



INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD



# Report

## 2023



### EMBARGO

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## **Reports published by the International Narcotics Control Board for 2023**

The *Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2023* (E/INCB/2023/1) is supplemented by the following reports:

*Narcotic Drugs: Estimated World Requirements for 2024 — Statistics for 2022* (E/INCB/2023/2)

*Psychotropic Substances: Statistics for 2022 — Assessments of Annual Medical and Scientific Requirements for Substances in Schedules II, III and IV of the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 for 2024* (E/INCB/2023/3)

*Precursors and Chemicals Frequently Used in the Illicit Manufacture of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances: Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2023 on the Implementation of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988* (E/INCB/2023/4)

The updated lists of substances under international control, comprising narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and substances frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, are contained in the latest editions of the annexes to the statistical forms (“Yellow List”, “Green List” and “Red List”), which are also issued by the Board.

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The text of the present report is also available on the website of the Board ([www.incb.org](http://www.incb.org)).



INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD

# Report

of the International Narcotics Control Board  
for 2023



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# Foreword

The members of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) were deeply saddened by the passing of Mr. Bernard Leroy in February 2023. A member of the Board since 2015, Mr. Leroy served as Rapporteur of the Board in 2015, 2018 and 2020, and also served in various years as a member of the Board's Standing Committee on Estimates and the Board's Committee on Finance and Administration. Mr. Leroy conducted missions to Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Egypt, Jamaica, Luxembourg and Mauritius on behalf of the Board. He was renowned for his legal expertise and extensive experience at the national and international levels, as well as in civil society, and the Board pays tribute to his valuable contribution to the functioning of the international drug control system.

The year was characterized by emergencies resulting from natural disasters, climate change and conflict, which resulted in acute humanitarian needs – including for medicines containing internationally controlled substances. INCB has been calling upon Governments to ensure the unimpeded international availability of these medicines and raising awareness of the possibility of using simplified control procedures in such situations.

Chapter II, part B, of this annual report expands on this matter and presents an analysis of the global availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. Data reported to INCB confirm persistent disparities between regions in the consumption of opioid analgesics such as morphine for pain treatment and anaesthesia, with use concentrated in Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Our analysis indicates that this disparity is due to countries not accurately estimating their medical requirements for these substances, many of which are considered by WHO to be essential medicines. Levels of consumption of affordable morphine in regions other than Europe and North America are also insufficient to adequately address medical needs.

To better guide Governments, international and regional organizations and civil society in their efforts to improve the situation, the Board has introduced for each regional section a summary on availability of controlled substances for licit purposes and related reporting. INCB is committed to supporting Member States in improving the availability of controlled substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes and to this end was pleased to conduct training in 2023 for Central Asian and South American countries through the INCB Learning programme. We hope to count on increased support and participation of Member States to ensure that this capacity-building programme, including e-learning resources, can continue to benefit States in improving treaty implementation and availability of controlled substances for licit purposes.

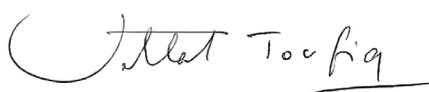
Regarding the illicit supply of drugs, we have witnessed a dramatic decline in illicit opium poppy cultivation and heroin production in Afghanistan. As affected farmers may not have alternative sources of income, alternative livelihoods need to be secured. Governments and the international community will need to closely monitor developments and the response of illicit markets globally, particularly with regard to the provision of evidence-based treatment and rehabilitation services and the serious threat posed to public health by potential substitution with highly potent synthetic opioids.

Trafficking in synthetic drugs and their precursors represents a growing threat to public health globally. During the 138th session of INCB, the Board met with Member States to discuss operational support provided within the frameworks of the INCB precursor control and Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) programmes, details of which are provided in the present annual report and the 2023 report on precursors. To address this threat, new initiatives have been put in place by INCB to support Governments in strengthening partnerships with chemical industry, mapping national chemical industry sectors, preventing diversion and misuse of specialized equipment used in illicit drug manufacture, and supporting public-private partnerships to prevent exploitation of Internet-based and postal/courier services for trafficking in non-medical synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances.

