



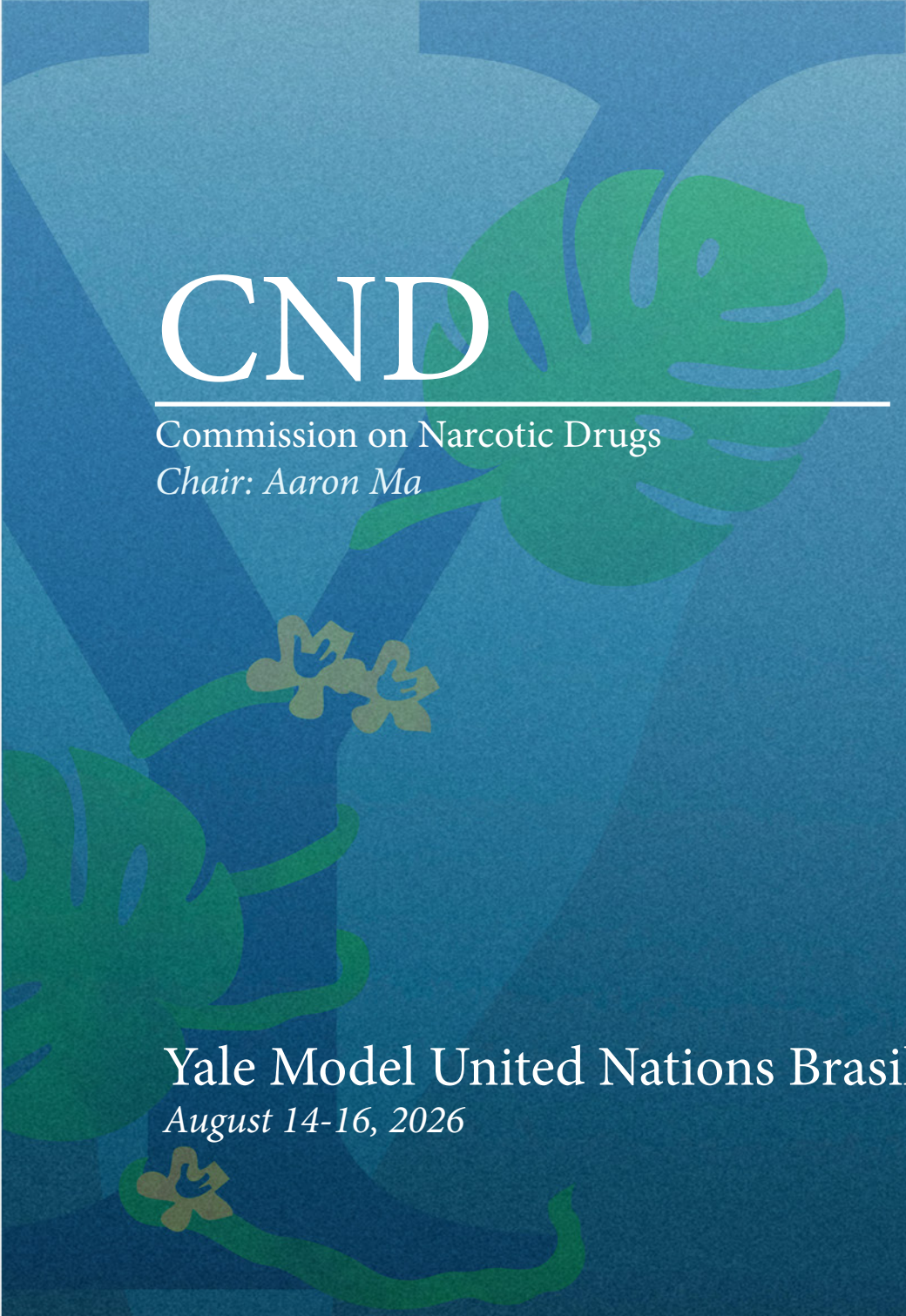
CND

Commission on Narcotic Drugs

Chair: Aaron Ma

Yale Model United Nations Brasil

August 14-16, 2026



Letter from the Dais

Dear Delegates,

Hello and welcome to the first-ever iteration of YMUN Brasil! My name is Aaron Ma, and I will be your Chair for the Committee on Narcotic Drugs (CND). As a sophomore at Yale majoring in Economics and East Asian Studies, I am interested in US-China relations and Chinese foreign policy, including China's role in BRICS. Outside of academics, I'm involved in the Asian American Cultural Center, a consulting club, an investment club, and do research on healthcare inequities and art history. When I have free time, I also enjoy rock climbing, figure skating, and eating delicious food!

