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Executive Summary

The drug situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran remains critical. Despite its apparent efforts to tackle the problem, the country continues to be highly affected by both drug-trafficking and drug-abuse. Very large quantities of opium and opium derivatives produced in Afghanistan are exported via Iran. Although Iran reports the highest drug-seizures worldwide, the amount of drugs transiting Iran to reach other countries as well as that remaining in the country for domestic consumption is high. Amphetamine type stimulants represent an emerging threat to Iran, both at production, trafficking and abuse level.

At the national level, Iran continues to make considerable efforts in the fields of drug supply reduction and particularly on demand and harm reduction, both in terms of legislation and institution building – cf. the new Anti Drug Law ratified by the Supreme Leader on 2nd October 2010 or the establishment of the Financial Intelligence Unit - and in terms of practical implementation. Important challenges remain, above all the issue of death penalty and corporal punishment in particular for serious drug-related crimes.

Regional cooperation is being improved, especially in the framework of the Triangular Initiative brokered by UNODC in 2007. Under this initiative, a series of joint operations between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan were conducted, the most recent one in March 2011. The operations were planned and coordinated by a Joint Planning Cell, a unit established in Tehran with the support of UNODC, and resulted in more than three tons of drugs seized.

Other initiatives aim at engaging Iran at the regional level, e.g. TARCET, the Paris Pact Initiative or the EU-funded project with the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). The latter brings together different organisations working in the areas of intelligence exchange (Interpol), container control (UNODC) and forensic analysis (Bundeskriminalamt).

International cooperation with Iran can be cumbersome, but is well worth the effort in the counter narcotics field. Cooperation with the MDG continues to be influenced by the political environment and the quality of bilateral relations, dialogue can rapidly improve or worsen against predictions. Cooperation is often strongly politicised and lacks sustainability. The presence of more Drug Liaison Officers in Iran would be an important first step to initiate technical cooperation in substance with Iranian authorities and improve continuity. Following a period of relative stagnation, contacts resumed in summer 2010. Being the single most important international player in the field, UNODC played a crucial role in bringing the mini-Dublin Group (MDG) and the Iranian authorities together. Nearly all contacts and successful initiatives are facilitated by UNODC, the most important result being the joint development of the new country programme.

This integrated programme of technical cooperation on drugs and crime for Iran (2011-2014) was signed by UNODC's Executive Director and Iran's Minister of Interior and Secretary General of Drug Control Headquarters in Vienna in March 2011. This program, which was prepared in a participatory way by national authorities, MDG and UNODC, has received valuable contributions from Norway and Denmark. To build a sound basis for cooperation in the field, however, it is now crucial to guarantee full funding for this year (700.000 USD remain unfunded) and also to ensure adequate financing for the full period of the Country Program (7.000.000 USD unfunded for 2012-2014).

1. GENERAL SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY

1.1. Drugs

Iran's eastern border with Afghanistan and Pakistan is 1,845 km long and consists of mainly mountainous or harsh desert terrain. There are obvious challenges to achieving even partial control over this area, although 12,000 anti-narcotics police and border guards are reportedly deployed at these long borders. The considerable amount of seizures reported by the Iran drug control agencies indicates that Iran is the strongest counter-narcotics partner in the region.

Nearly all opium produced in Afghanistan – in 2009 an estimated 6,900 mt, 89% of the world's total – is exported via routes flowing into and through Afghanistan's neighbouring countries, partly in the form of high purity heroin. UNODC estimates that 140 mt (37%) of the 380 mt of heroin produced in Afghanistan are annually trafficked into the Islamic Republic of Iran from Afghanistan and via Pakistan, towards the European market. According to the UNODC World Drug Report 2010, the Islamic Republic of Iran leads all countries with 87 % of worldwide opium seizures and 31% of all heroin interceptions in 2008. The latest numbers from DCHQ shows that opium seizures decreased by 32% from 2009 to 2010, while seizures of heroin slightly increased in the same period.

Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) represent an emerging threat to the Islamic Republic of Iran. The country's combined seizures of amphetamine and methamphetamine amounted to 891 kg in 2009 and 1,371 kg in 2010.¹ While in the proceeding years, methamphetamine was mostly imported to Iran, an increasing amount is today produced both for the domestic market and trafficked to other lucrative markets like South East Asia, where the price of methamphetamine is reportedly ten times higher than in Iran. Several hundred Iranians have been arrested in East and South East Asia during the last few years. The starting material used for ATS is most likely domestically diverted pseudoephedrine. In just four years, the demand for pseudoephedrine increased and the Islamic Republic of Iran has the fourth highest legitimate requirement for pseudoephedrine in the world; this increases the likelihood of domestic diversion and makes the country an attractive target for precursor diversion by transnational organized crime groups.

¹ In last year report it was reported that seizures of amphetamines was 1472 kg in 2008 and 2426 kg in 2009. The most possible explanation is that DCHQ added High purity heroin (called crystal in Iran) into seizures of amphetamines.

Drug abuse represents a big challenge for Iran. Opiate use prevalence in the country was reported as 2.8% of the population in 1999, and more than 2 million people were estimated to be regular opiate users. The official number of opiate dependent users is valued at 1.2 million, equivalent to more than 2% of the adult population. However, experts in the Islamic Republic of Iran perceive that there has been a slight decrease in opiate use over the last years. In contrast to its high opium consumption levels, and despite its proximity to the world's largest heroin producer, official reports indicate that heroin consumption is relatively low (14 mt for an estimated 391,000 users). Nevertheless, there are strong indications that the number of methamphetamine users have increased significantly over the last few years. Iran's Anti-Drug Police Squad chief, Hamid Reza Hossein-Abadi, in January 2011 announced that police have busted 129 crystal meth laboratories, seized 1,151 kilograms of crystal meth (methamphetamine) and arrested 20,170 people in connection with these crimes since 21 March 2010.¹

1.2. HIV/ AIDS

Injecting drug use is the main modality of HIV transmission in Iran. Between 1987 and 2011, around 70% out of a total of 22,250 HIV positive cases detected in the country, have had a history of injecting drug use. According to the Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education, the total amount of HIV cases in the country may be up to 80,000.

1.3. Prison system

A major problem faced by the prison system in Iran is the overcrowding due to a steady rise in the number of prisoners and high incarceration rates. Since 2000, an average of 600,000 people have been imprisoned annually, 60% of whom have been jailed for drug related crimes. More than 95% of prisoners are men; this equates to over 1% of the male population.

¹ Mehr News 27/1-10

2. SHORT UPDATE ON IRAN'S ANTI-DRUGS STRATEGY

2.1. CN institutional framework and legislative changes

To increase coordination of all competent ministries and other governmental bodies, the Iranian anti narcotics decision making body DCHQ was established by the 1988 Iranian Anti Narcotics Law (amended in 1997). The Secretary General post is held since August 2010 by the Minister of Interior, Mostafa Mohammad Najjar.

During the previous year the National Strategic Plan on Drug Prevention was developed, with some technical assistance from UNODC. The Plan has already been endorsed by the cabinet and is awaiting further approval for budgetary issues in the parliament. Also, a National Strategic Plan on Drug Treatment is under preparation by the DCHQ. The government is expanding on treatment options for vulnerable groups of drug users and has endorsed the establishment of specialised drug treatment centres for women and youths.

UNODC, DCHQ and the Iranian judiciary have worked together on drafting a new Drug Law with a more balanced approach between drug supply and drug demand reduction. The new Anti Drug Law of the Islamic Republic of Iran was approved by the Expediency Council on 31 July 2010 and ratified by the Supreme Leader on 2 October 2010.

