# Myanmar Efforts to Control Illicit Drugs (1998-2015) Tin Tin Aye\*

### **Abstract**

Since the assumption of the state power in 1988, Myanmar Government sought to control opium cultivation and production and drug trafficking. Then, the Government reestablished the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control and adopted objectives, strategies and tactics, promulgated the laws, rules and regulations relating to the control on drug-related crimes. The Government reached the peace agreements with the armed insurgent groups and attempted to develop the border areas and socio-economic lives of national races. To accelerate the border area development and to be effective in drug eradication measures, the Government also implemented the Fifteen-Year Narcotics Elimination Plan. This Plan has been extended a further five years and will conclude in 2019. Nevertheless, drug eradication measures achieved success in some extent. Three Opium Free Zones were emerged in Shan State. This research aims to analyze how Myanmar attempted to control drug problems.

Keywords: drug, demand reduction, supply reduction, law enforcement

#### Introduction

Since the narcotic drug is not only the problem for a single nation and a single race, but also the menace for the entire mankind of the world to ruin all the people, Myanmar had endeavored the drug problem as national cause in successive eras. The government fully recognizes the threat posed to mankind by narcotic drugs and the most important need to eliminate the problem. In this context, this research paper attempts to analyze national efforts to control drugs in Myanmar since 1988 and how much it achieved success in its own efforts. Therefore, it is necessary to know how the government is trying to eliminate the narcotic drugs problem in the country.

Myanmar is a Party to the 1961 United Nations Single Convention, the 1971 United Nations (UN) Convention on Psychotropic Substances and the 1988 UN Convention against Illicit Trafficking in Narcotics. Myanmar adopted and signed many documents and statements for effective cooperation. Myanmar is also a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and signatories to the ASEAN and China Cooperative Operations in Response to Dangerous Drugs (ACCORD) 'drug-free ASEAN by 2015' agenda. Myanmar has been cooperating along with Cambodia, China and Vietnam through United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) covering a sub-regional action

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plan aimed at controlling precursor chemicals and reducing illicit drug use in the highlands of Southeast Asia. Myanmar also has bilateral agreements relating to drug issues with China, Laos, India, Russia, Thailand, United States of America and Australia.

## National Effort to Drug Control in Supply and Demand Reduction Sector

In Myanmar, successive governments have waged a relentless war on illicit drugs since regaining her independence in 1948. The Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control(CCDAC) was formed on 2 March 1976 under the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs. The government worked opium operations such as Nga Ye Pan Operations (Phase one to eight) from 1981 to 1987, Moe Hein Operation (Phase one to twelve) were launched with a lot of manpower and funds to combat narcotic drugs from 1984 to 1988 and Taung Yan Shin Operation (Phase one to four) from 1985 to 1988. Then, the CCDAC was reorganized on 9 October 1989. The governments combated the narcotic drugs menace as an issue of national concern after independence. At that time, Myanmar received foreign assistance to some extent in the fight against narcotic drugs. However, the assistance has been ceased unilaterally since late 1988.

The CCDAC established eleven Working Committees on 9 March 1995. These are (i) Law Enforcement Supervisionary Committee, (ii) Working Committee on Law Enforcement Sector, (iii) Crop Substitution Committee, (iv) Livestock Breeding Committee, (v) Medical Treatment Committee, (vi) Rehabilitation Committee, (vii) Sector for Educating the Students and Youths, (viii) Mass Media Committee, (ix) Administrative Committee for Disposal of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, (x) International Relations Committee and (xi) Property Examination Committee. To take the measure of drug abuse control, the CCDAC added two committees: Law Enforcement Supervisory Committee on 4 September 1995 and Monitoring Committee on 31 December 1997. In 2013, the Union Ministry for Home Affairs announced the name change of the Anti-Drug Department to Anti-Drug Police Force, which will be headed by a Police Brigadier General. The Union Ministry for Home Affairs also announced the creation of twenty-six new Anti-Narcotic Task Force (ANTF) units, which will take the total number of ANTF units to fifty.