When I was in high school, my interest in international relations and geopolitics began through Model United Nations. As a freshman navigating my first MUN conferences via Zoom during a global pandemic, my initial experience was not ideal, but even then, I knew I wanted to continue pursuing Model UN and deepen my understanding of geopolitics. It does not feel that long ago when I was in your shoes, eagerly counting the days till my next MUN conference. While I am no longer a high school delegate, my excitement for Model United Nations as a way to foster interpersonal skills and global cooperation has only strengthened, and I am incredibly excited to serve as your Chair of the Committee on Narcotic Drugs for the inaugural YMUN Brasil conference.

The Committee on Narcotic Drugs is a fascinating body of ECOSOC and deals with issues that affect hundreds of millions of people and nearly every country in the world, albeit often in different forms. The two topics we will discuss—drug trafficking and illicit crop cultivation—capture the range of issues and importance of the CND's efforts. No one country single-handedly perpetuates or has the ability to resolve issues regarding illicit drugs on its own. As such, it is necessary for multilateral cooperation in organizations like the Committee on Narcotic Drugs to address the negative impacts of illicit substances, whether it is how it impacts struggling agricultural communities, those associated with organized crime, or consumers in developed nations.

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me at aaron.ma@yale.edu. In any case, I cannot wait to hear solutions from all of you, and witness how countries that may seem different on the surface find common ground on such a pressing issue in the modern world.

Sincerely,
Aaron Ma
Chair of CND



Committee History/Role

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) is a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, serving as a global forum on drug-related matters. It was established in 1946 by ECOSOC to oversee international drug control treaties and coordinate international responses to drug-related issues worldwide. In 1991, the Commission became the governing body of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Today, the CND is responsible for overseeing international drug treaties, providing policy advice, developing programs to prevent and treat drug abuse, and assisting nations dealing with organized crime networks, working closely with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). While the Commission has a supervisory role over drug treaties, it does not enforce or necessarily monitor compliance with them.

The CND has 53 Member States elected by ECOSOC distributed among regional groups, with 11 seats for the African Group, 11 for the Asia-Pacific Group, 10 seats for the Latin America and Caribbean Countries Group (GRULAC), 6 seats for the Eastern European Group (EEG), 14 seats for the Western European and other States (WEOG), and 1 additional seat that rotates between the Asia-Pacific and GRULAC groups. Each member receives one vote, and resolutions are passed via simple majority. This committee will follow the same voting structure, although countries will not necessarily follow the same distribution.

The CND played a pivotal role in the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, and more recently, has focused on the classification of new drugs, such as the recent inclusion of the placement of some synthetic opioids and cannabinoids into international control under existing treaties in March 2026.

As illicit drug markets continue to expand, mature, and damage communities throughout the world, it is now more important than ever for the international community and the CND to tackle such pressing issues. This YMUN Brasil committee, by addressing transnational drug trafficking and illicit crop cultivation, underscores the importance of international cooperation and the United Nations in the 21st century.

Glossary

- **Alternative Development:** A development-centered approach to prevent and eliminate illicit cultivation through rural development measures that address the socioeconomic factors behind illicit crop cultivation.
- **Extradition:** A legal process through which one state transfers an accused or convicted person to another state for prosecution or punishment.
- **Hawala:** a trust-based system of transferring money without moving physical currency that relies on a network of brokers (hawaladars) who settle accounts among themselves, operating entirely outside traditional financial institutions. This practice is most common in South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.
- **Illicit Crop Cultivation:** The farming of crops used for illegal drug production, often concentrated in isolated areas with limited services and market access.
- **Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA):** Formal cooperation between states in gathering evidence and supporting prosecutions
- **Narcotic Drugs:** In the international community, any substance listed in the schedules of the 1961 Single Convention of Narcotic Drugs, encompass-

ing both natural and synthetic compounds. This definition is broader than the medical definition of narcotics, encompassing not only opioid depressants, but also stimulant drugs like methamphetamine.

- **New Psychoactive Substances (NPS):** Substances not under international control when they