The role of the Internet, including social media, in drug trafficking and use, is explored in the thematic chapter of the report. The chapter highlights both the challenges and opportunities faced by the international community in the Internet era, focusing on online drug trafficking and difficulties faced by law enforcement authorities due to encryption technologies and jurisdictional issues. The increasing use of social media platforms to market illicit drugs, including to children and adolescents, is highlighted, as are opportunities presented by these platforms, such as for prevention of non-medical use of drugs and awareness-raising. The chapter also sets out how legitimate e-commerce platforms are being exploited for drug trafficking and presents efforts being taken to foster cooperation between Governments and online industries. The Board held consultations with civil society on this topic during its 137th session in May 2023. The chapter concludes with a number of areas for action by Governments, including engagement with the private sector and participation in INCB operational activities. These activities are enabling law enforcement and customs authorities worldwide to share information in real time to prevent highly potent and potentially fatal substances from reaching members of the public.

Safeguarding health and welfare is at the heart of the three international drug control conventions. This report also reviews the functioning of the international drug control system, including INCB support to Member States to improve treaty implementation and promote health and well-being.

The past year saw the resumption of INCB country missions, with the first mission since the COVID-19 pandemic-related travel restrictions taking place in December 2022. We were pleased to work with the Governments of Canada, Cyprus, Kyrgyzstan, the United States and Uruguay, and also to meet with representatives of civil society in those countries. We look forward to continuing this dialogue with Member States, particularly in the context of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs mid-term review of implementation of drug policy commitments and in progressing the Sustainable Development Goals. At the mid-point for the implementation of the Goals and the 2030 Agenda, it is heartbreaking to see how little progress has been made towards Sustainable Development Goal 3 on good health and well-being. I urge Governments and international and regional organizations to apply the recommendations set out in this report, and encourage civil society organizations to be cognizant of these recommendations in planning their work. Each and every member of our global society has the right to the highest attainable standard of health. The evidence-based tools exist. With the political will of Governments and the targeted support of the international community and civil society, the health and well-being of all can be a reality.



Jallal Toufiq  
President  
International Narcotics Control Board

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## Explanatory notes

Data reported later than 1 November 2023 could not be taken into consideration in the preparation of this report.

The defined daily doses for statistical purposes (S-DDD) are used by INCB as a technical unit of measurement for the purpose of statistical analysis and are not a recommended prescription dose. This definition, which is not free of a certain degree of arbitrariness, recognizes that there are no internationally agreed standard dosages for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, that they are used in certain countries for different treatments or in accordance with different medical practices, and that therefore amounts expressed in S-DDD units should be considered an approximate measure used for ranking consumption in different countries. For narcotic drugs, levels of consumption, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants per day, are calculated by using the following formula: the annual consumption reported by a country or a territory, excluding the amount utilized for the manufacture of preparations listed in Schedule III of the 1961 Convention, is divided by the defined daily dose established for each substance, then divided by the population, in millions, and then divided by 365 days. The result obtained is the S-DDD value for that particular drug for that country or territory.

The S-DDD by region value is calculated by adding up the consumption amount (excluding the amounts utilized for the manufacture of preparations listed in Schedule III), dividing by the defined daily dose for each substance, and then dividing, successively, by the total population of the countries in that region that have reported to the Board, expressed in millions, and then dividing by 365 days.

The global S-DDD value for each substance reflected in some diagrams is calculated by adding the S-DDD separately calculated for each individual country or territory to obtain a value which represents the sum of all S-DDDs of consumption for each substance.

Countries and areas are referred to by the names that were in official use at the time the relevant data were collected.

References to dollars (\$) are to United States dollars, unless otherwise stated.

