



Political-Security: Narcotics

Issue: How can ASEAN pursue its aspiration of a drug-free region?

Welcome Note

A warm welcome to the S Rajaratnam Endowment-Youth Model ASEAN Conference 2017. We are Laura and Jia Hao, Year 2 students from the Diploma in Business Administration and Diploma in Biomedical Science respectively. It is our honor to be your Committee Chairs for the issue on “How can ASEAN pursue its aspiration for a drug-free region?”

This is a topic with a great potential for discussion and you are expected to be clear on your country’s position. At the same time, have an open mind to the various perspectives that may be raised during the conference. We also hope that you will actively participate in the discussions.

Through this journey, we hope that you will not only forge strong friendships with other delegates, but also gain an experience like no other. We believe that the friendships forged, memories made and experience gained will last you a lifetime.

As your committee chairs, we promise to support you in all ways possible. We look forward to meeting you during the conference and we hope that you will have a splendid and enriching time. In the meantime, all the best for your preparation!

Best wishes,
Jia Hao and Laura

1. Introduction

There are various perspectives on what it means to be a “drug-free ASEAN”. While ASEAN member states have differing National Plans in combating illicit drug activity (UNODC, 2008, pp. 41-61), they agreed together that a “drug-free ASEAN” is to successfully address the illicit drug activities and alleviate its negative impacts on the society through decrease in supply and demand of drugs, (ASEAN, 2016), despite them having differing perspectives on how to actualize the definition through policy.

Over the years, the number of drug users and drug related disorders has been increasing from 208 million in 2006 to 255 million in 2015 (a growth of 4.9% to 5.3%) amongst people aged 15-64 (UNODC, 2017d). The use of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) worldwide has increased to 37 million users, and has been expanding its market to East and Southeast Asia, as well as Oceania (ibid.). With the growth and widening of the synthetic drug market in recent times, the hope of attaining a drug-free ASEAN by 2020 remains but a vision.

As early as 1972, ASEAN called for a meeting with officials and agencies regarding the prevention and control of drug abuse, ultimately leading to the Declaration of ASEAN Concord of 1976. This began the cooperative efforts amongst member states and relevant

international bodies in preventing and eliminating illicit drug trafficking and abuse (AIPA, 2015).

However, even with these efforts, countries like Myanmar, Lao PDR and Thailand, are still one of the world’s largest opium and amphetamine-type stimulant producers (IDPC, 2016). Therefore, ASEAN countries urgently need to combine efforts to solve this issue.

2. Definitions

2.1 Illicit Drug Use:

It is the non-medical usage of a variety of drugs which are prohibited by international law. Such drugs include: amphetamine-type stimulants, cannabis, cocaine, heroin and other opioids, and ecstasy (Degenhardt & Lynskey, 2004).

2.2 Golden Triangle:

It is an area in Southeast Asia where a significant portion of the world’s opium comes from since the beginning of the 20th century. It is a mountainous terrain with an area which is centered around the meeting point of the borders that separate Myanmar, Laos and Thailand (Goldberg, 2017).

3. History

July 1998: Signing of the Joint Declaration for a Drug-Free ASEAN by 2020

This was signed by ASEAN Foreign Ministers in hopes of eradicating illicit drug use, trafficking, production and processing by 2020, forged in line with United Nation's endeavor for a drug-free world by 2019.

July 2000: Drug-Free ASEAN from 2020 to 2015

During the 33rd ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, the Joint Communiqué of this meeting agreed that ASEAN member states needed to enhance efforts in combatting newly emerging drugs, then, such as amphetamine-type stimulants. Ultimately leading to advance target for Drug-Free ASEAN from 2020 to 2015.

October 2015: Endorsement of ASOD's proposal for a post-2015 Work Plan on Combating Illicit Drug Production, Trafficking and Use

During the 4th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Drug Matters, Ministers endorsed a zero-tolerance, comprehensive and balanced approach towards drugs, a firm and resolute stance against drugs and calls to legalise controlled drugs, as well as preparedness to work closely with other regions.

October 2016: Adoption of ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities against Illicit Drugs 2016 - 2025

This Work Plan proposed at the 37th Meeting of ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters was adopted by Ministers at the 5th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Drug Matters. This was designed to support regional efforts for a drug-free ASEAN. Additionally, it designs policies in maintaining a zero-tolerance approach towards drugs.

4. Recent Developments

Following the rising threat from synthetic drugs as well as the ongoing illicit drug cultivation and trade from the Mekong sub region, the following developments have been set in place by ASEAN and UNODC to tackle these issues.

4.1 Securing ASEAN Communities Against Illicit Drugs 2016-2025

This Work Plan was developed following the vision to achieve a "Drug-Free ASEAN" by 2015. It emphasizes the importance of multilateral ties in dealing with illicit drugs and to have a broader approach in the reduction of supply and demand of drugs. This Work Plan was formulated based on the evolving drug market, strengthening existing measures, and implementing realistic targets. This work plan aims to tackle the drug problem on five different fronts: preventive education, treatment and rehabilitation, law enforcement, research, and alternative development (ASEAN, 2016).

