

Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)

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Burma

I. Summary

Both UNODC and U.S. surveys of opium poppy cultivation indicated a significant increase in cultivation and potential production in 2007, and production and export of synthetic drugs (amphetamine-type stimulants, crystal methamphetamine and Ketamine) from Burma continued unabated. (Note: 2008 UNODC Cultivation Report statistics were not available by our printing deadline.) The significant downward trend in poppy cultivation observed in Burma since 1998 was reversed in 2007, with increased cultivation reported in Eastern, Northern and Southern Shan State and Kachin State. Whether this represents a sustained change in poppy cultivation in Burma, which remains far below levels of 10 years earlier, remains to be seen. It does indicate, however, that increases in the value of opium are driving poppy cultivation into new regions. An increased number of households in Burma were involved in opium cultivation in 2007. While Burma remains the second largest opium poppy grower in the world after Afghanistan, its share of world opium poppy cultivation fell from 55 percent in 1998 to 5 percent in 2006, and rose slightly in 2007. This large proportional decrease is due to both decreased opium poppy cultivation in Burma and increased cultivation in Afghanistan, which is now by far the world's largest opium poppy cultivating region. Burma has not provided most opium farmers with access to alternative development opportunities. Recent trends indicate that some opium farmers were tempted to increase production to take advantage of higher prices generated by opium's relative scarcity and continuing strong demand. Increased yields in new and remaining poppy fields (particularly in Southern Shan State), spurred by favorable weather conditions in 2007 and improved cultivation practices, partially offset the effects of decreased cultivation in 2006. Burma's overall decline in poppy cultivation since 1998 has been accompanied by a sharp increase in the production and export of synthetic drugs, turning the Golden Triangle into a new "Ice Triangle." Burma is a significant player in the manufacture and regional trafficking of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS). Drug gangs based in the Burma-China and Burma-Thailand border areas, many of whose members are ethnic Chinese, produce several hundred million methamphetamine tablets annually for markets in Thailand, China, and India, as well as for onward distribution beyond the region. There are also indications that groups in Burma have increased the production and trafficking of crystal methamphetamine or "Ice".

Through its Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC), the Government of Burma (GOB) cooperates regularly and shares information with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Australian Federal Police (AFP) on narcotics investigations. In recent years, the GOB has also increased its law enforcement cooperation with Thai, Chinese and Indian counternarcotics authorities, especially through renditions, deportations, and extraditions of suspected drug traffickers. In May 2008, Burmese General Ye Myint was forced to retire from his senior position as Chief of Bureau of Special Operations 1, which some observers attribute to his son's involvement with narcotics. In November 2008, former regime crony Maung Weik and four other defendants were convicted and sentenced to 15

years in prison. During the 2008 drug certification process, the U.S. determined that Burma was one of only three countries in the world that had “failed demonstrably” to meet its international counternarcotics obligations. Major concerns remain: unsatisfactory efforts by Burma to deal with the burgeoning ATS production and trafficking problem; failure to take concerted action to bring members of the UWSA to justice following the unsealing of a U.S. indictment against them in January 2005; failure to investigate and prosecute military officials for drug-related corruption; and failure to expand demand-reduction, prevention and drug-treatment programs to reduce drug-use and control the spread of HIV/AIDS. Burma is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

II. Status of Country

Burma is the world’s second largest producer of illicit opium. Eradication efforts and enforcement of poppy-free zones combined to reduce cultivation levels between 1998 and 2006, especially in Wa territory. However, in 2007, a significant resurgence of cultivation occurred, particularly in eastern and southern Shan State and Kachin State, where increased cultivation, favorable weather conditions, and new cultivation practices increased opium production levels, led to an estimated 29 percent increase in overall opium poppy cultivation and a 46 percent increase in potential production of dry opium.

According to the UNODC, opium prices in the Golden Triangle have increased in recent years, although prices in Burma remain much lower than the rest of the region due to easier access. Burmese village-level opium prices or *farm-gate* prices increased from \$153 per kg in 2004 to \$187 in 2005, to \$230 in 2006 and to \$265 per kg in 2008. Burmese opium sales contribute about half of the annual household cash income of farmers who cultivate opium, which they use to pay for food between harvests. Forty-five percent of the average yearly income (\$501) of opium cultivating households in Shan State was derived from opium sales in 2007.