The following abbreviations have been used in this report:

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| AIRCOP          | Airport Communication Programme   |
| ASEAN           | Association of Southeast Asian Nations  |
| CARICC          | Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre  |
| CBD             | cannabidiol   |
| CICAD           | Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission  |
| COPOLAD         | Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies |
| CSTO            | Collective Security Treaty Organization   |
| ELITE           | eLearning Individual Training Environment   |
| EMCDDA          | European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction   |
| Europol         | European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation   |
| FARC-EP         | Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army  |
| GHB             | <i>gamma</i> -hydroxybutyrate   |
| GRIDS Programme | Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances Programme   |
| ha              | hectare(s)  |

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| I2ES            | International Import and Export Authorization System   |
| IDS             | INCB International Drug Control System   |
| INCB            | International Narcotics Control Board  |
| INTERPOL        | International Criminal Police Organization   |
| IONICS          | Project Ion Incident Communication System  |
| LSD             | lysergic acid diethylamide   |
| MDMA            | 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine  |
| MERCOSUR        | Southern Common Market   |
| OAS             | Organization of American States  |
| OHCHR           | Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights                              |
| OPIOIDS project | global Operational Partnerships to Interdict Opioids' Illicit Distribution and Sales project |
| PAHO            | Pan American Health Organization   |
| PEN Online      | Pre-Export Notification Online system  |
| PICS            | Precursors Incident Communication System   |
| SENAD           | National Secretariat for Drug Policy of Brazil   |
| S-DDD           | defined daily dose for statistical purposes  |
| THC             | tetrahydrocannabinol   |
| UNAIDS          | Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS   |
| UNAMA           | United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan   |
| UNDP            | United Nations Development Programme   |
| UNICEF          | United Nations Children's Fund   |
| UNODC           | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime   |
| UPU             | Universal Postal Union   |
| WCO             | World Customs Organization   |
| WHO             | World Health Organization  |

# Chapter I.

## The role of the Internet, including social media, in drug trafficking and use

The international community faces both challenges and opportunities for drug control, prevention and treatment in the era of the Internet, and the present chapter explores the intersection of the international drug control treaties and the challenges posed by the Internet, with a specific focus on the evolving landscape of online drug trafficking. Law enforcement authorities encounter difficulties in monitoring and prosecuting online drug activities due to the use of encryption technologies and jurisdictional issues that require global collaborative efforts. Social media is increasingly used as a local marketplace for illicit drugs, raising concerns about increased accessibility for children and adolescents. At the same time, these platforms offer opportunities to prevent non-medical drug use and raise awareness about the harms of such use by enabling communication with and between people who use drugs, coordinate strategic community responses and allow drug-checking services

to support public health initiatives. This chapter also discusses the misuse of legitimate e-commerce platforms for drug trafficking, emphasizing efforts to foster cooperation between Governments and online industries. Criminal groups exploit online platforms for the trafficking of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursor chemicals and other new psychoactive substances. The online presence of fentanyl and synthetic opioids raises serious concerns due to their high potency and the risk of overdose deaths. INCB initiatives to prevent the exploitation of the Internet for drug trafficking include Operation Acronym, the GRIDS Programme and tools such as IONICS for real-time information exchange. INCB notes that there is a need to further develop public-private partnerships and stresses the need for international cooperation and enhanced legislation to address evolving challenges in Internet-driven drug trafficking.

### A. Introduction

1. The international community adopted the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 prior to the advent of the Internet, and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 shortly before the major changes in information and communication technologies became global in reach. These conventions are the cornerstone of the international drug control system and continue to guide concerted actions aimed at safeguarding health and welfare. Signatory countries are obliged to limit exclusively to medical and scientific purposes the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution of, trade in, use and possession of drugs, while

ensuring their availability for such purposes.<sup>1</sup> Legislative, regulatory and policy measures implemented to achieve these aims must be proportionate, humane and grounded in respect for human rights.<sup>2</sup> The Internet has proved to offer both opportunities to support the aims of the conventions and to undermine them, as it enables communication that facilitates trade and trafficking in and use of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals.<sup>3</sup>

2. The international cooperation fostered by the three United Nations drug control treaties continues to prevent

<sup>1</sup>Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, art. 4, para. 1 (c).