4.2 Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control (Mekong MOU)

This MOU is a more targeted agreement to address the drug issue in ASEAN, designed to keep track and deal with the evolving threat. It is a strong collaboration and partnership between various countries in the Mekong region, in which the region is responsible for a large percentage of the production and distribution of drugs. There is a continued challenge in the trading of illicit drugs and precursor chemicals in the Mekong countries (UNODC, 2017c). There has been a revised Sub-Regional Action Plan, in short SAP, for 2017-2019, covering four main topics, “drugs and health”, “law enforcement cooperation”, “legal and judicial cooperation” and “sustainable alternative development”. Each segment has its own specific set of guidelines which complement each other to enhance the strength of this agreement (UNODC, 2017a).

5. Scope of debate

Given the broad aspect that the debate on a drug-free region can divert into, the main focus and scope of the committee is to address the production and trade of narcotics within ASEAN. This includes the rising production of synthetic drugs. As mentioned that the Mekong region represents one of the largest producers of narcotics, providing solutions to reduce the production of them will help

to bring ASEAN one step closer to being a drug-free region.

6. Problems

6.1 Drug Cultivation and Production in The Golden Triangle

Rural areas lack a proper policing system (QuantumBooks, n.d), which results in a common practice of cultivating and producing illicit drugs as a form of income and food security in these areas (IDPC, 2016). Government agencies in Lao PDR and Myanmar have implemented measures which involves identification of these areas of production and destruction of the illicit crops. However, complications arise when these individuals relocate themselves to other newer and more remote areas that are ripe for drug production (Eyler, 2015). This area is not only notorious for its opium, but also for methamphetamine and heroin, and due to its remote nature, illicit drug farmers and middleman traffickers are able to operate with impunity (ibid). With the Golden Triangle as a major player in the illicit drug market, it poses a threat to the notion of a “drug-free ASEAN”.

6.2 Evolution of synthetic drugs

Synthetic drugs, which include amphetamine-type stimulants and new psychoactive substances (NPS), have been on the rise globally in recent years. To date, 168 synthetic drugs have been identified in Southeast Asia (BorneoPost Online, 2017). These NPS have been making its way into the ecstasy market

and are sold as “fake” ecstasy (UNODC, 2017b). Many countries in Southeast Asia do not have the forensic capacity to detect and identify these drugs, and with the drug’s ability to stay undetected in the market for long periods of time indicates the threat it poses to a “drug-free ASEAN” (Feuer, 2017).

6.3 Corruption

The control of drug in rural areas has been failing due to corruption. The officials are complicit in the drug production and trade. Many state-backed militia members sent to patrol these remote areas are often drug traffickers themselves and because of their status, they can operate with impunity (QuantumBooks, n.d).

6.4 Transnational crime syndicates

Transnational crime syndicates are involved in the manufacturing and trafficking of illicit drugs (Central Narcotics Bureau, 2016). Drug trafficking has been an issue across borders within ASEAN, coupling with a lack of border safeguards at the 6 countries in the Mekong subregion, further promotes the trafficking of illicit drugs (Heijmans, 2015).

6.5 Blood-borne infections

Examples of such infections are due to Hepatitis and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), which are blood borne pathogens. These can spread through the use of injection of these drugs (UNODC, 2017d). Amongst the people who inject drugs, HIV rates are 19% in

Malaysia, 36% in Indonesia, and Myanmar and Thailand with 22%, and the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) rate is 74% in Vietnam (Hser, Liang, Lan, Vicknasingam and Chakrabarti, and IDPC, 2016). There is also an increased risk of sexual transmission of HIV associated with increased usage of new synthetic drugs (Hser, Liang, Lan, Vicknasingam, and Chakrabarti 2016).

7. Solutions

Delegates can consider the following possible solutions when coming up with solutions to tackle the problems stemming from illicit drug.

7.1 Strengthen law enforcement

One of the possible solutions is to increase the investigation and seizure in areas cultivating drugs. With the results, re-enforcement at these borders can be increased to prevent drug trafficking. However, as aforementioned, individuals who depend on producing drugs for their livelihood will suffer.

7.2 Policies to tackle corruption

A second solution which can be taken into consideration, is to implement measures/policies that are capable of discouraging officials from having a hand to play in the drug production and trade. Since officials are the ones who sets an example for the citizens, it makes corruption a huge threat to the dream of a drug-free ASEAN.

7.3 Raise awareness amongst youths

Education is one platform to tap on. It plays an important role in many youths these days. Weekly talks in schools or an integration of the current situation and negative impacts of illicit drugs into their lesson outline could be carried out. Emphasis on the consequences should be emphasized to deter youths from taking part in any drug-related activities. However, youths who do not attend school may not get the opportunity to come into contact with such education.

8. Guiding Questions

1. How can ASEAN help areas that are heavily dependent on illicit drug cultivation for income?
2. What can ASEAN do to deal with corrupted officials in illicit drug cultivation areas?
3. What can ASEAN do to strengthen border security in tackling drug trafficking?
4. Should ASEAN countries retain capital punishment (e.g. death penalties) for drug-related crimes, or use a harm reduction approach? Why?
5. How can ASEAN ensure that the implemented solutions are sustainable in curbing the issue in the long run?

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