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Press Release

CONNECTION BETWEEN DRUGS AND CONFLICT MUST BE ADDRESSED IN AFGHANISTAN, SAYS UN OFFICIAL TO NATO PARLIAMENTARIANS

The nexus between opium and insecurity in Afghanistan and its implications for reconstruction and development were addressed in a meeting today (Sunday) in Madeira of the NATO PA Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security by Andrea Mancini of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Emmanuel Reinert of the think tank Senlis Council.

“Battling the connection between drugs and conflict”, said Mancini “requires a long term commitment and the recognition that opium in Afghanistan is as much a narcotic issue as matter of insurgency”. But the international community’s response to the “three interacting crises of security, poverty and opium”, added Reinert, “will not be won on the battlefield alone”.

In order to gain the support of the Afghan people by winning their hearts and minds, NATO and its partners, as well as the UN and the EU, need to adopt an integrated strategy, which should include effective poppy eradication but also serious economic incentives to the Afghan population to abandon opium cultivation. However, as indicated by the Senlis Council, forced eradication is fuelling support for the Taliban and the insurgency, compromising Alliance troops’ safety and mission.

To avoid such a negative outcome, Mr. Reinert illustrated a “poppy for medicine” strategy that could complement the work of the UNODC. The model involves government and international community controlled village-based poppy cultivation and production of medicine tablets. “Afghan morphine tablets would help address the global demand for essential pain medicine”, writes the Senlis Council, “and all economic profits will remain in the village, allowing for economic diversification”.

In a parallel strategy, NATO should step up its efforts in increasing co-operation between the security and development sectors. In particular, the Alliance’s training and capacity building is essential to help the Afghan government address the drug problem, particularly by developing its army and police. This was also stressed by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer while addressing NATO legislators last Friday: “countries must do more to help train and equip Afghanistan’s national army and police”.

While progress has been made in the development of the Afghan National Army, “the situation appears to be somewhat less successful with regard to the Afghan National Police”, said British parliamentarian Frank Cook in his report on Afghanistan to NATO PA Defence and Security Committee. “Influence over local poppy policy enforcement”, writes Mr. Cook, “has also made local police posts particularly vulnerable to the corrosive effects of the narco-economy”.

Members of the Afghan parliament, participating for the first time in an Assembly session, contributed to the discussions in Madeira today and, while praising Mr. Cook’s effort, they also reminded delegates that their country’s problems should be seen in a broader regional context and encouraged the international community to adopt a more structured regional strategy. Members of the Pakistani parliament also participated for the first time in an Assembly session in Madeira.

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