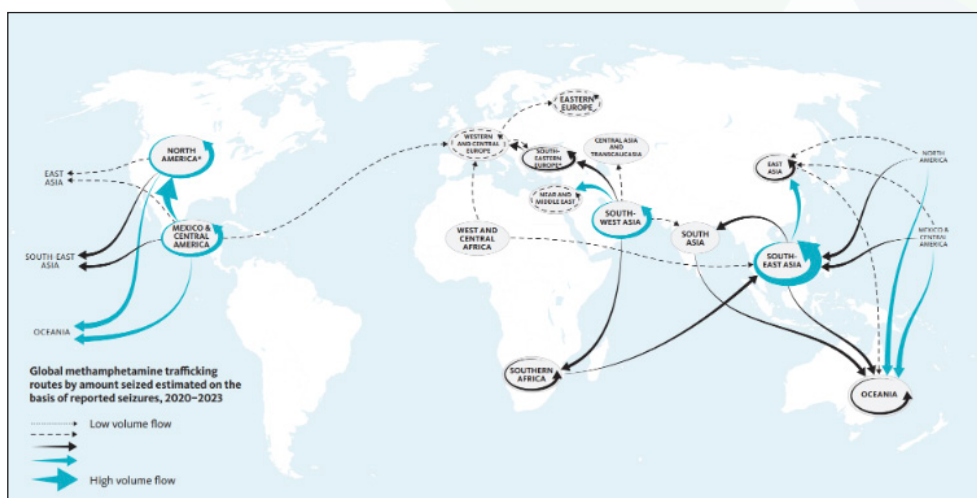
first emerge, often designed to mimic controlled drugs.

- **Precursor Chemicals:** Chemicals used in illicit drug manufacturing that are not inherently illegal by themselves.
- **Sequencing:** The principle that policies encouraging development and viable legal livelihoods should take priority and come

Topic 1: Enhancing Global Cooperation Against Transnational Drug Trafficking

Transnational drug trafficking is a form of organized crime that connects the production, transport, and distribution of illicit drugs across borders. In the past several decades, drug markets have become increasingly globalized, with criminal organizations operating across countries and continents, coinciding with record-high usage of existing illicit drugs and the rapid development of new synthetic drugs. Given the crime's scope and rise, it is therefore absolutely critical that countries cooperate to address transnational drug trafficking.

https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR_2025/maps/01_Main_methamphetamine_trafficking_flows_as_described_in_reported_seizures_2020-2023.pdf



Main methamphetamine tracking flows as described in reported seizures, 2020–2023

Globalization has played a pivotal role in the creation and smuggling of drugs. For example, cheap precursors can be produced in Country A, exported to Country B for processing into a usable form, and sold in Country C, where demand for such products is high. Every step in the drug trafficking process exploits existing laws, enforcement, and infrastructure, but the complexity of this crime also means that interventions at any one of these steps could be decisive in curbing transnational drug trafficking.

Each Member State has its own regulations for monitoring the flow of precursor chemicals, protecting its borders, processing imports, and implementing penalties for selling and consuming drugs to tackle drug trafficking. However, no single nation can address global networks entirely on its own. Collaboration through intelligence sharing, global standards for ports and customs, financial intelligence, and judicial cooperation are just some of the methods that countries employ to tackle transnational drug trafficking, but international frameworks always have areas for improvement, especially giv-

en the evolving nature of drug markets. What should be done now, in 2026, to curb the flow of drugs from country to country?

Topic History

Transnational drug trafficking has a long history. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the opium trade dominated international markets. The scale of the trade, especially into China, pushed states to work together to regulate the flow of drugs, resulting in the 1912 Hague International Opium Convention, which restricted narcotics to medical and scientific purposes. Over the following decades, additional agreements in 1925, 1931, and 1936 expanded controls over manufacturing and trade. In 1961, the United Nations created the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, which consolidated previous international agreements and became the foundation of modern international drug control. The Convention established a unified scheduling system that classified drugs based on their potential for abuse and medical utility, required signatory states to limit the production and distribution of narcotic substances to medical and scientific purposes, and created the International Narcotics Control Board to monitor compliance with these provisions.

As more regulations came into effect, trafficking networks adapted, pivoting from primarily focusing on opium to drugs such as heroin, cocaine, and cannabis. In response, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances expanded international controls to a greater diversity of drugs, but organizations operating in the drug trade continued to persist because the Convention's impact was limited by granting states greater discretion over domestic implementation, imposing less stringent reporting requirements, and lacking robust enforcement provisions. For example, South American drug traffickers in the 1970s and 1980s consolidated supply chains connecting coca-growing areas in the Andes to Caribbean transit routes and major markets in the United States. The Medellín Cartel, led by figures such as Pablo Escobar, became infamous during this time period for combining cocaine trafficking with other crimes, such as assassinations and kidnappings. Over time, law enforcement became effective at weakening the Medellín Cartel, but many other cartels, which were more organized than the Medellín Cartel's loose structure, soon rose to prominence.



Colombian security forces on a rooftop moments after killing Pablo Escobar and engaging in gunfire.

<https://www.nydailynews.com/2016/12/01/drug-kingpin-pablo-escobar-killed-in-an-army-ambush-in-1993/>

The 1990s saw cocaine pivoting from sea routes through the Caribbean to land routes through Central America and Mexico, leading to the rise of prominent Mexican cartels in the 2000s, such as the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG). These cartels, along with the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) in Brazil, became increasingly vital to the global illicit drug trade, moving cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, and fentanyl throughout the Americas and Europe. Other organized groups also became involved in the production and transportation of drugs on a larger scale, regionally and internationally, such as the 'Ndrangheta in Italy, Big Five Cartel in South Africa, and Sam Gor in Asia.

