

**PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**

**ENORMOUS CHALLENGE POSED BY THE INCREASED THREAT OF
DRUGS NOT LIMITED BY NATIONAL BOUNDARIES AND MUST BE
TACKLED BY CONCERTED AND COLLECTIVE EFFORTS OF ALL
COUNTRIES: S.S.PALANIMANICKAM, MOS (REVENUE)**

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Union Minister of State for Revenue, Shri S.S.Palanimanickam has said that India has put in place an elaborate legislative and administrative mechanism to counter the drug menace in the country and we are conscious of the need to periodically review and strengthen the same. He was inaugurating the Second Paris Pact Working Group meeting on precursors here today.

The Minister of State (Revenue) Shri Palanimanickam stated that this meeting is being held at the backdrop of the release of 2011 Afghan Opium Survey by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) which indicates a 7% increase in the area under illicit opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan over the 2010 figures, which is alarming. He said that equally significant is the fact that this cultivation is reported to have spread to areas which were earlier declared as ‘poppy free’ in the country. This cultivation is estimated at One hundred and thirty one thousand hectares, which is likely to result in production of Five thousand eight hundred metric tonnes of illicit opium and this represents a 61% increase over the expected production for the year 2010, he said. Shri Palanimanickam said that the experts present at the meeting were aware of the potential damage to society that can be caused by such a large scale of illicit production of drugs as it not only supports criminal activity which has linkages to other forms of organized crime, but also has implications on health and well being of the people. Afghan opium is estimated to kill a hundred thousand people every year, worldwide, he added. The Minister stated that the problem of drug addiction and diseases spread by intravenous injection such as HIV-AIDS in most of the participating countries indicates worrying trends that should provide an incentive for all governments to consider combating drug abuse as an integral part of public health policies and to deal with it at regional and international level.

Shri Palanimanickam said that the challenge posed by the increased threat of drugs is enormous and as this problem is not limited by national boundaries, it must be tackled by concerted and collective efforts of all countries. He stated that on account of this initiative such as the Paris Pact Initiative, under the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, is indeed laudable. This is because this initiative brings together the efforts of over 50 countries, which are directly affected by opium trafficking from Afghanistan and a recognition that this fight against drug abuse is a shared responsibility. Recognizing the extent and gravity of the problem, the Government of India, this year, has contributed Two Hundred Thousand U. S. dollars to the Paris Pact Initiative, he said.

Shri Palanimanickam highlighted before the gathering India's unique position in the world in the matters relating to drugs. He said that India was one of the very few countries which have a tradition of medical use of naturally occurring drugs, particularly opium. United Nations in its Conventions has recognized this tradition and has accorded India the status of a licit supplier of opium to the world, for medical and scientific purposes, he said. At the same time, he stated that India lies between two of the major illicit opium and heroin producing regions of the world, namely Afghanistan and Myanmar and our country also has a thriving pharmaceutical industry which utilizes a number of such narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and is the source of several lifesaving medicines for the world. He added that we are manufacturers, consumers and exporters of some of the major 'pre cursors' which have legitimate uses by themselves, but which are also critical ingredients in the manufacture of drugs of abuse. Shri Palanimanickam said that as in sheer numbers, we account for a sixth of humanity – all this places upon us a great responsibility to establish a regulatory and enforcement regime which is alive to the emerging challenges and reacts to them equally dynamically

The Minister of State Shri Palanimanickam said that the area of pre cursors on which the Expert Working Group would focus was an extremely critical area in the context of drug trafficking originating from Afghanistan. He said that the illicit opium production in Afghanistan largely gets converted to heroin and for this, the use of Acetic Anhydride and some other chemicals is critical. He stated that it is apparent that the efforts towards preventing trafficking of precursors must really be strengthened to prevent its supply to Afghanistan and that we in India are particularly conscious of this, being significant producers of precursors. He hoped that the deliberations during the course of the two day meeting would be able to provide implementable strategies to curb precursor trafficking into Afghanistan. He reaffirmed the Government of India's commitment to values espoused by the United Nations.

Speaking on the occasion, Finance Secretary, Shri R.S.Gujral said that the deliberation of this expert group in resolving the issues emerging out of the movement of precursor chemicals where they are misused in drug production is of core importance. He said that this expert group is facing the challenge of addressing the situation in Afghanistan arising out of continuing opium cultivation and of putting their expertise together to prevent the movement of precursor chemicals like Acetic Anhydride from reaching the hands of traffickers. These developments have critical implications for the long term security of our region and of the world, for economies of our countries and the well-being of our people, he said.

Ms. Cristina Albertin, Regional Representative of UNODC in India said that countering the trafficking and consumption of opiates originating in Afghanistan is a top priority for the international community in the light of its undermining effect on the security and stability in the broader region, including South, South West and Central Asia and the globe in general.

Among others present on the occasion were Mr. Pierre Lapaque, Chief, Implementation Support Section, Organised Crime Branch, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), experts from Paris Pact Member countries and officials from various Ministries and agencies of the Government of India.

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