



# [Customs and Drugs Report 2008



WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION



## FOREWORD

It is a great honour to present to you the World Customs Organization's (WCO) Report on international trafficking in drugs and chemical precursors for 2008.

Globalization of trade has created a surge in supply and demand, both in terms of licit and illicit trade. Unfortunately, illicit trade continues to flourish or even increases in scale during times of crisis. Whereas legitimate traders seek out crossing points where they will be granted facilitation, traffickers seek out the easiest option, namely zones where everything is negotiable, especially illegal operations.

What is more, current events show that there is nothing to stop them. They have no qualms about changing the routeing, means of transport or using intermediate reloading. Criminal organizations are taking advantage of problems or sometimes even of a complete absence of co-operation and mutual administrative or legal assistance. They have adapted to changes in the economy and infiltrated legal trade channels, especially by using all the new technologies available to derive the maximum benefits and profits. Illicit activities are consequently buried under the daily whirlwind of transactions and it is extremely difficult to unravel the tangle of legal and illegal operations.

Intelligence sharing, co-operation and mutual assistance must be strengthened in response to this scourge. We have to pool our efforts and make the best possible use of all the tools and instruments available to us, whilst demonstrating a high level of integrity.

To that end, the WCO Secretariat, which has made the fight against drug trafficking one

of its priorities, takes as its basis an Action Plan approved by the Council in June 2008. This Action Plan, which was not designed as a rigid list of measures to be implemented, but rather as a dynamic means of action, focuses on promoting information exchange between Customs administrations, building Customs services' capacities, co-operation with external (public/private) partners, raising public awareness about Customs services' actions and enhancing the Secretariat's role in terms of supporting Members' operational activities.

Throughout 2008, the Secretariat has put a great deal of effort into supporting Members' operational activities and into conducting targeted operations. These activities, especially Operations "Drug Stop" and "COCAIR", have borne out the significance of such a mechanism combining the three pillars of enforcement : firstly, experience, expertise and sharing of knowledge; secondly, exchanging, supplementing and circulating information and intelligence; and, finally, the use of modern enforcement techniques and technologies.

The WCO chose International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking on 26 June 2008 to organize a heightened control operation aimed at combating illicit trafficking in narcotics and chemical precursors within all its Member countries.

In order to see Operation "Drug Stop" through to a successful conclusion, all the Directors General were invited to implement heightened controls and were given full scope to select the areas on which they wished to focus their efforts, based on their own country's specific requirements.

Sixty Member's responded positively to this Secretariat initiative, together with eight Regional Intelligence Liaison Offices (RILOs). Over one hundred users connected up to CENcomm simultaneously to input data on seizures made and to share information over the course of 26 June 2008.

This Operation proved to be a resounding success, with a total of 118 seizures made by some thirty or so countries, mainly involving the postal items and express courier sectors. Over 300 kg of drugs were seized by Customs services during this one-day Operation. These broke down into 150 kg of cannabis (herbal and resin), 100 kg of khat, 30 kg of cocaine, 20 kg of opiates (heroin and opium), 7,000 ecstasy and amphetamine tablets as well as 40 litres of GBL (Gamma-Butyrolactone).

In December 2008, in partnership with the European Commission, Interpol and the UNODC, the WCO Secretariat carried out a pilot operation named "COCAIR" in 15 West and Central African countries, intended to strengthen anti-drug trafficking measures in 22 international airports. The aim was to intercept consignments of cocaine and other drugs bound for Europe.

Over the course of seven consecutive days, Customs services from the various countries taking part in the Operation put the training they had received into practice : product recognition, risk analysis, selection, targeting and information and intelligence sharing. The motivation and dynamism demonstrated by the WCO Secretariat, coupled with the first-rate co-operation that reigned with the other experts from partner organizations, were reflected by a wide-

spread marshalling of forces in the field. The responsiveness of the Directors General of Customs of the Members involved and the co-ordinated action by their services yielded results (see the "Special articles" section for more information).