<sup>2</sup>E/INCB/2022/4.

<sup>3</sup>*World Drug Report 2022* (United Nations publication, 2022).

diversion from licit international trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals. However, criminals have also adapted to the new informational and technological environment. The growth in online drug trafficking follows the broader trend in Internet use and Internet-facilitated trade. The role of the Internet in drug trafficking and in the sourcing of precursor chemicals and equipment for illicit drug manufacture has evolved but has not yet dramatically changed drug supply chains. The share of illicit transactions that occur online is still growing, constituting every year a larger share of the global illicit drug market, which is valued at between \$200 billion and \$600 billion.<sup>4</sup> There is considerable potential for Internet-facilitated drug markets to further expand as the technological components continue to evolve and larger shares of the global population use social media.<sup>5</sup>

3. As early as 2000, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in its resolution 43/8, resolved to curtail the availability of controlled pharmaceuticals and precursor chemicals for illicit purposes through the misuse of the World Wide Web.<sup>6</sup> In 2009, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) published the *Guidelines for Governments on Preventing the Illegal Sale of Internationally Controlled Substances through the Internet*.<sup>7</sup> In chapter I of the annual report of the Board for 2015, entitled “The health and welfare of mankind: challenges and opportunities for the international control of drugs”, the emerging problem of the use of the Internet for drug trafficking and use was addressed. In the conclusions and recommendations of that thematic chapter, the need was underlined for States to expand the range of interventions to cope with new psychoactive substances and the marketing technologies used to promote and facilitate the non-medical use of drugs through the use of the Internet and social media.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the INCB annual report for 2021 addressed, as a global issue, the use of social media in the promotion of the non-medical use of drugs.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup>World Drug Report 2005, vol. 1, *Analysis* (United Nations publication, 2005); and Harry R. Sumnall, “The harm reduction impact of cryptomarkets: inequality and opportunity”, *Addiction*, vol. 113, No. 5 (2018), pp. 801–802.

<sup>5</sup>Judith Aldridge, Alex Stevens and Monica Barratt, “Harms, benefits and the policing of cryptomarkets: a response to commentaries”, *Addiction*, vol. 113, No. 5 (2018), pp. 802–804; Judith Aldridge, Alex Stevens and Monica Barratt, “Will growth in cryptomarket drug buying increase the harms of illicit drugs?”, *Addiction*, vol. 113, No. 5 (2018), pp. 789–796; European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), *EU Drug Markets: Impact of COVID-19* (Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2020); and *World Drug Report 2023*, booklet 2, *Contemporary Issues on Drugs* (United Nations publication, 2023), chap. 7.

<sup>6</sup>E/INCB/2022/4.

<sup>7</sup>United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.XI.6.

<sup>8</sup>See E/INCB/2015/1, chap. I.

<sup>9</sup>E/INCB/2021/1.

4. Currently, the urgent macro-level challenges to international drug control are the misuse, diversion from domestic trade and evolution of designer and pre-precursor chemicals and new psychoactive substances, including non-medical synthetic opioids, that are not under international control. At the micro level, the Internet and especially social media, in combination with encryption technologies, have increased the availability of drugs on the illicit market and made it more difficult for law enforcement authorities to prevent drug trafficking.

5. The international drug control treaties obligate States parties to take steps to prevent the diversion of controlled substances into illicit channels while also facilitating their availability for legitimate medical and scientific purposes. In a globalized market, reducing illicit supply involves international cooperation, even at the production stage. The identification of suspicious online transactions is challenging because they are hidden within legitimate trade. To apply the international drug control treaties, States parties should implement comprehensive and balanced approaches to regulate new online marketplaces.<sup>10</sup> This requires an appropriate focus on reducing illicit supply and demand for drugs, promoting research and sharing knowledge.

