

The Economic and Social Council: Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)

The [Commission on Narcotic Drugs](#) (CND) is the central policymaking body of the United Nations on drug-related matters. As a functional Commission of the Economic and Social Council, CND monitors the implementation of the three international drug control conventions and is empowered to consider all matters pertaining to the aim of the conventions, including the scheduling of substances to be brought under international control. It also advises on all matters pertaining to the control of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors. CND submits reports to the Economic and Social Council on its proposals to strengthen the international drug control system.

Topic #1: Promoting alternative development as a development-oriented drug control strategy that is sustainable and inclusive

The illicit drug cultivation of cannabis, coca and opium cause immense harm to [300 million people annually](#). Moreover, millions are negatively affected by [drug trafficking, organized crime and terrorism](#) as a result of illicit cultivation. While efforts to enforce drug control have existed within the United Nations system for decades, in recent years United Nations' strategies have worked to incorporate what is called "alternative development" in efforts to combat the production of illicit drugs. Alternative development refers to [development-based strategies aimed at helping communities involved in illicit drug production transition to legitimate, sustainable livelihoods](#). Rather than focusing exclusively on criminal enforcement or eradication, alternative development emphasizes economic opportunity, infrastructure, education and social inclusion.

The global framework designed to control the production and distribution of illegal substances began in the wake of global reckoning with the Chinese opium crises in the late 19th century. Throughout the mid-20th century, the United Nations adopted several instruments addressing illicit drugs including [the Lake Success](#)

Protocol in 1946, the Paris Protocol in 1948, which culminated with the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. This convention attempted to regulate illicit drug cultivation for purely medical and scientific purposes through required reporting to the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). However, these regulations proved ineffective as the convention failed to provide Member States with the tools necessary to implement the convention's provisions. Moreover, because the convention explicitly targeted drug cultivation in developing countries, it failed to recognize that illicit drug production had become embedded in the social, cultural and religious traditions of some Member States. Twelve years later, the United Nations amended the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs to provide Member States with technical assistance needed to implement the provisions of the convention and increase reporting requirements for Member States cultivating illicit drugs. Despite some early progress in decreasing cultivation of illicit drugs, by the end of the 1970s, global use of cocaine and opium skyrocketed.

Recognizing that drug trafficking harmed not only humans, but also the economic, social and cultural pillars of society, the United Nations enacted the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in 1988. While the convention continued to take a punitive stance against drug trafficking, it provided increased support for Member States working toward decreasing their production of illicit substances, including offering alternative development methods. Two years later, the United Nations declared 1991-2000 as the Decade Against Drug Abuse, signaling an increased devotion towards combating drug trafficking and abuse.

In 1998, the United Nations reconvened in a special session, enacting the Action Plan on International Cooperation on the Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development through their outcome Political Declaration. The action plan signaled a shift in the United Nations' attitude towards Member States cultivating illicit drugs as it recognized that for many Member States illicit drug cultivation was the only viable means for sustainability. Alternative development sought to provide a mechanism for leading these economies away from their reliance on such cultivation, and combined with increased cooperation, innovation and comprehensive law enforcement measures, hoped to succeed where previous drug control strategies had stalled.

Following the special session, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) established the Global Illicit Crop Monitoring Programme to [provide Member States with assistance and reliable data to help them achieve a significant reduction or elimination of illicit narcotic crops](#). Following up upon the 1998 meeting, in 2009, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) issued the [Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation Towards An Integrated And Balanced Strategy To Counter The World Drug Problem](#). This declaration recognized that advances in alternative development were hindered by lack of sustained financial and technical assistance and called for Member States to increase cooperation through providing access to markets for alternative development and continued integration of alternative development within Member States' existing infrastructure.

In 2016, the United Nations convened in another Special Session, resulting in [Our Joint Commitment to Effectively Addressing and Countering the World Drug Problem](#). The joint commitment further emphasized illicit drug cultivation remained a serious concern, while recommending the implementation of the lessons gained from the [Second International Conference on Alternative Development](#) held in Thailand the year prior and the [promotion of targeted assistance to Member States](#), alternative development can become a preventive tool against drug trafficking.

Despite the United Nations promotion of alternative development, the 2024 World Drug Report indicated that while opium cultivation decreased 70 percent due to the [Taliban Opium Ban](#), illicit drug cultivation remains high [with coca cultivation seeing a twelve percent increase between 2021 and 2022](#). However, UNODC released the [Practical Guide to Alternative Development and the Environment](#) in 2023. The Practical Guide provides Member States with policy recommendations and best practices for sustainable alternative development focusing on the three pillars of sustainability: planet, people and profit. Moreover, alternative development strategies continue to face challenges with environmental progress and inclusivity. In response, the Ninth Expert Group Meeting on Alternative Development recommends updating the [United Nations Guiding Principle on Alternative Development](#) to incorporate current scientific evidence and best practices regarding alternative development.