The law prescribes corporal punishment for most drug crimes and death penalty for anyone who “imports, produces, distributes, exports, deals in, puts on sale, keeps or stores, conceals and carries” more than thirty grams of a number of listed drugs, including psychotropic substances.¹ Positive changes in the law can be found in some of the law’s article referring to addicts. According to article 15, addicts who refer to treatment and harm reduction centres to undergo treatment and rehabilitation will not be prosecuted. However, in contrast to the previous law, prosecution is envisaged for drug dependents who are not under treatment. Possible punishments are imprisonment, monetary fines and lashes. The same article states that the Ministry of Welfare and Social Security is obliged to cover treatment and harm reduction costs of poor addicts.

¹ Anti Drug Law article 8

2.2. Organized crime and money laundering

Iran signed the United Nation Convention on Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) in 2000 but has not ratified it yet. A Ratification bill is reported to be currently in the Legal Commission of the Cabinet for its final consideration. A successful seminar titled "Ratification and Implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime: impacts on the Iranian criminal, legal and institutional framework" was held in Tehran in March 2011. This event, which was co-organized by UNODC and the Iranian Judiciary, brought together thirty one senior representatives from the Parliament, different Judiciary departments, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Financial Intelligence Unit, Defence and Political Commission and Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization.

The Anti-Money Laundering Bill was implemented in 2008 and 2009. In order to support the fight against money laundering and financing of terrorism, UNODC Iran launched a set of initiatives to improve domestic Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) capacity and broaden domestic and international cooperation in this field.

The Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) of Iran, created in December 2009 and inaugurated in February 2010, has been established to serve and promote domestic and international cooperation in the direction of AML/CFT. Today, the FIU is capable to work with all domestic concerned authorities as well as to cooperate with other countries. This very active Unit is closely working with UNODC and invites UNODC and international experts to participate in trainings, seminars and other international initiatives. The FIU is also engaged in discussions with FATF/GAFI and meets regularly with its counterparts from foreign countries. Since the beginning of 2010, bilateral cooperation agreements have been signed between Iran and Armenia, Brazil and Kazakhstan.

UNODC organizes anti-money laundering training for Iranian officials from the Financial Intelligence Unit, banks, insurance companies, the Stock Exchange and other financial institutions. The first officers received diplomas in April 2011 for successfully completing a computer-based training on anti-money laundering held during 2010 and early 2011.

Iran ratified the United Nations Conventions against Corruption (UNCAC) in October 2008. However, additional technical support is still needed for Iran to fully implement the Convention and establish an independent Anti-Corruption body with domestic experts. Iran and Paraguay conducted a peer review of Bangladesh on the implementation of the UNCAC in 2010; Iran will be evaluated by two other countries later this year.

2.3. Iranian government's political will to conduct a comprehensive and resolute anti-drug policy

There are a number of good practices in the field of counter narcotics enforcement in Iran, such as high seizure rates and construction of extensive barriers and trenches along the borders with Afghanistan to better tackle drug trafficking.

Good practices in the field of drug demand reduction, stemming from the general understanding of drug addiction as a disease rather than a crime, include the provision of drug prevention programmes in more than 3,000 schools nationwide, 700 drug treatment centres run by the Government, NGOs and the private sector, as well as comprehensive drug treatment and care services and HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment provided in the prison setting. Moreover, 6,000 experts will be trained in this field during the current year according to the National Strategic Plan on drug prevention. Guidelines on treatment and care of women drug users are under finalisation. Another initiative is the launching of a program focusing on management of tuberculosis of drug using prisoners, which will have very positive effects on HIV prevention and care. Some initiatives have also been taken to improve drug treatment and HIV prevention and care services for Afghan drug users in Iran.

Participation in international and regional fora of counter narcotics cooperation represents another good practice. The country acted as vice-chairman of the 52nd Commission of Narcotics Drugs (CND) and chaired the 53rd CND with praise from all member states. Iran also actively participates in the Paris Pact Initiative, supporting UNODC's Rainbow Strategy. Iran was re-elected as a member of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for a five-year term in April 2011.

Despite all good efforts in the field of drug supply reduction (Iran is world leading in opium and heroins seizures) and intensified international cooperation, the Iranian authority's willingness to share and exchange information in drug related fields could still be increased.

3. BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL CN PROGRAMMES

UNODC has been present in the Islamic Republic of Iran since 1999. During the twelve years in the country, strong relations have been established and UNODC is in a unique position to promote international cooperation on drugs and crime in Iran. The UNODC Iran Country Program 2011-2014 is the tool for the international community to work with Iran on drug control.

The Programme of Technical Cooperation on Drugs and Crime in the Islamic Republic of Iran was jointly developed by UNODC and Iranian authorities during the second half of 2010 and included consultation of the mini-Dublin Group. Despite some delays in having the Country Programme signed by Iranian authorities, the implementation of the programme is likely to start soon. This programme, which has been developed in a participatory way – i.e. by the Islamic Republic of Iran, UNODC, the mini-Dublin Group and other potential funding partners – has three sub-programmes:

- i) illicit trafficking and border management
- ii) drug demand reduction and HIV control
- iii) crime, justice and corruption.

3.1. Ongoing and planned regional initiatives

a) EU-funded ECO project

An EU-funded project “Fight against trafficking from and to Afghanistan” has been launched to strengthen regional cooperation in fighting drug trafficking between member states of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). The project is based in Tehran and funded with 9,5 million Euro from the EU Commission Instrument for Stability over the next three years. Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan will be the main countries targeted during the first phase of the project implementation.

The project is made up of four components aiming at:

- (1) Strengthening the political and technical capacities of ECO Secretariat's Drug and Organized Crime Coordination Unit (ECO-DOCCU);
- (2) Establishing and reinforcing Interpol's I-24/7-system as the central communication system for information and intelligence exchange;

- (3) Developing a network of border control cooperation at land/air/sea ports through the implementation of the UNODC-WCO Global Container Control Programme;
- (4) Establishing a network of forensic laboratories in the ECO region with the support of experts from the German Federal Police, notably with regard to drugs, precursors and forged documents, but possibly also to other elements of evidence.

The formal "International kick-off conference" took place in Tehran on 24th and 25th January 2011 and brought together high ranking delegates from Iran and the other ECO member States. During this conference it was agreed to revamp the cooperation between ECO and EU under the EU-funded project. Some progress was made, but challenges remain, such as coordination among the different programme components, efficient management structures and real support by all ECO-member states. The post of the project coordinator is vacant since February 2011, while the different components continue to be implemented.

b) UNODC Regional Programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries

To address the same serious drugs and crime problems in Afghanistan resulting from the massive poppy cultivation and illicit trafficking, UNODC plans to launch a "Regional Programme for Afghanistan and the Neighbouring Countries" later this year. The Regional Programme aims at realizing the full potential of the UNODC field offices in Kabul, Islamabad, Tehran and Tashkent.

c) Triangular Initiative

A good practice, both in terms of counter narcotics enforcement and regional cooperation, carried out and led by the Islamic Republic of Iran is the so-called Triangular Initiative (TI). This initiative, brokered by UNODC in 2007, aims at strengthening cross-border cooperation in the field of drug control amongst Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. The 4th Triangular Initiative Ministerial Meeting was held at the end of November 2010 in Pakistan. During this meeting a Ministerial Declaration was signed and the three countries committed themselves to enhance the operation of the Joint Planning Cell (JPC), a unit established in Tehran with the support of UNODC, and conduct effective drug-intelligence led operations. A series of joint operations between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan in the last year, the latest one in March 2011, were planned and coordinated by the JPC and resulted in more than three tons of drugs seized. So far, eight joint operations have been conducted since the JPC started its work at end of 2009. Liaison officers from the three countries have been appointed.

4. PLACE AND DATE OF MEETINGS OF MINI DUBLIN GROUP

Trilateral meetings and meetings of the mini-Dublin Group are held on a regular basis in order to keep up the level of cooperation. Since the last report in September 2010 several meetings have been organized. During a focal point meeting in October 2010 (*14 October 2010, UNODC premises*) the draft of the new country programme was presented by UNODC.