## B. Opportunities offered by the Internet to prevent non-medical drug use

6. Telemedicine and Internet pharmacies illustrate the duality of challenges and opportunities. They both hold great potential for improving access to health care but at the same time enable illegitimate actors to hide among legitimate providers. Telemedicine is a fast-growing health-care delivery option.<sup>11</sup> Using the Internet, physicians have the ability to issue prescriptions online, but several studies suggest a correlation between telemedicine and overprescription.<sup>12</sup> For consumers, Internet pharmacies offer lower

<sup>10</sup>E/INCB/2022/1.

<sup>11</sup>Laura Hoffman, “Shedding light on telemedicine and online prescribing: the need to balance access to health care and quality of care”, *American Journal of Law and Medicine*, vol. 46, Nos. 2 and 3 (July 2020), pp. 237–251; and Kostas Mouratidis and Apostolos Papagiannakis, “COVID-19, Internet, and mobility: the rise of telework, telehealth, e-learning, and e-shopping”, *Sustainable Cities and Society*, vol. 74 (2021), p. 103182.

<sup>12</sup>Tim K. Mackey, Bryan A. Liang and Steffanie A. Strathdee, “Digital social media, youth, and nonmedical use of prescription drugs: the need for reform”, *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, vol. 15, No. 7 (July 2013), pp. e143.

costs, convenience and privacy, while businesses can save on expenses and increase their competitiveness.<sup>13</sup>

7. For the purposes of providing treatment, rehabilitation, aftercare and social reintegration services for people with drug use disorders, telemedicine represents a valuable additional resource for reaching patients,<sup>14</sup> and the online delivery of services related to drug treatment holds great potential.<sup>15</sup> There are several online discussion forums dedicated to drug-related topics. These discussions sometimes relate to practical logistical issues about procuring drugs illicitly, such as naming fraudulent sellers and describing online security measures,<sup>16</sup> but people also discuss the inherent risks of drug use.<sup>17</sup> This information can be highly localized and includes warnings about adulterated drugs encountered.<sup>18</sup> While this knowledge-sharing is a positive element, it is unknown if it is associated with significant reductions in aggregate health-related costs, as the persons reached in this way are seldom among the most vulnerable people who use drugs.<sup>19</sup>

8. National health authorities can improve their use of social media platforms to reach youth with drug use prevention advice and health warnings and provide information on where and how to seek help for problematic drug use. INCB recognizes the efforts of some Governments and international organizations to make use of the Internet to prevent drug use and improve drug control at the national and international levels.

## C. Challenges posed by the Internet to drug control

9. The Internet connects sellers and potential buyers of both licit and illicit commodities across the globe. Drug traffickers can reach a large international audience by

exploiting social media and other online platforms to advertise their products. Online communication between sellers and potential buyers is discreet and even encrypted and blends in with the massive stream of legitimate messages and e-commerce activities. The sheer scale of communications on these platforms makes it exceedingly difficult for regulatory authorities to monitor, even if the communications leave digital traces. It is complicated to take legal action and prosecute trafficking offences conducted online. There are jurisdictional issues owing to the global reach of Internet-facilitated drug trafficking, and offenders can move their activities to territories with less intensive law enforcement action and lighter criminal sanctions or base themselves in countries where they can evade extradition.

10. New encryption technologies and innovations such as virtual private networks to hide users' Internet Protocol address, combined with conventional free speech protection, the right to anonymity and the use of slang and emojis, leaves law enforcement authorities with a daunting task. While it is difficult to investigate and attribute criminal responsibility to individuals, drug traffickers only have to make one mistake before law enforcement authorities can establish their identity.<sup>20</sup>

11. Recently, organized criminal groups in Europe have exploited Internet-based technologies to traffic drugs, using modified smartphones, "cryptophones" or "PGP" phones running EncroChat and similar software. They believed that they were communicating confidentially, but law enforcement authorities managed to decrypt their conversations and took down several high-value targets beginning in 2021. In France alone, the National Gendarmerie collected over 120 million text messages from 60,000 mobile phones, with data tracing back to more than 100 countries.<sup>21</sup> The ensuing criminal cases in several European countries resulted in an unprecedented number of convictions for large-scale drug trafficking, homicides and weapons offences.<sup>22</sup> The duality of encrypted online communications is that they are safe for criminals until they are no longer safe.

