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30Jan2002 MYANMAR: ASIA - UN drug control officials call for more funds to Burma.

By Ron Corben

BANGKOK, Jan 29, AAP - The international policy of isolating Burma should be reversed to allow more humanitarian funds to areas undergoing **opium** crop reduction programs, UN officials say. European states, as well as human rights groups, have led the call for severe limits on aid to the military government in Rangoon until improvements are made in its human rights record.

But UN officials are arguing against the isolationist policy, saying funds are needed to assist ongoing efforts to reduce the output of **opium** from Burma's northern regions.

Burma, together with Laos and Thailand, form the "Golden Triangle" region of **opium** production, the second-largest in output behind Afghanistan.

In 1996 Burma's **opium** production reached a peak of 2,500 tonnes. But since then the crop has fallen by at least 40 per cent, with US figures putting the output at just 860 tonnes in 2001.

UN International Drug Control Program representative in Burma, Jean Luc Lemahieu, said there are fears the reduction will not be sustained without additional resources from the international community.

"There is one thing in reducing (output) fast, there is another in giving a livelihood, a sustainable livelihood to the farmers who are dealing traditionally with **opium**, and that is not coming forward," Mr Lemahieu said.

"The political situation is one thing, but we have arguments which say regardless as to what is happening politically in Myanmar (Burma), we need to act now," he told AAP.

In the northern regions of Burma, under the control of the Wa people, the United States and Japan are providing up to \$US12 million (\$A23.2 million) for an **opium** crop reduction program.

But Mr Lemahieu says for the United Nations to have a "real drastic impact on **opium** reduction" it needs at least a "three to four-fold increase" in assistance.

Australia is contributing \$US400,000 (\$A773,400) to assistance in Burma as part of drug control and monitoring efforts. Some 70 per cent of Australia's imported heroin is sourced from the Golden Triangle.

Australian Federal Police officers have been stationed in Rangoon to monitor trends in heroin trafficking from the region.

UN Drugs Control Program representative for East Asia and the Pacific, Sandro Cavani, said Burma should not be abandoned.

"We should focus on those (**opium** producing) countries and listen to them ... find ways to help them to get out of this economy of risk and this economy of violence," Mr Cavani told AAP.

"Isolation only produces Osama bin Ladens. Integration, facilitate dialogue gets solutions to problems," he said.

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