In 2007, the UNODC opium yield survey estimated there were approximately 27,700 ha planted with opium poppies, with an average yield of 16.6 kg per hectare (significantly higher than the 2006 average yield of 14.6 kg per hectare). Independent U.S. opium poppy cultivation surveys also indicated increased poppy cultivation and estimated opium production to approximately 27,700 ha cultivated and 270 metric tons (MT) produced. The UNODC’s opium yield survey concluded that land under cultivation had increased 29 percent in Burma from 2006 levels, with a 46 percent increase in potential opium production to 460 MT. This represented a 67 percent increase in the total potential value of opium production in Burma, from \$72 million in 2006 to \$120 million in 2007. Nonetheless, both surveys indicated that opium production is still down 90 percent from its peak production in 1996.

The general decline in poppy cultivation in Burma since 1996 has been accompanied by a sharp increase in the local production and export of synthetic drugs. According to GOB figures for 2008 (January-October), the GOB seized approximately 760,000 methamphetamine tablets, compared to 1.5 million seized in 2007. Opium, heroin, and ATS are produced predominantly in the border regions of Shan State and in areas controlled by ethnic minority groups. Between 1989 and 1997, the Burmese government negotiated a series of cease-fire agreements with several armed ethnic minorities, offering them limited autonomy and continued tolerance of their narcotics production and trafficking activities in return for peace. In June 2005, the UWSA announced implementation in Wa territory of a long-delayed ban on opium production and trafficking. While the cultivation of opium poppies decreased in the Wa territory during 2006 and 2007, according to UNODC and U.S. surveys, there are indications from many sources that Wa leaders replaced opium cultivation with the manufacture and trafficking of ATS pills and “Ice” in their territory, working in close collaboration with ethnic Chinese drug gangs.

Although the government has not succeeded in persuading the UWSA to stop its illicit drug production and trafficking, the GOB’s Anti-Narcotic Task Forces continued to pressure Wa traffickers in 2008. UWSA also undertook limited reprisals against rivals in Shan State in 2006 and 2007. In May 2006,

UWSA units found and dismantled two clandestine laboratories operating in territory occupied and controlled by the UWSA-South in Eastern Shan State. When the UWSA units entered the lab sites, a firefight ensued, with eight people fatally wounded, four arrested, and 25 kg of heroin and 500,000 methamphetamine tablets seized by the raiding UWSA units. In June 2006, the UWSA passed custody of the contraband substances to GOB officials. The prisoners remained in the custody of the UWSA. These UWSA actions likely were motivated more towards eliminating the competition in their area than by a desire to stop drug trafficking. According to UNODC, opium addiction remains high in places of historic or current opium production, ranging from 1.27 percent of the total adult population in Eastern Shan State to 0.97 percent in Kachin State and an estimated 0.83 percent in the Wa region, the main area of opium production until 2006.

III. Country Actions against Drugs in 2008

Policy Initiatives. Burma's official 15-year counternarcotics plan, launched in 1999, calls for the eradication of all narcotics production and trafficking by the year 2014, one year ahead of an ASEAN-wide plan of action that calls for the entire region to be drug-free by 2015. To meet this goal, the GOB initiated its plan in stages, using eradication efforts combined with planned alternative development programs in individual townships, predominantly in Shan State. The government initiated its second five-year phase in 2004. Ground surveys by the Joint GOB-UNODC Illicit Crop Monitoring Program indicate a steady decline in poppy cultivation and opium production in areas receiving focused attention, due to the availability of some alternative livelihood measures (including crop substitution), the discovery and closure of clandestine refineries, stronger interdiction of illicit traffic, and annual poppy eradication programs. The UNODC estimates that the GOB eradicated 3,598 ha of opium poppy during the 2007 cropping season (ranging between July-March in most regions), compared to 3,970 ha in 2006.

The most significant multilateral effort in support of Burma's counternarcotics efforts is the UNODC presence in Shan State. The UNODC's "Wa Project" was initially a five-year, \$12.1 million supply-reduction program designed to encourage alternative development in territory controlled by the UWSA. In order to meet basic human needs and ensure the sustainability of the UWSA opium ban announced in 2005, the UNODC extended the project through 2007, increased the total budget to \$16.8 million, and broadened the scope from 16 villages to the entire Wa Special Region No. 2. Major donors that have supported the Wa Project include Japan and Germany, with additional contributions from the UK and Australia. The U.S. previously funded the UNODC Wa project, but halted funding over death threats issued by UWSA leadership against U.S. DEA agents following the January 2005 indictment of seven UWSA leaders in a U.S. district court for their role in producing and smuggling heroin to the U.S.