To effectively eliminate illicit drugs, the government has laid down two strategies: (i) to strive relentlessly to eliminate narcotic drugs as national cause and (ii) to gradually eliminate poppy cultivation in line with the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the national races in border areas. To implement the strategies, three tactics has been adopted. These are supply elimination, demand elimination and law enforcement. Furthermore, three techniques are (i) to uplift, improve and change the morale, perception and belief of drug users, poppy growers and drug producers, (ii) to secure smooth and easy transportation and communications between the nationals residing in highland areas and those in mainland and (iii) to uplift the economic and social life of the national races residing in the border areas. In order to eliminate poppy cultivation, production and abuse of narcotics in Myanmar, the Fifteen-Year Narcotics Elimination Plan (see Appendix) has been laid down since 1999-2000. It was divided into three

phases of five-year plan and implemented year by year projects and the plan will be ended in the year 2013-2014. The estimated cost of the Fifteen-Year Plan is kyats 33588.14 million and USD 150 million. The Plan consisted of three phases in different geographical areas. It was constrained by the extreme difficulty Myanmar faces in raising funds form international agencies.

The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) government realized that illicit drugs production and trafficking were closely linked with ethnic groups in the border areas. Mountain ranges, climatic condition, no good of communication and transportation facilities in the border areas cause illicit drug production and trafficking problem. In addition, it has no cultivation of legal crops. So, the government has given priority to the border areas development. Furthermore, the government practiced the policy of peaceful unification as an attempt to bring relative political stability to the country.

Since, the government invited the armed ethic groups to return into the legal fold, altogether seventeen armed ethnic groups returned into the legal fold. In their regions, works on eradication of opium poppy cultivation were carried out in higher accelerations and Wa Special Region No.2, Kokang Special Region No.1 and Monglar Special Region No.1 have been declared as Opium-Cultivation Free Zones in 1993, 2003 and 2005 respectively. International aid has funded crop substitution and eradication in the country from the mid-1970s and has remained the central pillar to Myanmar's response to drug issues. Myanmar's enacted policy against drugs was launched in 1999 with the goal of accelerating the anti-drugs campaign nationally, as well as the gradual elimination of the cultivation of opium, while improving the economic and social prospects of people who rely on opium as a livelihood. Eradication efforts and enforcement of opium free zones combined to reduce cultivation levels between 1996 and 2006, especially in Wa Region. In 2013, according to UNODC report, the combination of an increase in both cultivation and yield of opium poppy in Myanmar resulted in a rise in opium production of some 26 percentin comparison to 2012. Opium production in Myanmar is 870 tonnes in 2013. In addition to the increase in production, it is important to note the sophistication in cultivation. The farmers use irrigated fields and fertilizers to increase productivity, while planting in lowland paddy and use intercropping such as with beans, and multi-stage planting to mitigate eradication.

In order to reduce demand, the Department of Education has implemented the school-based activities for students and strengthening quality of training for teacher. The school-based activities were talks in class, competition and exhibition, talks in school, educating with wall posters, school curricula, study tour and excursion, student participation in narcotic drug destruction and activities of school calendar. Drug education and information were disseminated to the public through television, radio, newspapers, motion pictures, journals, magazines, etc. Therefore, the Department of Education took the main responsibility to conduct school drug prevention programmes.

For the public awareness activities on narcotic drugs control and prevention of HIV/AIDS, the government cooperated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as

Myanmar Anti Narcotic Association (MANA). It works competition of essays, poems, talks, debates, sign-boards and posters and conducts workshops.

In order to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS through drug abuse by injection, the government has taken action at both the national and regional levels. They are medical treatment centre, rehabilitation centre, students and youth educating sector, mass media information centre and international relations sector. The Department of Social Welfare was responsible for the rehabilitation activities. The Department carried out registered addicts individual psychotherapy, group psychotherapy, family counseling and meditation at the medical treatment centres. The government has established twenty-six major drug treatment centres (DTCs) and forty subsidiary DTCs with three Youth Correction and Rehabilitation Centres in Myanmar. According to 2010 annual report, total number of drug users was registered 12,616 at the DTCs from 1999 to 2010 during the first phase and second phase of fifteen year plan. Opium was the highest drug abuse which was 55.78 percent, ATS 1.04 percent and heroin 35.33 percent. However, it is difficult to assess the demand reduction sector because there was no baseline data collection for drugs addicts and the number of yearly registered addicts to the drug treatment centres.