<sup>13</sup>Sia Chong Hock, Mervyn Ming Xuan Lee and Lai Wah Chan, "Regulating online pharmacies and medicinal product e-commerce", *Pharmaceutical Engineering*, vol. 39, No. 6 (November/December 2019).

<sup>14</sup>E/INCB/2022/1.

<sup>15</sup>*World Drug Report 2022*.

<sup>16</sup>James Martin, Jack Cunliffe and Rasmus Munksgaard, *Cryptomarkets: A Research Companion* (Bingley, United Kingdom, Emerald Group Publishing, 2019).

<sup>17</sup>Angus Bancroft, "Responsible use to responsible harm: illicit drug use and peer harm reduction in a darknet cryptomarket", *Health, Risk and Society*, vol. 19, Nos. 7 and 8 (December 2017), pp. 336–350.

<sup>18</sup>Aldridge, Stevens and Barratt, "Will growth in cryptomarket drug buying increase?"

<sup>19</sup>Sumnall, "The harm reduction impact of cryptomarkets".

<sup>20</sup>United States, Department of Justice, "Administrators of DeepDotWeb indicted for money-laundering conspiracy, relating to kickbacks for sales of fentanyl, heroin and other illegal goods on the darknet", press release, 8 May 2019; and Europol, "Bitzlato: senior management arrested", press release, 23 January 2023.

<sup>21</sup>Jan-Jaap Oerlemans and D.A.G van Toor, "Legal aspects of the EncroChat operation: a human rights perspective", *European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law and Criminal Justice*, vol. 30, Nos. 3 and 4 (2022), pp. 309–328.

<sup>22</sup>Europol, "DeepDotWeb shut down: administrators suspected of receiving millions of kickbacks from illegal dark web proceeds", press release, 8 May 2019; and Europol, "Double blow to dark web marketplaces", press release, 3 May 2019.

Cryptophones are specially designed smartphones with enhanced encryption methods, protecting all communication systems. While their hardware is similar to regular mobile phones, the key distinction lies in advanced encryption software. These devices prioritize security and privacy, offering features such as encrypted calls and texts, secure boot, bootloader protection, and hardware-level security measures to prevent tampering.

12. Access to the Internet varies from region to region and within countries, but its importance is rising everywhere, and the trend is set to continue. In Western countries, young people typically acquire their first mobile phone between the ages of 7 and 10, and a growing share of adolescents' social activities occur online.<sup>23</sup> In the United States of America, nearly 40 per cent of children as young as 8 to 12 years of age use social media, and teenagers spend several hours per day on social media, an average of 3.5 hours according to one survey.<sup>24</sup> Almost half of teenagers in the United States say that they use the Internet "almost constantly" – double the number compared with only eight years ago.<sup>25</sup> Accompanying this increase among children in time spent online, however, there has been a concurrent decline in risk-taking behaviour in adolescents, including substance use and physical fighting. Less time spent in unstructured socializing with peers in public results in fewer opportunities and temptations for conventional offending.<sup>26</sup>

13. Seen over a period of 30 years, the evolving use of the Internet shows how drug distributors adapt their behaviours to reduce their risk of being apprehended.<sup>27</sup> Initially, this entailed a shift away from open-air, street-level marketplaces and towards indoor sales. Online distribution is a continuation of the leveraging by offenders of technology.<sup>28</sup> It is

<sup>23</sup>Alex McCord, Philip Birch and Lewis A. Bizo, "Digital displacement of youth offending: scoping and understanding the issue", *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice*, vol. 8, No. 4 (June 2022), pp. 243–259.

<sup>24</sup>United States, Department of Health and Human Services, "Surgeon General issues new advisory about effects social media use has on youth mental health", press release, 23 May 2023.

<sup>25</sup>Emily A. Vogels, Risa Gelles-Watnick and David Massarat, "Teens, social media and technology 2022", Pew Research Center, 10 August 2022.

