18 DECEMBER 1998: SOUTH WEST ASIA CHAIRMAN REPORT

(1) Progress of work in the mini-Dublin Groups

Summarising the work of the mini-Dublin Groups in the region.

Iran

16. The mini-Dublin Group last met on 4 October 1998 when a debriefing was held by the visiting UNDCP Mission. The Group gave their views on cooperation and the internal drug situation in Iran.

Pakistan

17. The last meeting of the mini-Dublin Group was held on 29 June 1998. The Group received a presentation by the UNDCP Office for South West Asia Representative (Mr Frahi) who outlined the proposal to have a UNDCP Representative in Iran, rather than cover that country from Islamabad.

18. The Group also discussed Afghanistan, where poor weather had contributed to a decline in poppy cultivation in Kandahar. However, it was likely that cultivation in Nangahar and Badakshan would increase by 30-40%. The Annual Poppy Survey had been allowed unhindered in Taliban controlled areas.

India

19. The mini-Dublin Group in India has been active and last met on 9 October 1998. The Group have discussed assistance, both bilateral and multilateral, in an effort to provide more effective cooperation between the Government of India, donors and UNDCP. The Group intends to visit the limit opium growing areas in February or March 1999.

Bangladesh

20. There has been little activity reported by the mini-Dublin Group. The Group have yet to report on the progress of the démarche made to the local authorities, calling for more effective measures against the drug trade and for imposing controls at Zia airport. The UK will follow up.
**Nepal**

21. Although the mini-Dublin Group has not officially met since 14 March 1998, there has been some activity. Members of the Group had the opportunity to meet visiting UK Drugs Liaison Officers and other experts and Nepalese officials at a reception held by the Chairman.

22. An UNDCP Programme Mission visited Nepal in November 1998 to review the ongoing UNDCP programme of technical co-operation and to identify areas needing further attention. Some members of the Group had the opportunity to meet the Mission. This visit was welcomed, as the closure of the UNDCP Office last year seemed to result in a lack of co-ordinated action. The Group believed that a UNDCP Office in Nepal would provide a focal point for feedback of requirements and priorities to donors.

**Sri Lanka**

23. The last meeting of the mini-Dublin Group was held on 6 July 1998. Bilateral and multilateral assistance to Sri Lanka has been discussed. The Group also received a presentation from the Colombo Plan Bureau.
SUBJECT: DUBLIN GROUP: BRUSSELS 17-18 DECEMBER 1998: SOUTH WEST ASIA CHAIRMAN REPORT

(2) Matters requiring treatment in the Dublin Group

24. The mini-Dublin Group in Iran would be grateful to know the reaction of other member countries to the recent UNDCP report, and whether members are considering firm project proposals as a result of it.