Overall, drug seizures made by WCO Members in 2008 increased significantly in terms of the total quantities seized in comparison with 2007, and also increased modestly in terms of the number of seizures made.

In point of fact, there has been an increase from 13,356 seizure reports covering a total of 646 tonnes of all categories of drugs in 2007, to 13,444 seizure reports covering a total of 692 tonnes of drugs in 2008. This equates to an increase of over 6 % in the total quantity of products seized.

Almost 51 tonnes of cocaine were intercepted in 2008 (25 % less than in 2007), 72 % of which was seized by Western European countries alone. That region represents the main destination market for this product.

In 2008, seizures of cannabis (herbal, resin and oil) amounted to a total of 452 tonnes, an increase of more than 5 % over 2007. Spain remains the country having made the most seizures together with Morocco, the source country for cannabis resin for over 70 % of the products seized.

Over 91 tonnes of opiate products were seized by Customs services in 2008, some six times more than the previous year. This figure was greatly affected by a notable drug seizure involving close to 75 tonnes of poppy straw reported by Pakistan. Afghanistan remains the main source country for this cate-

gory of drug, thus confirming, if need be, the trend observed over recent years.

The data in this Report has been compiled from information input into the Customs Enforcement Network (CEN), which has been operational since July 2000. Today, more than 155 WCO Member administrations and over 2,000 users have access to the database (over 250,000 entries on Customs offences), an information and communication system, a dedicated Web site and a picture data bank of places of concealment. The growing number of Customs officers using this network on a daily basis bears witness to its effectiveness.

The CEN also consists of applications such as the CENcomm communication tool which has enjoyed burgeoning success since 2005, the year it entered into service. Many regional or international operations to combat trafficking in drugs, weapons, cigarettes, counterfeit goods and money laundering have been carried out. Some 16 operations covering different areas of fraud, but essentially drugs, were conducted using CENcomm in 2008. That equates to triple the amount of operations carried out in 2006, with further actions scheduled.

Finally, the WCO Secretariat provides an Operational Co-ordination Unit (OCU), which effectively supplements this enforcement mechanism. The WCO hosts the OCU and all the requisite equipment (computers with Internet connection, telephones and faxes). It is independent from the Secretariat and ensures co-ordination between WCO Members participating in a given operation, as well as with other non-Customs services involved.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to WCO Members and to the RILOs which have contributed to this Report by entering cases in the CEN and by validating data.

Analysis is only as valuable as the quality of data on which it is based, and to that end greater participation by certain Members or RILOs would undoubtedly enhance the quality of the worldwide data analyses conducted.

I therefore wish to encourage all Member administrations to do everything in their power to ensure that each and every seizure relating to drugs and precursors is habitually input into the CEN.

I hope that this Report will provide valuable assistance, on a daily basis, to those Customs officers tasked with combating trafficking in drugs and precursors, especially by providing them with information on the latest trends or routeings used by traffickers, and by giving them a global picture of the phenomenon.



**Kunio Mikuriya**  
Secretary General  
World Customs Organization

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2008

The seizure data has been compiled from the WCO Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) database, which has been operational since July 2000. Today, 155 countries, involving more than 2,000 users, have access to the CEN. More than 250,000 cases of Customs fraud have been entered by Members or by their respective RILO. A total of 104 Members reported seizures of drugs to the CEN database relating to more than 13,444 cases.

## Opiates

In Afghanistan, a country which is responsible for some 90 % of illicit opiate production, opium poppy cultivation continues to flourish according to the annual report of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).

## Heroin

Customs administrations worldwide were extremely effective during 2008, intercepting 1,128 consignments of over 100 grams (the minimum threshold for inclusion of data in the CEN), namely a 12 % increase in the number of findings compared with 2007. This increase is also substantial from a quantitative perspective (+7 %) and has been continually growing since 2005.

The “overland vehicles” sector remains the preferred means of transport for dispatching heroin. As had been the case from 2005 to 2008, in noticeably smaller proportions, roadside checks led to the detection of 74 % of illegal heroin consignments.