Law Enforcement Efforts. The CCDAC, which leads all drug-enforcement efforts in Burma, is comprised of personnel from the national police, customs, military intelligence, and army. The CCDAC, under the control of the Ministry of Home Affairs, coordinates 26 anti-narcotics task forces throughout Burma. Most are located in major cities and along key transit routes near Burma's borders with China, India, and Thailand. As is the case with most Burmese government entities, the CCDAC suffers from a severe lack of funding, equipment, and training to support its law-enforcement mission. The Burmese Army and Customs Department support the police in the police's drug enforcement role.

Burma is actively engaged in drug-abuse control with its neighbors China, India, and Thailand. Since 1997, Burma and Thailand have had more than 12 cross-border law enforcement cooperation meetings. This cooperation resulted in the repatriation by Burmese police of drug suspects wanted by Thai authorities: two in 2004, one in 2005 one in 2006, and one in 2008. According to the GOB, Thailand has contributed over \$1.6 million to support an opium crop substitution and infrastructure project in southeastern Shan State. In 2007, Thailand assigned an officer from the Office of Narcotics Control

Board (ONCB) to its mission in Rangoon; this officer remains in country. Burma-China cross border law enforcement cooperation has increased significantly, resulting in several successful operations and the handover of several Chinese fugitives who had fled to Burma. While not formally funding alternative development programs, the Chinese government has actively encouraged investment in many projects in the Wa area and other border regions, particularly in commercial enterprises such as tea plantations, rubber plantations, and pig farms. China has assisted in marketing those products in China through lower duties and taxes. There are also indications that China conducted its own opium cultivation and production surveys in 2007 and 2008 in regions of Burma bordering the PRC, although they have not shared data resulting from those surveys with other parties.

After Burma and India signed an agreement on drug control cooperation in 1993, the two countries agreed to hold cross border Law Enforcement meetings on a bi-annual basis, though the last meeting was September 11, 2004, in Calcutta.

The GOB has to date taken no direct action against any of the seven UWSA leaders indicted by U.S. district court in January 2005, although authorities have taken action against other, lower ranking members of the UWSA syndicate. In 2007, one of the indicted leaders, Pao Yu-hua, died of natural causes. During 2008, the GOB arrested suspects connected with the UWSA who were involved in a local Ecstasy and methamphetamine distribution.

The GOB reports significant arrests in 2008, totaling more than 2,000 suspected drug traffickers, but several of these were low-level traffickers. The arrests had no noticeable effect on continuing large-scale methamphetamine pill trafficking from Burmese territory.

In May, the GOB investigated 158 suspected drug cases, arresting 245 suspects, of which 201 were men and 44 women. In July and August, the police arrested more than 800 individuals involved with drug trafficking. In September, the GOB arrested 398 suspects, of which 300 were men and 98 were women, and investigated 253 drug-related cases.

On November 18, regime crony Maung Weik and four other defendants were convicted and sentenced to 15 years in prison for methamphetamine distribution. Maung Weik, a top Burmese businessman, was engaged in cyclone relief efforts in the Irrawaddy Delta at the behest of the Government when he was arrested in May.

On November 18, Thet Naing Win, who had been arrested by Thai ONCB and deported to Rangoon pursuant to a Burmese arrest warrant, was acquitted. Thet Naing Win was re-arrested on November 20, 2008 by the CCDAC for narcotics charges related to his association with USWA fugitive Ho Chun-t'ing and Wei Hsueh-kang.

Summary statistics provided by Burmese drug officials indicate that from January 2008 through October 2008, Burmese police, army, and the Customs Service together seized 1340 kilograms of raw opium, 2447 kilograms of low quality opium, 79 kilograms of opium oil, 78 kilograms of heroin, 206 kilograms of morphine base (#3 heroin), 760,213 methamphetamine tablets, 7.7 kilograms of methamphetamine ICE, 472 kilograms of ephedrine, 9179 liters of other precursor chemicals, and 1922 kilograms of precursor chemical powder

Corruption. Burma does not have a legislature or effective constitution, and has no laws on record specifically related to corruption. While little evidence emerges from the secretive Burmese regime to indicate that senior officials in the Burmese Government are directly involved in the drug trade, there are credible indications that mid-and-lower level military leaders and government officials, particularly those posted in border and drug producing areas, are closely involved in facilitating the drug trade. The Burmese regime closely monitors travel, communications and activities of its citizens to maintain its pervasive control of the population, so it strains credibility to believe that government officials are not

aware of the cultivation, production and trafficking of illegal narcotics in areas they tightly control.

A few officials have been prosecuted for drug abuse and/or narcotics-related corruption. In May 2008, Burmese General Ye Myint was forced to retire from his senior position as Chief of Bureau of Special Operations 1, which some observers attribute to his son's involvement with narcotics. However, Burma has failed to indict any military official above the rank of colonel for drug-related corruption. Given the extent of drug manufacture and trafficking in Burma, it is likely that other individuals with high-level positions in the Burmese regime, and their relatives, are involved in narcotics trafficking or misuse of their positions to protect narcotics traffickers.