For the elimination of opium poppy cultivation and production, the government has undertaken activities on agriculture, livestock breeding, road and bridge construction, communication, energy, health, commerce and education sector to eliminate poppy cultivation and production. With the aim to promote the living standard of the people in the border areas and to abandon the poppy cultivation, the Ministry of Progress of Border Areas and National Races was established in 1992. The Livestock Breeding Committee has been carrying out the poppy substitute livestock breeding tasks in border areas for elimination of poppy cultivation. The committee has been also undertaking the conducting courses on livestock breeding at the drug rehabilitation camps, conducting on-job training courses on modern livestock breeding and conducting training courses on agriculture for boosting the crop yield. From 1999-2000 to 2006-2007, the committee gave vaccines to 460,909 cattle, 124,174 pigs and 1,489,630 poultry of spending Kyats 12.039 million.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries distributed poultry, pigs and cattle worth Kyats 102 million for improvement of the socio-economic life of national races. The Ministry also carried out tasks for higher living standards of national races, prevention and control of animal diseases, setting up model farms, putting fingerlines into rivers, creeks and lakes, distribution of quality animals, keeping beehives and conducting agriculture courses of spending Kyats 1,658 million from 1999-2000 to 2006-2007.

The Ministry was providing the fingerline at natural pond, lake, river in Namsum, Lashio, Lai Hhu, LoiLem, Moe Ne, LangKhay for the regional food security, income generation of the poppy plantation. Total value of the 13.85million kyats of fingerline was distributed. It can be seen that the government has made tremendous achievements, particularly in the education, health, road transportation, and agriculture and livestock sectors. Therefore, the opium eradication

efforts in Myanmar are successful to some extent and the poppy cultivation areas came to reduce gradually. Figure (1) indicates opium poppy cultivation and eradication in Myanmar from 2000 to 2010.

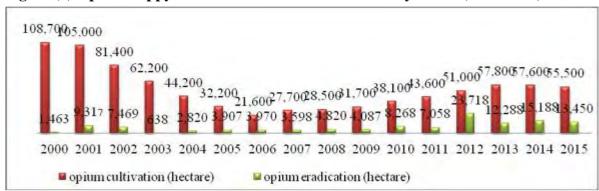


Figure (1) Opium Poppy Cultivation and Eradication in Myanmar (2000-2015)

Source:(a) World Drug Report 2008, p.247

- (b) *World Drug Report 2011*, p.250
- (c) South-East Asia Opium Survey (Lao PDR, Myanmar) 2011, p.7
- (d) South-East Asia Opium Survey (Lao PDR, Myanmar) 2013, p.3
- (e) South-East Asia Opium Survey (Lao PDR, Myanmar) 2015, p.30

According to Figure (1), it can be seen that opium cultivation in Myanmar significantly increased in 2000. However, opium cultivation slightly decreased since 2003. This upward trend started slowly in 2007 after six years of decline from 2001 to 2006. It can be said that the eradication efforts were weak and internal political situation. The strike led by thousands of Buddhist monks broke out on 26 September 2007. Furthermore, the other reason of the increase of poppy cultivation is found that food-shortage, growing opium poppy to fulfill the needs to buy the foods, increasing trend of opium prices, and to cultivate the opium poppy-substituted crops.

In order to combat narcotic drug, CCDAC has cooperated with thirteen working committees. Adopting strategies and tactics with fifteen-year Narcotics Elimination Plan, some region become free of illicit opium poppy cultivation and decreasing opium poppy cultivation. However, some eradication efforts are still weak due to the difficult communication and transportation, and remaining tense between government and some ethnic groups until 2010. Peace negotiations between new government and some ethnic group such as KIA (Kachin Independence Army) will also pave a new way to further eradicate the opium poppy cultivation in the future.

Under the new government, peace negotiations were made with the ethnic armed groups in consistence with three main national causes for the national reconsolidation and altogether twenty armed groups negotiated in Union and state levels and only KIA remained in 2011. Peace negotiations were conducted with the groups of SSA and the agreements had been already singed.

Myanmar agreed to cooperate and carry out for the prevention of narcotic drugs. The new government has been implementing five-year plan to eradicate opium cultivation, production and abuse of narcotic drugs in Myanmar from 2014 to 2019. The plan has not been allocated budget and duties of respective Ministries.