The international legal response also evolved in response to the rise of organized crime and innovations in drug transportation, front businesses, and criminal financial networks. The 1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances was critical in addressing not just drug control, but also organized crime's role in perpetuating such activities by strengthening international cooperation on extradition, mutual assistance, asset seizure, and precursor chemical regulation. The 1988 Convention remains one of the most important legal tools for international cooperation against trafficking today.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the UN continued to combat the illicit drug trade by establishing the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 1997 and fostering cooperation between Member States on drug crime. The scope of drug policy has also become increasingly considerate of socioeconomic factors that result in people resorting to working in the illicit drug business. The 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action emphasized that drug control strategies must be paired with poverty reduction, public health initiatives, and respect for human rights, marking a shift away from purely punitive approaches. The Outcome Document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem further reinforced this direction by calling on states to address root causes such as marginalization and lack of economic opportunity, while also promoting access to treatment and harm reduction. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development embedded these principles into broader global goals, linking progress on drug policy to achieving progress on poverty and inequality reduction.

<https://www.unodc.org/roscaip/en/2023/09/non-mekong-drug-control-meeting/story.html>



China, Southeast Asian countries, and the UNODC gather in 2023 to discuss organized drug crime.

In recent years, drug trafficking has continued to change. Cocaine trafficking has diversified across Africa and Europe, novel synthetic drugs have proliferated throughout the world, and criminal organizations continue to innovate their operations. As a result, the history of transnational drug trafficking is the story of a battle between world governments and the constantly adapting criminal economy.

Current Situation

There are many current efforts aimed at reducing drug trafficking across the world. For example, the UNODC Drugs Monitoring Platform and INTERPOL's I-24/7 allow law enforcement in 196 countries to share data on drug traffickers, trafficking routes, and criminal networks in real time. Meanwhile, the INCB helps monitor the movement of precursor chemicals through Pre-Export Notification Online, the Precursors Incident Communication System, and the Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances program. The INCB's efforts have resulted in the diversion of shipments of fentanyl precursors, allowed authorities to flag and monitor suspicious transactions, and increased cooperation between chemical companies and governments.

While transitional drug trafficking is a global issue, the dynamics vary significantly by region.

North America

North America remains one of the largest consumer markets for illicit drugs, particularly opioids, cocaine, and methamphetamine. Mexican criminal organizations, such as the Sinaloa Cartel and Jalisco New Generation Cartel, dominate trafficking routes into the United States and Canada. The ongoing opioid crisis, driven by synthetic products such as fentanyl, has further contributed to the drug trade and deaths related to drug use in the region.

To tackle drug trafficking, the United States has pursued an aggressive approach in recent years, designating the Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation Cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations. The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has sanctioned dozens of individuals and entities tied to both cartels, including money laundering operations, shell companies, and fuel smuggling enterprises that serve as alternative revenue streams for cartels. Mexico's Financial Intelligence Unit has also targeted cartel financial operations, often collaborating with the U.S. on such operations. However, tensions between the two governments have, at times, undermined cooperation on reducing drug trafficking between the countries.



<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sinaloa-cartel>

Mexican officials capture Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán, leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, in 2014.