Seizures made in the air freight sector also rose in 2008 (35 % of the total seizures made and 14 % of the total quantities seized).

The use of mail and express courier for heroin consignments has continued to grow over recent years (191 cases totalling 332 kg intercepted in 2008). This trend should prompt Customs services to heighten controls in this sector.

## Cocaine

The latest United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) studies reveal that the global cocaine market is characterized by relative stability, with supply and demand indicators having remained unchanged over recent years.

With regard to Customs seizures of cocaine, almost 52 tonnes were intercepted in 2008, equating to a 24 % reduction compared with the 2007 quantities. There was a fall of approximately 12 % in the number of seizures made.

The trend noted between 2005 and 2007, shaking up the traditional delivery routes for cocaine to some extent and showing that West and Central Africa was increasingly being used by traffickers as a storage and transit hub for cocaine from South America with Europe as its final destination, was confirmed in 2008, even though the quantities seized and the number of cases noted decreased, as shown by the analysis in the relevant chapter (Regional overviews - Africa).

## Cannabis

Cannabis remains one of the most available and widely abused drugs. The drug is cultivated in most countries of the world, since it does not require a high degree of technical expertise nor elaborate processes. The growing levels of indoor and hydroponics cultivation in most parts of the world are causing concern among drug enforcement agencies.

## Cannabis resin

Western Europe is the world's largest market for cannabis resin. Moroccan cannabis resin remains the largest source and trafficking patterns in Western Europe remain the same as in previous years. The majority of the resin is moved to Spain and then overland to France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany.

## Herbal cannabis

The total quantity of herbal cannabis seized in 2008 reached new heights when looking at the amounts seized since 2002, amounting to 111 tonnes.

Ghana was the main source country for the herbal cannabis seized worldwide amounting to 45 tonnes in 48 incidents. This is a huge increase compared with 2007 when only 4 tonnes had departed Ghana. The 2008 figure is however affected by a seizure of 19 tonnes detected by Dutch Customs. The cannabis was concealed in a sea freight consignment of cashew nuts.

Paraguay is another source country for herbal cannabis in the South America region. Most of the Paraguayan drugs were detected within the country. The main destination country is Argentina, followed by Brazil and Chile. **As Paraguay is one of the largest producers of herbal cannabis, it is believed that Paraguayan herbal shipments may also be targeting other regions in the world such as Europe.**

## Amphetamine

The Middle East, and especially Saudi Arabia, is still the main market for seizures of counterfeit Captagon tablets. Since these tablets contain amphetamines, seizures of Captagon have been reported as amphetamine seizures in the Middle East region.



The total quantity of amphetamine seized in 2008 was almost 9 tonnes a decrease of almost 5.5 tonnes in comparison with 2007. Almost 73 % of the amount seized was reported by Middle East region followed by 19 % from Western Europe and 7 % from the Asia and the Pacific region.

## MDMA (ecstasy)

The volume of MDMA (ecstasy) almost vanished in 2008 as only 468 kg in 82 incidents were detected by Customs worldwide. The huge quantity reported in 2007 was affected of a huge seizure of 4.4 tonnes of ecstasy detected in the world's largest ecstasy seizure made in Australia. The sea freight consignment had originated from Italy and the drugs were detected in tins of tomato.

The reason for the decrease is firstly that ecstasy production is more and more taking place in other regions, which means that the drug does not have to cross any borders with the risk being detected by Customs.

» Swedish Customs seized 66 kg of opium from a storage facility north of Stockholm. The drugs were discovered in hollow wooden boards divided into sections. Each section contained approximately 5 kg of opium.

*(Photos courtesy of Swedish Customs)*

Another reason for the decrease is the lack of exceptionally large seizures during 2008.

## Methamphetamine

There were 245 detections of methamphetamine reported in 2008, totalling 1,784 kg. Methamphetamines continue mainly to be a problem in the Asia Pacific region, as almost 97 % of the weight were detected here.

