

**Statement by Robert B. Charles
Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics
and Law Enforcement Affairs**

**House Committee on Government Reform
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice,
Drug Policy, and Human Resources**

Thursday, April 1, 2004

**"Afghanistan: Are the British Counternarcotics Efforts Going
Wobbly?"**

Good Morning Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee,

Once again, I am both grateful for the chance to be here and for your steadfast leadership on this issue. I am here today to update you on the status of the impending 2004 poppy crop and eradication efforts in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan there are no more urgent and fundamental issues than the drug situation, which if left unchecked, will become a cancer that spreads and undermines all we are otherwise achieving in the areas of democracy, stability, anti-terrorism and rule of law.

Opium is a source of literally billions of dollars to extremist and criminal groups worldwide. As a result, it should go without saying that cutting down the opium supply is central to establishing a secure and stable democracy, as well as winning the global war on terrorism. A chart I have here today shows the potential relationship of Afghan opium to some of these terrorist and extremist groups.

It is hard to imagine how any economic development program can be feasible if it ignores the fact that the IMF estimates that as much as 50% of the GDP of Afghanistan is derived from narcotics, or that the opium crop can yield up to 100% more profit than the alternatives.

Clearly, Afghan drugs affect Afghanistan, and the progress of democracy there. But Afghan drugs also affect all consuming nations and dozens of countries along the drug trafficking routes. Afghan heroin presents a sobering domestic issue for our European allies, since 90% of the heroin on European streets comes from Afghanistan.

As Ronald Reagan was fond of pointing out, facts are stubborn things. Initial reports just in from the field indicate that we could be on a path for a significant surge—some observers indicate perhaps as much as 50% to 100% growth—in the 2004 crop over the already troubling figures from last year. By these estimates, unless direct, effective and measurable action is taken immediately, we may be looking at well over 120,000 hectares of poppy cultivation this year. That would constitute a world record crop, empowering traffickers and the terrorists they feed, raising the stakes for (and vulnerability of) Afghan democracy, and raising the supply of heroin in the world market. Even more disturbing, these reports indicate that the clock is ticking faster than many anticipated, due partly to warmer than expected weather in southern and eastern Afghanistan. As a direct result, the time for action may be shorter than anyone anticipated. I have recently learned that the UN Office on Drugs and Crime expects that the unusually warm weather in Southern Afghanistan will result in an early harvest, which in some provinces has already started.

As you know, the UK is the G-8 designated lead on the counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan. Our two nations have worked closely with the Afghan Government and our coalition partners to achieve a consensus on how best to combat the illicit drug economy in free Afghanistan.

Let me state unequivocally that we have no better ally on counterterrorism and counternarcotics in the world than the United Kingdom. The cooperation between our governments, our diplomatic services, our military forces, our intelligence agencies, and our law enforcement agencies has never been greater and continues to yield innumerable successes in these areas. Some things I can talk about here – others I can discuss with you in another setting. With respect to counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan in particular, we continue to work hand-in-hand to achieve our mutual goal of destroying the illicit drug economy in Afghanistan. As we enter the 2004 harvest season, we face a daunting task.

In general support of overall counternarcotics programming in Afghanistan, the UK is providing roughly 70 million British pounds over a three-year period. Their focus has been drug law enforcement, capacity building and demand reduction. One program that has achieved significant results is the Afghan interdiction unit, whose efforts are strongly supported by the United Kingdom. Under the supervision of the Afghan Ministry of Interior, this special drug interdiction force is playing a crucial role as part of the wider Afghan law enforcement effort against illegal drugs. This unit has proven to be extraordinarily effective in recent months. In January, the UK-trained force conducted a highly

successful raid on a drug laboratory in Badakhshan. The drug lab and associated equipment were destroyed, 1.5 to 2 tons of opium and heroin were seized, and 11 arrests were made. Last month in Nangarhar, the interdiction force hit five heroin-producing laboratories, destroyed 400-500 kg of heroin and 150 kg of opium, seized a large quantity of weapons and arrested several suspected traffickers. And this is only the beginning. We expect significant success with this unit in the near future as the unit continues to hone its skills and gain further experience.

As the lead government on counternarcotics in Afghanistan, the UK has pledged approximately 2 million British pounds (approximately \$3.6 million) for manual eradication by provincial governors. The UK was integrally involved in the creation of a Central Planning Cell within the Afghan Ministry of Interior to address eradication. The British have pledged to provide eradication targeting options directly to senior levels of the Afghan Government and the provincial governors. UK counternarcotics officers have also worked closely with INL officers to develop a phased eradication plan for the three key provinces. While it is too early to predict the level of success that our overall eradication effort will experience, we continue to work together to achieve significant results. Here I must pause. It would be inaccurate, however, to say that we are in complete agreement on all aspects of our eradication efforts and on ways to achieve the essential, critical and mutual goal of eradicating a measurable and significant quantity of heroin poppies.

For example, we believe that the current set of eradication targeting criteria, while designed with the best of intentions, may be overly restrictive. Criteria such as requiring alternative development to be in place and a preoccupation with avoiding any possibility of resistance may restrict our ability to collectively reach key eradication goals. By current estimates, without targeting approximately 35,000 hectares for eradication, the Afghan-led, British-supported phase one effort-combined with the Afghan-led US-supported phase two effort will not effectively counter and deter growth of the 2004 crop. We believe eradication of a significant portion of this target is achievable, and in fact would be sufficient to deter future planting across the country.

In addition, we firmly believe that it is the role of the British-led Planning Cell to provide the Afghan Government with a comprehensive target list, to determine based on domestic considerations and concerns what targets are suitable, and then aggressively support eradication in these areas. If Afghanistan's future matters, and it does, we cannot speak warmly of progress in eradication without the planning, blood, sweat, and conviction that will make our words real.

Since you have obviously also seen the worrisome phase one progress to date, and thus called this hearing to discuss it more fully, we would encourage the British Government to revisit the issue of funding available to their program in support of governor-led eradication. The window of opportunity for effective eradication in the two major opium-producing provinces of Helmand and Nanarghar is fast closing. Substantial effort must be made immediately if we are to begin genuinely deterring the expansion of opium growth.

Specifically, we are entering the first stage of the poppy harvest in Afghanistan. The harvest begins in Afghanistan's southern provinces this month and will continue in a counterclockwise pattern across the country concluding in the northern provinces in September.

The UK-financed, governor-led eradication effort commenced in just one province this past weekend, and has reportedly been unfolding slowly.

Speaking frankly, I think it is now important that we and the UK redouble our efforts, and provide the necessary additional resources to achieve our mutual, critical and attainable goals. The climb is steep but the pace must be swift and our resolve must be unwavering. In fact, our resolve must match the words of President Karzai, "The fight against drugs is the fight for Afghanistan." We are going to continue to work with our closest ally, and together send a clear message to traffickers that heroin has no place in Afghanistan. Mr. Chairman, I hope that on my next appearance, I will be able to report that we are accomplishing our common objectives.

In closing, I want to commend President Hamid Karzai, Minister of Interior Ali Jalali, National Security Advisor Dr. Rassoul, Counter Narcotics Directorate Director Mirwais Yasini, and other prominent Afghan leaders whose commitment to the fight against drugs and for a free, stable, democratic Afghanistan has been both noble and unwavering. Their commitment and strong view that this is central to all we hope to achieve in Afghanistan, is an inspiration to us all in our united stand against narcotics and terror.