South America

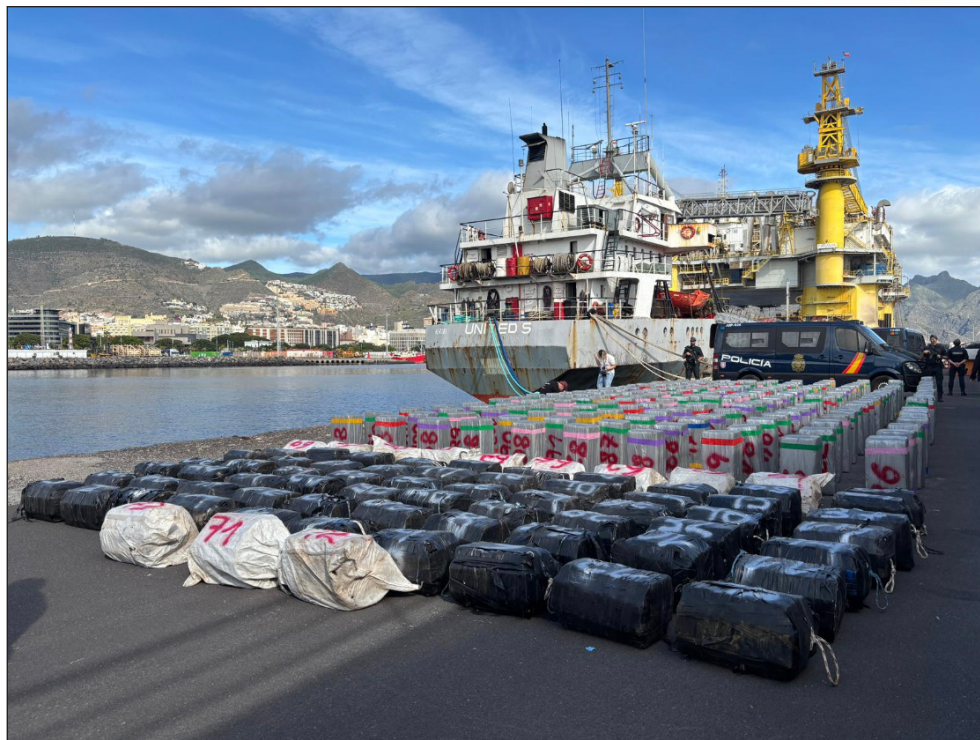
South America continues to serve as the primary production hub for cocaine, with countries such as Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia playing central roles in cultivation and processing. Organized criminal groups are involved in various stages of production and export, with trafficking routes often originating in South America before heading north through Central America or across the Atlantic Ocean towards Europe. The lack of enforcement in rural areas and economic dependence on illicit crop cultivation further exacerbate drug trafficking in the region.

Intelligence sharing and law enforcement cooperation have been central to counter-trafficking efforts in the region. Project CRIMJUST, a collaboration between the European Union, INTERPOL, UNODC, and Transparency International, supports countries across Latin America, the Caribbean, and West Africa in countering organized crime along cocaine trafficking routes through joint criminal investigations and intelligence sharing. These efforts have yielded significant results. For example, Operation Lionfish III resulted in 357 arrests and the seizure of over 52 tonnes of illicit drugs, along with the seizure of three tonnes of precursor chemicals, across 13 countries.

Europe

Europe is primarily a destination market for drugs, with cartels such as the 'Ndrangheta in Italy playing a leading role in coordinating the importation and distribution of cocaine and other drugs across the continent. Several European ports, such as some in Belgium and the Netherlands, have become key entry points for illicit shipments. Furthermore, many European criminal organizations are also investing in synthetic drug production, especially in amphetamines and MDMA.

One of the most notable cooperative solutions in Europe is the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre (MAOC-N). Established in 2007 and co-funded by the EU's Internal Security Fund, MAOC-N coordinates maritime and aviation intelligence from police, customs, military, and maritime authorities to suppress drug trafficking at sea and by air. With the support of MAOC-N, over 1,800 tonnes of illicit drugs were seized at or in transit to EU seaports between 2019 and 2024.



A MAOC-N cocaine seizure by Spanish authorities.

<https://maoc.eu/spanish-authorities-make-historic-cocaine-seizure-in-the-atlantic-ocean-with-the-support-of-maoc-n/>

Asia

Asia has become a central hub for the production of synthetic drugs. The Golden Triangle region, spanning Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand, is one of the most significant drug production zones in the world. A record 236 tonnes of methamphetamine were seized in East and Southeast Asia in 2024, a 24 percent increase from 2023, with the vast majority produced in Myanmar. Meanwhile, the creation and shipment of precursors originating in countries such as China also perpetuate the worldwide illicit drug trade by serving as vital suppliers for cartels operating in other regions.

Regional cooperation in Asia is primarily organized under the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control, which provides a framework for cooperation among member states. For example, the Safe Mekong Operation Project brings together law enforcement agencies from Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to combat drug trafficking and control precursor chemical movements. These efforts have achieved some success, but political instability and changes in government priorities have resulted in criminal groups significantly expanding synthetic drug production, especially in Myanmar.

Africa

West and Central Africa have emerged as important transit hubs for cocaine shipments into Europe. Some areas are also increasingly being used for storage, repacking, and redistribution. Many countries in the region have weak border controls, corruption, and limited enforcement capacity, which especially make the region vulnerable to exploitation by criminal organizations.

To address these challenges, the West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI) was launched in 2009 as a partnership between the United Nations and INTERPOL to support the implementation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Regional Action Plan to Address the Growing Problem of Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Drug Abuse in West Africa and the Sahel. WACI focuses on improving law enforcement, forensics, border management, anti-money-laundering, and criminal justice reform in the region. Despite initiatives such as WACI, government instability and the growing sophistication of criminal networks threaten to outpace enforcement resources.

Oceania

Oceania's geographic isolation presents both challenges and advantages for enforcement, as authorities must monitor vast maritime areas and many potential routes for drugs to enter and exit. Furthermore, Australia and New Zealand represent high-value destination markets due to high street prices for illicit drugs, making the region highly profitable for organized crime.

