

Akramjon Nematov: "No country can counter the growing drug threat alone."



This opinion was expressed by the First Deputy Director of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (ISRS) Akramjon Nematov, speaking at a meeting of the Council of National Coordinators of CARICC, which took place on December 5, 2025, in Samarkand under the chairmanship of Uzbekistan.

The event brought together representatives from relevant agencies of Central Asian countries, Azerbaijan, Russia, China, the United States, and the European Union, as well as international organizations such as the UNODC, the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). A delegation from Afghanistan, led by the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, participated for the first time.

The meeting focused on increasing the effectiveness of regional cooperation in combating drug trafficking, strengthening interagency coordination and information exchange, countering the spread of synthetic drugs, developing preventive measures for young people as a key risk group, and introducing modern digital tools for monitoring and analyzing the drug situation.

As the ISRS representative noted, in today's environment, drug demand, production, and trafficking, as well as the associated risks, will only expand.

According to him, the global context is rapidly changing. Rivalry between major powers is intensifying, the crisis of trust is deepening, the effectiveness of multilateral international security institutions is declining,

and economic fragmentation and competition for resources are intensifying. Sanctions pressure, protectionism, and the dysfunction of international law are increasing conflict and expanding "gray zones." It is precisely in these conditions that transnational crime, including drug trafficking, is rapidly developing.

According to the expert, the growing scale of the drug threat is determined by a number of factors.

Firstly, demographic dynamics: the proportion of young people—the main risk group—is growing, particularly in Asian countries, where rapid economic growth is accompanied by the destruction of traditional social structures, changing behavioral patterns, growing inequality, and stress. This increases the demand for narcotics.

Secondly, the spread of armed conflicts and crises is creating new zones of weak governance. In such conditions, drug production and transnational criminal networks are growing, and drug trafficking is becoming a source of financing conflicts. In some countries, drug trafficking is becoming part of the "survival economy," perpetuating long-term instability.

Thirdly, the rapid development of digital technologies, the internet, and artificial intelligence is radically changing the landscape of the drug market. These tools allow criminal networks to cooperate anonymously, accelerate the circulation of illicit substances, and complicate their detection and control.

As Akramjon Nematov emphasized, no single state can effectively counter the cross-border drug threat on its own. However, geopolitical rivalry, confrontation, and blocs hinder the development of collective security mechanisms. Given the deterioration of global collective security institutions, regional formats play a vital role and can compensate for the lack of international coordination.

The expert stated that the Central Asian states, which are at the intersection of many of the aforementioned risks, are fully aware of the scale of the ongoing processes and demonstrate a high degree of responsibility to their people.

According to him, the region has achieved truly historic progress in a relatively short period of time. A permanent political dialogue has been established between the states, trust has been strengthened, and a space of good-neighborliness and partnership has been formed.

"Thanks to this, the region was able to move from disjointed actions to the formation of a coherent and sustainable security architecture. Central Asia has proven that even in the most challenging conditions, it is possible to act together, assume responsibility, and create its own space of stability," asserts Akramjon Nematov.

In recent years, regular mechanisms for cooperation have been launched—meetings of security council secretaries, defense ministers, and heads of intelligence agencies, and joint exercises are being conducted. Numerous regional cooperation platforms—the Central Asian Expert Forum, the Central Asian Security Forum, and others—are actively operating.

Thus, according to the First Deputy Director of the ISRS, the countries of the region are forming a "strategic framework for a security community."

The expert attached particular importance to the decisions of the 7th Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia, recently held in Tashkent. Two key documents were adopted: the Concept of Security, Stability, and Sustainable Development of Central Asia and the Catalogue of Risks and Measures to Prevent Them.

As the ISRS representative emphasized, "These documents represent a breakthrough in the formation of a common regional security architecture. The Concept enshrines the principles of comprehensive, equal, and indivisible security, defining it as a multidimensional phenomenon. Along with traditional threats, it addresses sustainable development issues, calling for a comprehensive approach, and emphasizing preventive measures. Essentially, the documents form the basis for strengthening the regional security

system, open to constructive and transparent cooperation with external partners."

Based on the provisions of the Concept and the Risk Catalogue, Akramjon Nematov outlined several proposals for further strengthening cooperation.

First, he proposed developing a comprehensive regional counter-narcotics program. This could include coordinating law enforcement activities, implementing joint research and educational programs, and monitoring and preventing drug threats in Central Asia.

Secondly, the expert noted the need to strengthen specialized coordination mechanisms, primarily the activities of CARICC as the main regional platform. Emphasis is placed on strengthening the financial, institutional, and regulatory frameworks for its activities.

Thirdly, special emphasis was placed on combating drug addiction. Akramjon Nematov proposed creating a Regional Council to Combat Drug Addiction, which would allow for more effective coordination of treatment and rehabilitation programs, promote research and the exchange of best practices, and develop standards for youth prevention.

In conclusion, the ISRS representative emphasized that the drug threat is directly linked to overall global instability, the growth of cross-border risks, and the slowdown in sustainable development.

In this regard, the expert is convinced that an effective response is only possible through coordinated efforts and a comprehensive approach.

According to him, Central Asia is demonstrating its willingness and ability to assume responsibility for regional security. In this context, it is important to continue strengthening practical cooperation, developing joint programs, and strengthening regional institutions, including CARICC, as well as establishing specialized platforms to combat drug addiction.

"Only systemic, sustainable, and proactive cooperation will enable us to ensure a reliable response to one of the most serious cross-border threats facing our region," concluded the First Deputy Director of the ISRS.