

## **THE OPIUM PRODUCTION CHALLENGE IN AFGHANISTAN: CURRENT RESPONSES AND NEW STRATEGIES**

### **House of Commons**

London, 20 July 2005

Within the context of the UK's leading role in counter-narcotics activities in Afghanistan and its significant contribution to the reconstruction of the country, The Senlis Council held a high-level policy seminar on *The Opium Production Challenge in Afghanistan: Current Responses and New Strategies* on Wednesday the 20<sup>th</sup> July 2005 at the House of Commons, London.

The seminar brought together British policy makers and senior officials responsible for UK reconstruction policies in Afghanistan, with representatives from UK-based policy centres and organisations, and academics engaged in research work on Afghanistan. The meeting addressed the multiple dimensions of drug policy in Afghanistan with reference to key issues such as eradication strategies, alternative livelihood practices, and the rule of law. On this occasion, The Senlis Council presented its *Feasibility Study on Opium Licensing in Afghanistan for the Production of Morphine and other Essential Medicines*, a ground-breaking project aimed at the proper consideration of the licensing of opium production in Afghanistan for medical uses.

In his opening remarks, Chairman **Chris Mullin MP** highlighted the UK's strong commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction which is, however, being threatened by the illegal opium production in the country. He drew attention to the fact that there is no simple solution to the drugs problem and, given the failure of current counter-narcotics policies to address this issue in its entirety, alternative proposals and, in particular, The Senlis Council's proposal on opium licensing for the production of essential medicines should be considered.

Both **Sir Keith Morris**, British Ambassador to Colombia (1990-1994) and **Raymond Kendall**, Honorary Secretary General of Interpol underlined the urgency in dealing with the drugs problem in Afghanistan - especially as this has become both a European and an international problem. Interestingly, **Sir Keith Morris** compared the cases of Afghanistan and Colombia - the two countries are currently the world's biggest producers in heroin and cocaine, respectively. Central to the drugs trade in both countries is the weakened central government and judicial system. Accordingly, *"antinarcotics policies must be administered in a way that wins public support at local level. Building strong local government as well as central government with control countrywide are of critical importance"*.

Similarly, **Raymond Kendall** stressed that the drugs problem in Afghanistan, combined with the political fragmentation and restricted government control in remote areas, poses a large threat to the country's reconstruction agenda. It is crucial that all parties, including the civil society, take on the responsibility of achieving a worthwhile result. According to him, should the world fail to effectively address the drugs problem in Afghanistan, this would result in failing the Afghan people altogether.

On behalf of The Senlis Council, Executive Director **Emmanuel Reinert** shared some initial thoughts on the Feasibility Study to bring opium production in Afghanistan under a legal framework. He presented the core areas the Study will address ranging from global opium market to national and international control requirements, local government as well as implementation issues related to opium licensing. The Study is being conducted in partnership with Kabul University as well as with leading academic centres in Europe and North America such as Ghent University, Lisbon University and the University of Toronto. Mr. Reinert explained that the Study is looking at the extent to which opium licensing could provide a transitional and complementary solution to the illegal opium cultivation in Afghanistan, thus contributing dynamically to the country's security and economic development. The initial findings of the Feasibility Study will be presented at the Council's ***Kabul International Symposium on Global Drug Policy***, which will take place in 25-29 September 2005.

**Mr Reinert** concluded that *"to help the Afghan government to seize the moment and go for solutions that work is a very important responsibility shared by all. Shall we continue to fail to meet the opium production challenge in Afghanistan, the effects will be felt around the world: Afghanistan will not move credibly towards real democracy and the world will remain a less safe place"*.

Following the presentations by the speakers, the panel and participants engaged in a critical and constructive discussion on the severity of the drugs problem in Afghanistan, its implications for international security and the proposed Feasibility Study. In response to questions raised, The Senlis Council explained the benefits the Afghan farmers would gain within the proposed legal and controllable framework, while it also explained the importance of NGO involvement in achieving a successful and viable intervention especially with regard to economic development, farming and health treatment. It also drew attention to the importance of identifying local viable solutions and evaluating amnesty provisions in order to ensure proper regulation of opium production and promote security countrywide. An analysis of the value-chain and the actors in the global pharmaceutical market are also key issues to be considered and incorporated into the Feasibility Study.

In conclusion, the Chairman and Mr Reinert invited the attendees to take part in the ***Kabul Symposium*** in September 2005 where they will have the opportunity to listen to the initial findings of the Feasibility Study and continue contributing to this critical debate.