In response, the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO), in partnership with the Australian Border Force, has developed the Pacific Small Craft Application as a monitoring tool and trained customs officers across the Pacific in maritime intelligence and counter-smuggling techniques. Large-scale cooperation, such as a multilateral operation in September 2025 involving Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Brunei, and the United States, successfully disrupted a transnational drug trafficking syndicate and seized many kilograms of methamphetamine across multiple countries.

Trends

While measures combating international drug trafficking have become more advanced and larger in scale in recent years, global drug markets continue to expand. Criminal networks increasingly exploit legal trade infrastructure, such as vulnerabilities in seaport security, to conceal illicit substances, and some groups have even developed advanced drug smuggling submarines. The use of encrypted communications, cryptocurrencies, and informal finan-

cial systems such as hawala has also made detection and enforcement more difficult. At the same time, the variety of precursor chemicals used to produce illicit drugs continues to grow, and there is often a delay between innovations in drug production and their regulation. As such, both enforcement and the crime of drug trafficking are rapidly evolving in modern times.

<https://cimsec.org/pushing-or-overstepping-legal-boundaries-in-the-fight-against-maritime-drug-smuggling-pt-1/>



A seizure of drugs by the American Coast Guard in the Caribbean Sea.

Questions to Consider

1. What forms of intelligence sharing between countries are most feasible and effective, given differences in capabilities, sovereignty, and domestic laws?
2. How can states balance precursor chemical monitoring without creating significant barriers to legal manufacturing and trade?
3. What is the share of responsibility for funding and enforcement of solutions for countries that are either primarily producers of precursor chemicals, producers and exporters of illicit drugs, or consumers of illicit drugs?
4. How can states address differences in legal systems, evidentiary standards, and human rights when extraditing or fighting organized crime networks and their leaders?
5. When countries are politically opposed, how can international frameworks ensure that drug smuggling does not become weaponized?
6. To what extent are economic approaches to disincentivizing drug trafficking effective when compared to more traditional methods of intervention?

Resources

- The 2008 World Drug Report presents comprehensive, albeit somewhat outdated, trends and statistics about the illicit drug trade, serving as a strong primer for understanding the practice.
<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/WDR-2008.html>
- The 2025 World Drug Report provides a more updated perspective, which is useful to understand how drug use, innovation, and trade have evolved in modern times.
<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/world-drug-re>

port-2025.html

- This page is a hub providing a variety of resources for understanding international drug conventions.
https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/Mandate_Functions/Scheduling.html
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a broad overview of UN priorities, useful for situating the drug trade within the broader context of development.
<https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>
- The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency provides briefs on various cartels and wanted criminals relating to the illicit drug trade.
<https://www.dea.gov/cartels>
- INTERPOL is actively involved in crackdowns on international drug trafficking and provides a breadth of resources about the subject.
<https://www.interpol.int/Crimes/Drug-trafficking>

Topic 2: Transitioning Rural Economies Away from Illicit Crop Cultivation

In many rural regions around the world, households face limited access to infrastructure, financial services, and legal agricultural markets, resulting in the adoption of illicit crop cultivation. In these environments, the illicit economy often provides immediate and reliable income, creating the foundation that supplies the global illicit drug trade. As a result, cultivation is a criminal and socioeconomic issue deeply tied to poverty and a lack of economic development, which, if addressed, would significantly hamper drug trafficking.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/03/asia/taliban-bans-drug-cultivation-opi-um-afghanistan-intl>



Afghan farmers harvesting opium poppy.

Recent global trends highlight the urgency of addressing illicit crop cultivation. For example, coca cultivation in Colombia and opium cultivation in Myanmar have reached record highs. According to the UNODC, global coca cultivation reached 376,000 hectares in 2023, with Colombia alone accounting for 253,000 hectares. In Myanmar, the world's leading source of opium, poppy cultivation expanded by 17 percent to 53,100 hectares in 2025. Myanmar's trajectory contrasts with Afghanistan, where crackdowns have significantly reduced illicit cultivation by 95 percent, but have also generated severe economic disruption for rural communities as alternative crops to opium are much less profitable. These trends illustrate both the scale of the challenge and the trade-offs between economic well-being and strict bans on illicit crop cultivation.

Addressing the drug trade entails much more than tackling organized crime, as transitioning economies away from illicit crop cultivation requires policies that incentivize alternative development and income-earning opportunities in rural communities. Delegates must design strategies that both decrease illicit crop production and encourage policies that build robust rural economies.