## **National Efforts to Drug Control in Law Enforcement Sector**

Myanmar was once notorious for its high opium production and drug trafficking. Opium cultivating farmers in Myanmar are ethnically diverse. They live in remote and mountainous regions. In these upland areas, difficult agricultural and geographic conditions contribute to high levels of poverty. Opium poppy is currently cultivated in Kachin and Shan States in Myanmar. To eradicate opium cultivation in Myanmar, the Governments made the commitment by 2014. The law enforcement measure is one of the drug control strategies. Therefore, the Government has taken law enforcement measures.

The government implements law enforcement as one of its priorities towards combating the flow of illicit drugs out of Myanmar and the flow of precursor chemicals into Myanmar. Myanmar is a party to the 1961 United Nations Single Convention, the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances and the 1988 UN Convention against Illicit Trafficking in Narcotics. In 1993, Myanmar enacted the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law which addresses corruption, conspiracy, money laundering and international cooperation against drugs.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, responsible for law enforcement, has been the leading agency for influencing drug policy in Myanmar. Myanmar has faced international pressure to control drug production, especially opium and heroin, within its borders. In response to illicit drug problems in Myanmar, CCDAC has regional committees for drug abuse control at a state/divisional, district, township, and ward and village levels. It oversees twenty-one Special Anti-Narcotic Task Forces deployed throughout the country and relies in part on military, police and customs personnel to execute law enforcement duties. Their role is to cooperate with military intelligence and Tatmadaw in intercepting drug trafficking and production.

Law enforcement resources are primarily focused on drug seizures, arrests and crop eradication. With the recent introduction of harm reduction in Myanmar, CCDAC has advocated that law enforcement agencies relax certain laws that contradict some harm reduction services in certain pilot zones. CCDAC is also playing a leading role in training new law enforcement recruits in harm reduction.

Myanmar has enacted a number of laws concerning with drug issues. The Myanmar Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law of 1993 (Law No. 1/93) remains the most important law with regard to drug use in Myanmar. The 1993 law repeals the 1974 Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Law and aims: (i) to prevent the danger of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, which can cause degeneration of mankind, as a national responsibility, (ii) to implement the provisions of the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic

Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, (iii) to carry out more effectively measures for imparting knowledge and education on the danger of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and for medical treatment and rehabilitation of drug users, (iv) to impose more effective penalties on offenders in respect of offences relating to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and (v) to cooperate with the states parties to the United Nations Convention, international and regional organizations in respect of the prevention of the danger of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

In order to effectively control drug, *Law No.1/93* enacts the registration and provision of medical treatment for all drug users. Once registered, drug users are subject to a minimum sixweek compulsory detoxification. Drug users who fail to register face a prison sentence of a minimum of three years (up to five years). Under the 1993 law, the possession of any narcotic drug is illegal and punishable by imprisonment. Sentences range from five to ten years for growing an illegal narcotic plant or for unlawful possession of a narcotic substance and between ten years and life for possession of a drug to be sold. People found guilty of producing, exporting or importing a narcotic drug face a minimum fifteen-year prison sentence to a maximum sentence of death. Law No.1/93 also allows for the search and seizure of money, property and goods derived from involvement with illicit drugs.

With regard to drug issues in Myanmar, other important law is *the Control of Money Laundering Law* enacted on 17 June 2002. It prohibits the possession, sale or distribution of hypodermic needles without a license. *Notifications 1, 2, 3/2002* and *1/2004* together update *Law No. 1/93* and control of precursor chemicals as well as additional psychotropic substances. Myanmar controls 128 substances under *Law No.1/93*. In addition, to facilitated and accelerate the Money Laundering Law, Myanmar Government adopted the *Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Law* on 28 April 2004. Since 2004, it did not enact new drug laws. It can be said that drug policies in Myanmar are repressive and outdated, with an ineffective focus on arresting drug users and eradicating poppy fields.

Myanmar has forty-one prisons, three of which are specific drug prisons called Youth Rehabilitation Centers, and fifty-five work camps for convicted prisoners. On 12 August 2002, there were 29,390 people imprisoned for drug abuse in Myanmar. On 1 August 2002, there were 1,926 people imprisoned for drug abuse and 5,844 for possession or trafficking of drugs. In the work camps there were 2,211 people convicted for drug use and 438 convicted for possession of drugs in the same period.