Questions to consider from your country's perspective:

- How can Member States' experience with alternative development influence potential changes within the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development?
- What ways can Member States provide increased support and technical cooperation to Member States attempting to utilize alternative development?
- What steps can Member States take to shift alternative development from a reactive response to the world drug problem to a preventive solution?

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Topic #2: Promoting comprehensive and scientific evidence-based early prevention

The world drug problem is a complex challenge impacting millions of people. The negative effects from illicit drugs range from [substance abuse problems to embroiling communities in organized crime, corruption and terrorism](#). In 2023, [316 million people used illegal drugs, over 63,000 tons of illegal drugs were seized and over three million drug crimes occurred](#). While drug treatment is an important facet of any drug control strategy, [evidence-based prevention is a massive cost-saver for Member States](#). Moreover, the third Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), [ensures healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages](#), and includes targeted measures to strengthen Member States' prevention policies.

Early international drug conventions such as the [International Opium Convention of the Hague](#) in 1912 and the League of Nations' [International Opium Convention of 1925](#), the [Convention limiting the Manufacture and regulating the distribution of Narcotic Drugs of 1931](#) and the [Convention of 1936 for the Suppression of Illicit Traffic in Dangerous Drugs](#) all targeted the production, exportation and importation of illicit substances. While early treaties mention drug demand-reduction strategies such as prevention, they regarded this as a

responsibility [for Member States to](#) address domestically. In 1961, the United Nations adopted the [Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs](#), a landmark convention targeting illicit drugs. While this convention continued to target the production of illicit substances, it contained explicit provisions encouraging Member States to take preventative measures to limit drug abuse, such as early identification, treatment and education.

The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs was amended in 1972, resulting in further expansion on demand reduction provisions by [specifically promoting public understanding of the risks associated with drug abuse](#). Drug demand reduction became more prominent in the [United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances](#), adopted in 1988. The United Nations shifted its approach to drug demand strategies from treating [them solely as a domestic responsibility to encouraging Member States to adopt cooperative measures aimed at prevention](#). Prevention programs continued to see an increase with the creation of the [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC) in 1997.

The following year, the United Nations General Assembly held a [special session focused on combating the world drug problem](#), and with unanimous support from Member States, adopted the [Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction and Measures to Enhance International Cooperation to Counter the World Drug Problem](#). This declaration recognized the indispensable nature of demand reduction policies and the importance of collaborating with public health, social welfare and law enforcement authorities in establishing sustainable drug prevention programmes. Despite lacking a formal sanction mechanism, the political declaration was highly successful with [sixty percent of Member States reporting improvements in the implementation of drug control programmes by 2007](#).

Strategies to address the world drug problem started changing in 2009 when the United Nations adopted the [Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation Towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem](#). This comprehensive mandate continued to encourage further cooperation between Member States to create demand

reduction programs, but also emphasized the importance of programs that are both comprehensive and evidence-based. Compared to previous prevention strategies, comprehensive and scientific evidence-based prevention is [relevant to local needs, sustainable and is sufficiently documented and thus replicable](#). Moreover, these programs must consider the unique challenges and circumstances each Member States faces regarding drug abuse.

Seven years later, [the United Nations General Assembly convened to review progress on the Political Declaration and Plan of Action](#). This special session resulted in the adoption of [Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem](#). As part of this commitment, the United Nations recommended comprehensive and scientific evidence-based prevention programs targeted at children and youth. Furthermore, the commitment recommended increased data collection and sharing to formulate effective drug prevention strategies. Building off the recommendations from the joint commitment, UNODC and the World Health Organization (WHO) created [International Standards on Drug Use and Prevention](#) in 2018. These standards recommend that Member States seeking to establish a drug prevention system focus primarily on the environmental and developmental factors related to drug abuse, with a smaller emphasis on providing information.

Member States continue to struggle with adopting scientific evidence-based prevention programs, thus making such programs ineffective and unsustainable. To help Member States in assessing their own prevention programs, the United Nations launched the [Review of Prevention Services \(RePS\)](#). This tool allows Member States to identify strengths and weaknesses in their domestic drug prevention programs and thus adapt them to comply with the International Standards. While the COVID-19 pandemic [brought on a slight decline in drug use, the amount of people using drugs globally continues to rise](#), especially amongst youth. In response to this alarming trend, UNODC implemented [Children Amplified Prevention Services \(CHAMPS\)](#) in 2024. Through this program, UNODC aims to adopt a future-oriented framework that focuses on the specific needs of children and relies on evidence-based prevention models.

Questions to consider from your country's perspective:

- How can Member States collaborate and build capacity together to strengthen and expand prevention policies?
- What steps can the United Nations take to encourage further adoption of the International Standards on Drug Use and Prevention?
- How can Member States utilize RePS and CHAMPS to develop comprehensive, evidence-based prevention systems?

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