In order to revamp a dialogue between the mini-Dublin Group and the Drug Control Headquarters, the MDG chair (Ambassador of Germany) and UNODC's Representative in Iran met with the Secretary General of Drug Control Headquarters, Minister of Interior Mostafa Najjar (19 February 2011, Ministry of Interior). During this meeting it was agreed to organize a series of meetings, events and site visits in the following five areas:

1. drug use prevention
2. drug treatment and rehabilitation of drug users
3. HIV control amongst drug users and prisoners
4. counter-narcotics enforcement
5. alternative to imprisonment

The most recent developments were discussed during a focal point meeting in May 2011 (18 May 2011, UNODC premises). During this meeting, the Director General for Drug Prevention and Cultural Affairs from the DCHQ, Dr. Hamidreza Sarami, introduced the MDG member states to the newest initiatives of the Iranian Administration in the field of drug prevention.

A meeting with the ambassadors of MDG-member states, UNODC and the S.G. of DCHQ Minister Najjar is scheduled for the end of May (tent. 31 May 2011).

5. AREAS REQUIRING FURTHER IMPROVEMENT AND NEED FOR EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

Amongst the areas requiring further improvement, the issue of death penalty and corporal punishment, in particular for drug-related crimes, stands out. In official media publications, Iran implicitly acknowledged the execution of 252 people in 2010, including five women and a juvenile. Credible unofficial sources claim that 682 people were executed in 2010 and that 86 % of all executions were linked to drug related crimes.

More effective and comprehensive drug demand reduction, HIV Control and Harm reduction programmes, as well as improved access to HIV/AIDS prevention are also desirable. There is an overall management challenge that relates to both drug supply reduction and drug demand reduction policies and practices in Iran. As for the field of counter narcotics enforcement, major areas requiring further enhancement are the drug interdiction capacities, criminal intelligence investigation and pilot drug sniffing dogs breeding capacities. The scarce presence of international DLOs in Iran and the very limited cooperation of Iranian authorities with them also remain serious obstacles. Whilst there are close to 50 international DLOs represented in each of the three neighbouring countries Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey, currently only three permanent DLOs are present in Tehran and the Iranian government seems to be reticent to increase the DLO-presence. Other areas requiring further improvements include the need to ratify the UNTOC, development of national legislation on anti-corruption and on financing of terrorism.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Following recent positive developments and regarding the readiness in principle of the Iranian authorities to intensify their international engagement and implement a multilateral programme of technical cooperation, the MDG puts forward the following recommendations for the future:

- **International engagement:** Encourage Iran to continue to engage internationally on counter-narcotics and crime prevention. The exchange of expertise and the organization of visits of experts from MDG countries to Iran and of Iranian experts to MDG countries should be encouraged, e.g. in the framework of the existing UNODC programme for Iran.

- **Urgently provide funds for UNODC’s Integrated Programme of Technical Cooperation on Drugs and Crime in the Islamic Republic of Iran (2011-2014).** This Programme aims to support national efforts on drugs and crime by facilitating regional, bilateral and international cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and by promoting United Nations and international standards and best practices. More than in any other country, the UNODC work in Iran constitutes the backbone of international cooperation with local authorities. UNODC technical assistance contributes to intensify bilateral cooperation and constructive dialogue with Iran.

- **Regular MDG-meetings:** To overcome difficulties and improve continuity, it is important to keep up the level of coordination and cooperation between UNODC, the MDG members and Iranian authorities. This includes regular meetings of UNODC and MDG-chair with the Iranian authorities (DCHQ) to exchange information, prepare MDG-meetings and follow up on the implementation of recommendations.

 - **Regional cooperation:** Continue to encourage regional cooperation within the framework of the EU-funded project for the ECO-Member States, the Triangular Initiative, the UNODC programme of technical cooperation on drugs and crime in Iran, the forthcoming Regional Programme, as well as other regional platforms (e.g. Paris Pact, Operation TARCET etc.)

 - **Cooperation among DLOs:** Foster exchanges of Drug Liaison Officers with Iranian authorities in the framework of UNODC's integrated programme of technical cooperation on drugs and crime.
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