To reduce heroin production, law enforcement forces destroyed and seized heroin laboratories. According to 2012 CCDAC report, heroin seizures have steadily decreased from 2,234 cases in 1990 to 986 cases in 2003 and the total number of clandestine heroin refineries destroyed from 1997 to 2009 were 133. Moreover, total 12,618 people were arrested on drug related cases in Myanmar. Out of them 196 were not charged or were acquitted and the remainders were punished with sentences ranging from treatment orders to life imprisonment or

death. In 2004, sixteen people (fourteen male and two female) were executed for crimes related to drugs. The confiscated assets from drug related cases during the period from 1993 to 2011 have amounted up to 37111.3 million kyat. In Myanmar, more opium farmers have been arrested by local authorities, but many were released after paying a bribe in recent years. In many areas, corrupt arm and government officials tolerate opium cultivation in their area in return for 'taxation', sometimes agreed upon in advance. Table (1) illustrates seizures of illicit drugs in Myanmar from 2000 to 2010.

According to table (1), Myanmar law enforcement officials have achieved meaningful successes during 2009. Seizures are up, including a nearly thirteen-fold increase in the seizure of ATS and sharp upward trends in the amounts of precursor chemicals seized. According to CCDAC report, the seizure of illicit narcotics and precursor chemicals significantly increased in 2012, in contrast to 2011, however was still lower than total seizures in 2009. In 2013, Myanmar Government reported that it had seized 239 kg of heroin, 1792kg of opium, 10.2 million methamphetamine pills, 142 kg of crystalline methamphetamine, 274 litres of semi-finished crystalline methamphetamine, 80 kg of cannabis, 358 kg of ephedrine (ATS precursor chemical), and 6,946 kg of cold/flu medicine tablets containing pseudoephedrine (ATS precursor chemical). Other seizures of precursors includes Pseudoephedrine (3,581kg), Ephedrine (170kg) and Caffeine (13,482kg), which are not domestically produced but smuggled across its porous borders from the neighbouring countries. In addition, the CCDAC has reported the eradication of 12,257ha (2012/2013) and 12,774 (2013/2014) of opium poppy field, and the arrest of almost 6,000 persons for illicit narcotic-related offences. In 2013, a total of 4928 cases of drugs were exposed, narcotic drugs including over 2350 kgs of raw opium, 238 kgs of heroin and 10.18 millions of stimulant tablets were seized. Over 7130 offenders were apprehended with cooperation of local community. Myanmar is not an industrialized country and precursor chemicals are essential in the production of heroin and methamphetamine which are not domestically manufactured in Myanmar but smuggled across its porous borders form the neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Laos and China because these seizures were mostly arrested in the Shan State.

Table (1) Seizures of Illicit Drugs in Myanmar (2000–2010)

Year	Opium (kg)	Heroin (kg)	ATS (million tablets)	Ice (kgs)	Ecstasy (tablet)	Ephedrine (kgs)	Precursor Chemicals (in litres)
2000	1528	158	26.7	-	-	2670.31	89184.65
2001	1629	296	32.4	518.00	52	3922.17	186509.58
2002	1863	333	9.3	415.20	-	1723.54	29393.71
2003	1481	568	4.0	102.00	-	307.94	39466.08
2004	606.9	973	8.4	0.15	5	182.65	17971.07

2005	772	811	3.6	280.32	3981	325.09	17018.50
2006	2321	192	19.1	3.22	67	1287.45	15418.23
2007	1274	68	1.6	3.44	2690	530.02	10810.42
2008	1463	88	1.1	5.9313	108	750.93	9335.45
2009	752	1076	23.8	124.33	-	1645.67	27307.04
2010	664	90	20.9	226.12	200	33.64	3202.34