Philippines Customs detected the largest methamphetamine made in 2008 in a warehouse. The sea freight shipment had originated in Chinese, Taipei and a total of 660 kg were detected.

A total of 108 seizures amounting to 215 kg

originated from Lao People's Democratic Republic. All these seizures were detected by Thai Customs and mostly the couriers arrived by vehicle or by foot, while the drugs were concealed in the luggage or concealed on the person of the couriers. It is recommended that other neighbouring countries consider Lao People's Democratic Republic as being a high risk for methamphetamine smuggling.

Lithuania is another source country for methamphetamine seizures mainly made in the Russian Federation and Sweden.

## Khat

The number of seizures fell dramatically from 880 incidents in 2007 to only 495 cases in 2008, while the quantity seized continued to increase from 46 tonnes in 2007 to 51 tonnes in 2008.

A total of 99 % of the number of seizures and quantity seized were reported by Members in the Western Europe region.

## Western Europe – Herbal Cannabis

In 2008, 53 % (29 tonnes) of the total quantity of herbal cannabis intercepted in Western Europe came from Ghana, and this is most probably a new trend that Customs officers must take into consideration when conducting targeting operations (particularly in the sea freight domain).

## Eastern & Central Europe – Heroin

Air traffic should be considered an increasingly significant means of shipping heroin from Eastern and Central European countries to Western Europe.

## Commonwealth of Independent States – Cocaine

As in 2007, the source countries for the cocaine intercepted are located solely in South America (especially Ecuador and Chile).

The two biggest seizures were made in November 2008 by Customs officers in St. Petersburg, on board two vessels having set sail from Ecuador. The goods had transited via South Africa in the first case (42 kg), and gone through Estonia in the second case (21 kg).

There is reason to believe that cocaine trafficking by sea from South America is a trend that looks set to continue or even develop.

## Asia and the Pacific – Heroin

A total of 73 cases or 74 kg of heroin was detected in the mail sector, which is a significant increase compared to previous years.

This is mainly due to the enforcement controls carried out by Pakistani Customs, as 93 % of cases were reported from there. The mail shipments were mostly detected in Karachi, Lahore or Rawalpindi, with final destinations in the United Kingdom, South Africa, and China and to a lesser extent Tanzania, Nigeria and Kenya. Whilst Pakistani Customs detects numerous attempts to smuggle heroin out of the country, it is believed that mail shipments originating from Pakistan should be considered as high-risk consignments.

## Asia and the Pacific – Methamphetamine

Methamphetamine are still widely abused in the Asia and the Pacific region.

The volume of methamphetamine increased dramatically by 264 % compared with 2007, as more than 1.7 tonnes were seized in 2008.

## Canada - Cocaine

A significant portion of the cocaine that transits the United States to Canada has been transshipped through Mexico. The United States remains the primary transit country for cocaine shipments entering Canada. However, large shipments continue to be smuggled via the marine and air modes from locations outside the United States.

## South America – Cocaine

Almost 87 % of the reports made in the region refer to cocaine seizures, while the weight seized also rose by 144 %, amounting to almost 13 tonnes.

Argentine Customs made the largest seizure during 2008, amounting to 7.3 tonnes of

cocaine inside the luggage compartment of a bus. It was a seizure made inside the country.

## African Region - Cocaine

Although Latin America remains the world's primary cocaine producing region (Colombia, Bolivia and Peru), with North America and Western Europe as the main consumer markets, the distribution methods within these markets are nevertheless continuously developing.

In parallel to the above results, cocaine seizures made in Western Europe's main airports in 2008, with West and Central Africa as the countries of consignment, remain relatively significant despite the numbers being down on 2007, as illustrated by the results contained in the table (page 39).

## Middle East

It is believed that Iranian opium shipments destined for the Middle East region may increase in the near future.

The volume of amphetamine seized in the region dropped by more than 6 tonnes after having continuously increased in recent years.