Topic History

The cultivation of illicit crops dates back thousands of years, with opium poppies being cultivated in Mesopotamia since at least 3,400 BCE. Ancient civilizations in the Near East and the Mediterranean used opium for medicinal and ritual purposes, while Indigenous communities in the Andean region used coca leaves for their stimulant properties. For much of history, these crops were integrated into local economies and cultural practices and were not considered illicit commodities.



<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-york-north-york-shire-45732811>

A 3,500-year-old jug resembling the shape of a poppy that was likely used to store opium.

The transformation of these crops into trafficked goods began in the 18th and 19th centuries. The British Empire was heavily involved in opium production in India and exporting the drug to China, while the German chemist Friedrich Gaedcke first isolated cocaine from coca leaves in 1855. By the early 20th century, states began to regulate the production of opium through the 1912 Hague Opium Convention, shifting cultivation into more informal markets. Still, narcotic crops were produced legally for medical and scientific purposes until anti-drug sentiments worldwide gained increasing popularity starting in the 1960s and 70s, as represented by the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs in 1961.



<https://allthatsinteresting.com/opium-den>

An opium den in China in the early 20th century.

However, member states began to realize that enforcement-focused approaches alone were insufficient to reduce cultivation, and at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs in 1998, nations identified alternative development as a key strategy to eliminate illicit crop cultivation through socioeconomic means and incentives to solve illicit crop cultivation's underlying causes. For example, providing rural communities with viable economic alternatives, such as support for legal cash crops, access to credit and financial services, and investment in roads and irrigation, gives farmers a realistic path toward livelihoods besides illicit crop cultivation. Following the Special Session, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime expanded its monitoring capabilities through the Global Illicit Crop Monitoring Program (ICMP), which has tracked the cycles of reduction and resurgence of illicit crop cultivation in various regions of the world since 1998 and has created annual reports on the matter since at least 2002.

Furthermore, in 2013, the United Nations adopted the Guiding Principles on Alternative Development, identifying community participation, secure access to land, market integration, environmental protection, and proper sequencing of development and enforcement measures as key methods of addressing illicit crop cultivation in a sustainable, long-term manner.

To put an end to the illicit drug trade, the United Nations and Member States must make an effort to mitigate the issue at its source – illicit crop cultivation.

Current Situation

In modern times, there are several hubs of illicit crop cultivation, and governments throughout the world have implemented solutions to try to combat the practice.

South America

South America remains the world's dominant source of coca cultivation. For example, Colombia's coca production has reached record levels in recent years despite decades of eradication efforts, such as an aerial herbicide spraying program that ran from the 1990s until 2015. The program was designed to destroy coca crops by dispersing herbicide over large cultivation areas to make coca farming economically unviable, but farmers responded by replanting in new areas. The program also generated significant backlash due to the health issues and environmental damage, such as the contamination of water sources with glyphosate, a potential carcinogen. More recently, Colombia's 2017 National Comprehensive Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (PNIS) enrolled over 99,000 families who voluntarily agreed to uproot coca in exchange for financial assistance and technical support for legal crops. While PNIS achieved reductions, implementation was hampered by underfunding, delayed payments to farmers, and security threats from armed groups opposed to substitution.

Another approach to regulating illicit crop cultivation in South America has been Bolivia's "social control" model, which permits limited coca cultivation for traditional use while engaging coca grower unions (cocaleros) as partners in regulating excess production. This model has been relatively successful in reducing cultivation without the violent confrontations seen elsewhere, but the model's success may be difficult to replicate in countries without a strong cocalero presence.





<https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2019/07/06/cocaine-production-in-colombia-is-at-historic-highs>

AFP

Coca farm in Columbia.

Southeast Asia

The Golden Triangle region, particularly Myanmar, has experienced a dramatic resurgence in opium poppy cultivation. Political and economic instability following Myanmar's 2021 military coup allowed armed groups and criminal organizations to expand poppy farming with little resistance from the central government, which has also led to increased drug trafficking in neighboring countries. In contrast, Thailand offers one of the most widely cited success stories in alternative development. Beginning in the 1970s under the Royal Project Foundation, highland communities that had historically depended on opium cultivation gradually transitioned toward high-value legal crops such as coffee and macadamia nuts, supported by investments in infrastructure and education. However, the program required consistent government commitment and international funding to achieve success. Additionally, Thailand has become a hub for synthetic drug production, which threatens to reduce the effectiveness of crop-focused interventions as criminal networks shift away from agriculture and towards drug manufacturing.

Afghanistan

For decades, Afghanistan was the world's leading opium producer, but the country saw a dramatic collapse in poppy cultivation following the Taliban's strict ban on opium production in 2022. While this resulted in a sharp reduction in the global opium supply, it also devastated the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of farming households who had no viable economic alternative. While an enforcement-first approach that eliminates illicit crops may have immediate success, without simultaneously providing replacement incomes, affected communities may face severe food insecurity and deepened poverty, resulting in greater harm to people's well-being in the long term.

