

### ***Grappling with the Narcotics menace: Is the missing link bridgeable? Muyanja S.***

*The existence of many a nation, developing and developed alike, is facing one of the most vicious, protracted, and elusive problems: the trade in narcotics. It has left millions of the most active population enfeebled, incapacitated, indeed parasites of the society, where heretofore was a vibrant, independent creative and self assertive arsenal in the fight against poverty. Such is the enormity of the problem that many a nation have tried by all possible ways, if not to eradicate, at least to stem the tide of new converts to this 'real' opium of society. Billions have been invested in, amounts which with the advantage of hindsight can now be regarded as futile attempts, to wipe out the scourge.*

*The question is then pondered: 'What could be the Achilles' heel in the multifaceted, strenuous efforts to deal, what is now best described as 'public enemy number one', the death blow? 'Without any attempts tacit or otherwise to lay claim to punditry on the subject, this piece makes the bold attempt to peep into the armory of the narcotics business, which apparently, has so received little, if any consideration.*

*Like any multibillion dollar 'venture' narcotics trade bases its strength on a number of factors, seemingly obvious, but in reality make it harder a nut to crack,*

*The insatiable burgeoning demand provided by millions of its excruciating victims. This has been the easiest to target simply because harder as they try to elude law enforcers, both peddlers and addicts can be nailed, albeit rarely, in the thick of the action. Once this happens, one can not fail to see the disgust, distaste, and derision shown by most members of society who happen to be in the vicinity. If one is to draw any conclusion, tentative though it may be, is that no body among the onlookers can be reduced to such a low state as to indulge in either the peddling or the sniffing part of the drug business. Therein underlies one of the weaknesses in the society in its fight against the menace. By all appearances everybody is against the scourge, yet in reality, others are questioning the lack of ingenuity in whoever is 'caught in the act'. Secrecy explains it all. Being an illegal activity, drug use and trading takes place mostly in backyards, private rooms, suites, name it, which places to any body's knowledge, are the least likely to accept unannounced company from law enforcers, let alone invite them in! Despite the show of disdain, which punctuates peoples' faces once a drug problem is mentioned, there is no denying the fact that hadn't there been the hefty demand by those with a lot of 'change' to fling around, it is highly debatable whether the demand provided by the riff-raff who time and again are seen to be 'caught in the act, can sustain such a business in most developing economies. The difficulty thus becomes apparent for those bent on fighting the scourge. Key elements in society have stakes both as the oil that enables the drug machine not to squeak along, but always cruise at gallop speed, unable to be nailed down by the wretched state-enforcement machinery. It is always the small fish that is caught in the net!*

*Demand can not be met without linking the source to the market by some trafficking mechanisms. Next in line is the courier business. Drug business is wash with cash, which is why the most likely means transporting the merchandize is by the quickest means to date – airways. Many cases have come to light thanks to the alert of well-drilled customs officers. There flaws too, however. Those usually caught are persons worth suspicion, and possibly by the look of things, appear to be novices in the trade. One gets the view that on many occasions before apprehending a culprit, some signaling from outside sources are received by customs authority, expressing suspicion basing on the route followed by than individual. It is to any body's guess, that were the individual to take a detour, which many possibly can do, it is doubtful whether such am means can be relied upon as a means of apprehending the hardcore cases. What if one is initiated in the act? Surely his/her habits wont be that suspicious; his confidence can't easily give him away, his routes fraught with detours to confound that bent on scrutinizing his itinerary! And that is just one means of transport. How about other means of transport? One takes a deep breath on imagining the impossibility of making the Indonesian archipelago impervious! The many harbors, fish landing sites, multitude of rivers criss-crossing the land, land routes connecting the country to its cacophony of neighbors and beyond? The convention wisdom is that drug trafficking is hot money business, implying that it must reach the destination in the shortest time possible. One wonders whether drug bursting at airports, rare though they may be, may not compel drug barons to try slower but safer alternative means? Your guess is as good as mine. A chink into the enormity of the problem can be deciphered from smuggling practices. Many points in Indonesia have been identified as danger smuggling spots for goods into and out of the country. Is it implausible that such spots serve as heroine smuggling spots, too? Surely Drug trafficking has never been inseparable from smuggling! Yet the impression given is that a person who smuggles a 4000 C.C. Porsche can not indulge in smuggling heroine, which in any case is more lucrative!*

*Now the crux of the supply! It is inconceivable that any efforts to root out the drug scum can succeed without dealing with the problem of the source. However high the demand, and however high the price, however intense the craving by those succumbed to it, dope can be obtained as long as the source is churning out year in year out. Source countries include Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, plus Pakistan and Afghanistan take the prime position as the source of heroine. Democracies, pseudo democracies, and military juntas. Yet these are the countries that have to be engaged in dialogue if at all the drug scourge is to be uprooted once and for all from all nooks and crannies of this mother earth. Handling this issue will determine the success or the lack of it, of endeavors to eradicate heroine trade, which however is no simple feat. Just consider one case: Myanmar. The country has to be persuaded to burst the drug syndicates operating inside its territory at a time when the very lifeline of its society is choking from sanctions imposed by the United Nations! Myanmar rulers are likely to demand for the lifting of sanctions before any such efforts, which might be to the distaste of UN members. ASEAN countries have the leverage of being co-members of the regional economic grouping with Myanmar, and can thus use interweave trade relations with guarantees by Myanmar government to deal with the drug trade. In fact an opportunity was lost at the time Myanmar was admitted as a member of ASEAN. This would have been the pre-condition the country had to fulfil first before even talks on joining ASEAN begun. Well it all bygones now. So one of the key sources of heroine is a respectable member of the regional grouping, which entitles it to open its domestic market to products and services from the other nine member countries. The nine in reciprocation have to ensure some level playing field for products and services originating from Myanmar. This is where concerted efforts of all nations, especially the wealthy, which are in the main the targets of drug barons have to come in. Establishing an international drug bursting force may be one option, which however may be unacceptable to some zealots of 'total independence'. With arms folded, the scourge is conquering new turf, eating away the very sinews of society, shredding the very fabric that holds us together! National efforts can hardly succeed without coordination with neighboring states, source countries, and major target markets, the rich nations. It is a fact that the world community had better gets its teeth into!*