Agreements and Treaties. Burma is a party to the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs as amended by the 1972 Protocol, the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1988 UN Drug Convention. Burma is a party to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols on migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons, and has signed but has not ratified the UN Corruption Convention.

Cultivation and Production. According to the UNODC opium yield estimate, in 2007 the total land area under poppy cultivation was 27,700 ha, a 29 percent increase from the previous year. The UNODC also estimated that the potential production of opium increased by 46 percent, from 315 MT in 2006 to 460 MT in 2007. The significant increase in potential opium production in 2007 indicated in the UNODC estimates reflect improved agricultural methods and an end to several years of drought, resulting in more favorable growing weather in major opium poppy growing areas, such as Shan State and Kachin State.

Burma as yet has failed to establish any reliable mechanism for the measurement of ATS production. Moreover, while the UNODC undertakes annual estimates of poppy cultivation and production, the U.S. has been unable to conduct its annual joint crop survey with Burma since 2004 due to the GOB's refusal to cooperate in this important area.

Drug Flow/Transit. Most ATS and heroin in Burma is produced in small, mobile labs located near Burma's borders with China and Thailand, primarily in territories controlled by active or former insurgent groups. A growing amount of methamphetamine is reportedly produced in labs co-located with heroin refineries in areas controlled by the UWSA, the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S), and groups inside the ethnic Chinese Kokang autonomous region. Ethnic Chinese criminal gangs dominate the drug syndicates operating in all three of these areas. Heroin and methamphetamine produced by these groups is trafficked overland and via the Mekong River, primarily through China, Thailand, India and Laos and, to a lesser extent, via Bangladesh, and within Burma.

There are credible indications that drug traffickers are increasingly using maritime routes from ports in southern Burma to reach trans-shipment points and markets in southern Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and beyond. The UNODC claims there is evidence that Burmese methamphetamine tablets are also shipped to Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. The UNODC also reports that heroin seizures in 2005, 2006 and 2007 and subsequent investigations revealed the increased use by international syndicates of the Rangoon International Airport and Rangoon port for trafficking of drugs to the global narcotics market. However, U.S. DEA information indicates that heroin transits the Thai/Chinese borders over land rather than by sea. According to UNODC, the GOB seized eight methamphetamine labs in 2006 and five labs in 2007.

Domestic Programs/Demand Reduction. The overall level of drug abuse is low in Burma compared with neighboring countries, in part because most Burmese are too poor to be able to support a drug habit. Traditionally, some farmers used opium as a painkiller and an anti-depressant, often because they lack access to other medicine or adequate healthcare. There has been a growing shift in Burma away from opium smoking toward injecting heroin, a habit that creates more addicts and poses greater public

health risks. Deteriorating economic conditions will likely stifle substantial growth in overall drug consumption, but the trend toward injecting narcotics is of significant concern. The GOB maintains that there are only about 65,000 registered addicts in Burma. Surveys conducted by UNODC and other organizations suggest that the addict population could be as high as 300,000. According to the UNODC, Burma's opium addiction rate is 0.75 percent. NGOs and community leaders report increasing use of heroin and synthetic drugs, particularly among disaffected youth in urban areas and by workers in mining communities in ethnic minority regions. The UNODC estimated that in 2004 there were at least 15,000 regular ATS users in Burma; there are likely more now, although official figures are unavailable.

The growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in Burma has been tied to intravenous drug use. According to the National AIDS Program, one third of officially reported HIV/AIDS cases are attributable to intravenous drug use, one of the highest rates in the world. Infection rates are highest in Burma's ethnic regions, and specifically among mining communities in those areas where opium, heroin, and ATS are more readily available.

Burmese demand reduction programs are in part coercive and in part voluntary. Addicts are required to register with the GOB and can be prosecuted if they fail to register and accept treatment. Demand reduction programs and facilities are limited, however. There are six major drug treatment centers under the Ministry of Health, 49 other smaller detoxification centers, and eight rehabilitation centers, which, together, have provided treatment to about 70,000 addicts over the past decade. Prior to 2006, the Ministry of Health treated heroin addicts with tincture of opium. However, based on high levels of relapse, the Ministry of Health in 2006 began to treat heroin addicts with Methadone Maintenance Therapy (MMT) in four drug treatment centers, found in Rangoon, Mandalay, Lashio, and Myitkyina.