West Africa

West Africa has emerged as a region of growing concern in the international community because some rural communities have adopted the practice of coca and poppy cultivation. Weak governance, limited agricultural investment, and growing demand from both domestic and international markets have created conditions favorable to this illicit cultivation, which poses a threat to global efforts at combatting drug use because of West Africa's key location as a transit hub for illicit substances. Access to formal credit remains extremely limited, and interest rates are often extremely high, resulting in farmers being unable to invest in improved seeds, fertilizers, or other equipment that would make legal crops more competitive. Furthermore, the lack of

road infrastructure compounds these barriers, as long travel journeys to sell crops make the profit margins of illicit crops more attractive. Without coordinated investment in roads and financial markets, many West African farming households will continue to favor illicit cultivation over legal alternatives.

<https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20260311-cocaine-flowing-through-west-africa-fuels-corruption-and-crack-use-gi-10c>



People gather around a speedboat believed to be used by drug traffickers as it unloads cargo at a quay in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau.

Trends

Across all regions, the profitability gap between illicit and licit crops often is significant, and alternative development programs frequently suffer from underfunding, short project timelines, and a failure to secure reliable market access for substitute crops. Programs that have succeeded, such as Thailand's Royal Project, have shared features of long-term commitment and community participation, whereas programs that have failed tend to impose top-down solutions or implement strict bans before viable alternatives are in place.

Climate change and environmental sustainability concerns add further complexity, as shifting weather patterns alter which regions are suitable for certain crops and can push vulnerable farming communities toward illicit cultivation as a survival strategy. Additionally, successful eradication or alternative development in one area often simply shifts cultivation to neighboring regions with weaker enforcement, rather than reducing overall production. The international community faces the challenge of designing interventions that address these deeply rooted socioeconomic drivers while learning from both the successes and failures of past efforts.

Questions to Consider

1. What risks arise if alternative development programs fail or are not properly funded?
2. To what extent are enforcement, monitoring, criminalization, and punishments needed to ensure that farmers transition away from illicit crop cultivation?
3. What indicators, beyond the reduction of hectares devoted to illicit crop cultivation, should be used to measure the success of alternative development strategies?
4. How can international cooperation prevent displacement, where reductions in illicit crop cultivation in one country coincide with expansion in another?
5. Which policies that strengthen market access, such as credit markets

and transportation networks, should be prioritized so that licit products can realistically compete with illicit commodities?

6. How should states integrate environmental protection and sustainability into alternative development and encourage farmers to transition into producing other crops?

Resources

- This webpage is a great introduction to illicit crop cultivation and provides statistics on opium and coca cultivation.
<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/alternative-development/illicit-crop-cultivation.html>
- UNODC Global Illicit Crop Monitoring Program provides relevant, updated statistics about illicit crop cultivation.
<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/crop-monitoring/>
- The United Nations has articles that touch upon alternative development and the intersection between agriculture and development.
<https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/moving-away-illicit-crop-production-contributes-socioeconomic-development-peace-and>
- The Bulletin of Narcotics, and this section in particular, gives insight into the role of land rights in illicit crop cultivation.
<https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789213633014c005>
- PBS provides a detailed, but relatively concise overview of opium's history.
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/heroin/etc/history.html>
- This academic source details the medical history of how cocaine has been used throughout time.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0899328920300079>

Bloc Positions

Unlike other topics, bloc positions are less rigid in CND, and many countries hold positions that span multiple blocs. While there are ideological differences between countries, even traditionally adversarial nations can find common ground and solutions to reduce drug trafficking and illicit crop cultivation. To help get you started on research, here are some types of legislation and policy that your state may have. Note that these are not all-encompassing.

1. Enforcement-First States:

Some nations prioritize strict law enforcement and punitive measures as the primary tools for combating both drug trafficking and illicit crop cultivation. While this approach can yield rapid results, it can also generate humanitarian consequences and may drive illicit activity into neighboring regions.

2. Development-Oriented States:

Other nations emphasize that drug policy must address the root causes of both trafficking and cultivation. These states tend to strongly advocate for alternative development programs, harm reduction, and the integration of drug policy into broader sustainable development goals.

3. Producer and Transit States:

Nations that serve as major sources of illicit crops or key transit points for drug shipments often bear disproportionate costs of enforcement. As a result, they may advocate for greater shared responsibility in funding counter-narcotics efforts and argue that consumer nations should contribute more to alternative development and drug demand reduction.

4. Consumer Market States:

Countries that are primarily destination markets for illicit drugs tend to prioritize funding for border security, financial intelligence, and demand-side interventions such as addiction treatment programs.