Source: Myanmar's Country Report 2012, pp.4-5

#### Conclusion

Myanmar has been implemented Fifteen-Year Narcotic Elimination Plan since 1999-2000. The government agreed with ethnic armed group to return into the legal fold during 1996-2006. As a result, the government declared Monglar Special Region (4) in Eastern Shan State, Kokang Special Region No.1 and Wa Special Region No.2 as opium poppy cultivation free regions. These factors in particular helped decrease Myanmar's overall opium production, since Shan State was producing up to ninety percent of Myanmar opium in the early 2000s. As a result, by the mid-2000s, opium production was clearly declining in Northern Shan State and also in Kachin State. From 2000 to 2006, opium cultivation in Myanmar decreased from 108,700 hectares to 21,600 hectares. So, opium eradication efforts were successful to some extent. After 2007, rising opium prices, more favorable weather, lack of food, political situation and ethnic conflicts in Myanmar have resulted to increase opium cultivation. In addition, there were not enough budgets for Fifteen-Year Plan. Therefore, Myanmar remains the world's second largest illicit opium producer, with most of its poppy cultivation taking place in the Kachinand Shan states in the north and northeast of the country, along the borders with China, Laos and Thailand.

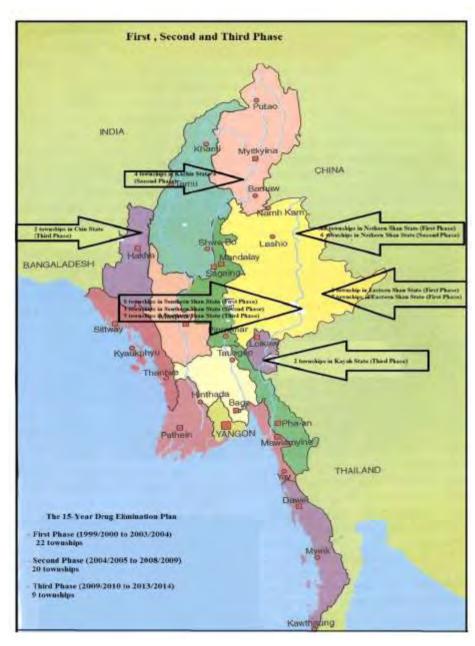
Law enforcement measures are important to eradicate illicit drug in Myanmar. Myanmar formulated laws and regulations concerning illicit drug problems. However, weak governance, corruption and lack of awareness of the government drug control laws and policies contribute to opium cultivation and use. Furthermore, as heroin producers have begun to diversify, the production of Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) has been considerably increasing in this region since the early 1990s. Seizures of ATS pills in Myanmar increased from 1,600,000 tablets to 23,800,030 tablets from 2007 to 2009 due to political situation.

Myanmar predominantly controlled by ethnic minority groups, is politically unstable and is affected by actual and potential armed conflicts between minority groups and the Myanmar military forces. Accordingly, conducting counter-narcotics activities in the areas, including law-enforcement and alternative development, is often difficult because the clash in Kokang in the aftermath of the 2010 election has already had a negative impact on the access of international humanitarian agencies to Kokang and elsewhere in Shan State. After the election in 2010, clashes erupted between ethnic groups of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and government forces in Myawaddy by the Thai border. The ongoing political instability in border areas and an

acute increase in ATS suggest that the government will find it difficult to eliminate all narcotic production by 2014. Myanmar announced extension of its fifteen-year drug eradication plan (1999-2014) for another five years until 2019 with the aim of maintaining the momentum of war against drug.

The government continues to publicise their determination to tackle narcotics production through its fifteen-year narcotics elimination plan. However, its activities have been hampered by insufficient funds and inaccessibility to many areas where it is believed that illicit drugs cultivation and production takes place. As a consequence, the political situation in Myanmar could affect the current illicit drug production and trafficking dynamics in the region. These conditions will serve as a push factor for increasing the trafficking of illicit drugs and could result in the relocation of clandestine manufacturing sites across the border. While the outcome remains uncertain, the new openness has created space for revising the country's 1993 drug law. Additionally, the reform process and the peace negotiations are likely to impact the country's drug consumption and production patterns.

If peace will be achieved and a real federal democratic government will come to power, the country will develop and opium cultivation will subsequently decrease. There will be more crop substitute and more job opportunities in the future and more involvement of civil society organizations in policy making. Government's policies to reduce opium cultivation should focus on providing assistance to address the basic needs of the people as well as to develop infrastructure development. The government should expand harm reduction projects and provide voluntary treatment programs for drug users. More attention should be paid to ATS-related problems, which are largely overlooked by current policies.



Appendix I
The Fifteen-Year Narcotics Elimination Plan

Source: Myanmar's Endeavours towards Elimination of Narcotic Drugs, pp.209-211

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