As a pilot model, in 2003 UNODC established community-based treatment programs in Northern Shan State as an alternative to official GOB treatment centers. UNODC expanded this program, opening centers in Kachin State. In 2008, UNODC operated 12 drop-in centers. UNODC plans to open an additional five drop-in centers by 2009. Since 2004, more than 2,000 addicts received treatment at UNODC centers. In 2007 and 2008, an additional 6,000 addicts have sought medical treatment and support from UNODC-sponsored drop-in centers and from outreach workers who are active throughout northeastern Shan State. The GOB also conducts a variety of narcotics awareness programs through the public school system. In addition, the government has established several demand reduction programs in cooperation with NGOs. These include programs coordinated with CARE Myanmar, World Concern, and Population Services International (PSI), focused on addressing injected drug use as a key factor in halting the spread of HIV/AIDS.

While maintaining these programs at pre-existing levels, Burma has failed to expand demand-reduction, prevention, and drug-treatment programs to reduce drug use and control the spread of HIV/AIDS. The Global Fund, which had a budget of \$98.5 million to fight AIDS, TB, and malaria in Burma, withdrew in 2005. In 2006, a number of foreign donors established the 3 Diseases Fund (3DF) to provide humanitarian assistance for AIDS, TB, and malaria. The 3DF, with its budget of \$100 million over five years, supports the work of local and international NGOs, the United Nations, and government health officials at the township level. In 2008, the 3DF supported HIV/AIDS programs such as HIV surveillance and training on blood safety. The 3DF also provided funds for antiretroviral therapy and the MMT program.

IV. U.S. Policy Initiatives and Programs

Policy and Programs. As a result of the 1988 suspension of direct USG counternarcotics assistance to Burma, the USG has limited engagement with the Burmese government in regard to narcotics control. U.S. DEA, through the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon, shares drug-related intelligence with the GOB and

conducts joint drug-enforcement investigations with Burmese counternarcotics authorities. In 2006 and 2007, these joint investigations led to several seizures, arrests, and convictions of drug traffickers and producers. The U.S. conducted opium yield surveys in the mountainous regions of Shan State from 1993 until 2004, with assistance provided by Burmese counterparts. These surveys gave both governments a more accurate understanding of the scope, magnitude, and changing geographic distribution of Burma's opium crop. In 2005, 2006, 2007, and again in 2008, the GOB refused to allow another joint opium yield survey. A USG remote sensing estimate conducted indicated a slight increase in opium cultivation in 2007 and a significant increase in potential opium production, based on increased yields, mirroring UNODC survey results. Bilateral counternarcotics projects are limited to one small U.S.-supported crop substitution project in Shan State, which will receive its final grant of U.S. funds during FY 2009. No U.S. counternarcotics funding directly benefits or passes through the GOB.

In September 2008, the USG identified Burma as one of three countries in the world that had “failed demonstrably” to meet its international counternarcotics obligations.

The Road Ahead. The Burmese government must reverse the increase in narcotics production in 2007 to restore the significant gains it made over the past decade in reducing opium poppy cultivation and opium production. This will require greater cooperation with UNODC and major regional partners, particularly China and Thailand. Large-scale and long-term international aid—including increased development assistance and law-enforcement aid—could play a major role in reducing drug production and trafficking in Burma. However, the ruling military regime remains reluctant to engage in political dialogue within Burma and with the international community. Furthermore, in order to be sustainable, a true opium replacement strategy must combine an extensive range of counternarcotics actions, including crop eradication and effective law enforcement, with alternative development options, support for former poppy farmers and openness to outside assistance. The GOB must foster closer cooperation with the ethnic groups involved in drug production and trafficking, especially the Wa, refuse to condone continued involvement by ceasefire groups in the narcotics trade, tackle corruption effectively, and enforce its counternarcotics laws more consistently to reach its goals of eradicating all narcotics production and trafficking by 2014.

The USG believes that the GOB must further eliminate poppy cultivation and opium production; prosecute drug-related corruption, especially by corrupt government and military officials; take action against high-level drug traffickers and their organizations; strictly enforce its money-laundering legislation; and expand prevention and drug-treatment programs to reduce drug use and control the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS. The GOB must take effective new steps to address the explosion of ATS production and trafficking from Burmese territory that has flooded the region by gaining closer support and cooperation from ethnic groups, especially the Wa, who facilitate the manufacture and distribution of ATS. The GOB must close production labs and prevent the illicit import of precursor chemicals needed to produce synthetic drugs. Finally, the GOB must stem the troubling growth of domestic demand for heroin and ATS.

Extract from the full [INCSR](http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2009/vol1/116520.htm) report at <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2009/vol1/116520.htm>