<sup>26</sup>Robert Svensson and others, "For whom do unstructured activities matter? The interaction between unstructured and structured activities in delinquency and cannabis use: a national self-report study", *Crime and Delinquency*, vol. 69, No. 10 (July 2022), pp. 2022–2045.

<sup>27</sup>Kim Moeller, Heith Copes and Andy Hochstetler, "Advancing restrictive deterrence: a qualitative meta-synthesis", *Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 46 (2016), pp. 82–93.

<sup>28</sup>Thomas Friis Sogaard and others, "Ring and bring drug services: delivery dealing and the social life of a drug phone", *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 69 (2019), pp. 8–15; and Maria Tcherni and others, "The dark figure of online property crime: is cyberspace hiding a crime wave?", *Justice Quarterly*, vol. 33, No. 5 (2016), pp. 890–911.

not a uniform trend towards discretion. Some segments of the online trade are "going dark" by utilizing decentralized software and encrypted communications, while others are increasingly brazen and use conventional social media. So far, the available research on these issues has been concentrated on the Global North, Australia and New Zealand.

## 1. Cryptomarkets: moving towards wholesale

14. Cryptomarkets are online darknet marketplaces located on the Deep Web. The Deep Web has content that is not indexed by search engines, for example, online banking and webmail, and it accounts for 96 per cent of all Internet traffic. Darknet markets are accessible only with specific software, such as the anonymity proxy network the Onion Router (Tor), and they use PGP encryption to mask emails and cryptocurrencies for payment.<sup>29</sup> Cryptomarkets first came to the public's attention in 2013 with the arrest of the administrator of Silk Road 2.0. Since then, law enforcement agencies in the United States and the European Union have arrested dozens of administrators and indicted them for narcotics trafficking, money-laundering and conspiracy.<sup>30</sup>

Tor is a peer-to-peer overlay network that allows people to browse the Internet anonymously. It uses multiple layers of encryption to conceal both the source and destination of information. Tor directs internet traffic through a global volunteer network of over 7,000 relays, making it difficult to trace a user's activity. This free and open-source software protects personal privacy by hiding a user's location and usage from network surveillance or traffic analysis, ensuring IP address anonymity through Tor exit nodes.

15. Administrators operate the sites on a day-to-day basis, collect a transaction fee of 8 to 15 per cent of sales and manage escrow systems enabling the withholding of

<sup>29</sup>Martin, Cunliffe and Munksgaard, *Cryptomarkets*; and *World Drug Report 2023*, booklet 2.

<sup>30</sup>United States, Department of Justice, "Three Germans who allegedly operated dark web marketplace with over 1 million users face U.S. narcotics and money-laundering charges", press release, 3 May 2019; United States, Department of Justice, "Administrators of DeepDotWeb indicted for money-laundering conspiracy"; United States, Department of Justice, "Dozens of online 'dark markets' seized pursuant to the forfeiture complaint filed on Manhattan Federal Court in conjunction with the arrest of the operator of Silk Road 2.0", press release, 7 November 2014.

payments to sellers until delivery.<sup>31</sup> Estimates of the monetary value of these markets vary substantially. In 2021, UNODC suggested that the total value of the drug trade on cryptomarkets is around \$315 million annually, while alternative estimates place total sales on individual platforms at between \$36 million and \$221 million annually.<sup>32</sup> The overall value of this darknet trade may have quadrupled from the period 2011–2017 to the period 2017–2020. Purchasing drugs on cryptomarkets involves a certain level of technical literacy, and most people who use drugs are young and educated.<sup>33</sup>

16. Buyers have reported that they use these markets because they provide access to drugs of a more predictable quality. Limited forensic tests confirm that drugs sourced from cryptomarkets are less likely to be adulterated and have higher purity compared with offline purchases.<sup>34</sup> Both buyers and sellers perceive the transactions as less risky in terms of rip-offs, physical violence and threats compared with street-level exchanges and even exchanges with known dealers and friends.<sup>35</sup> Vendors typically operate only for about half a year and deal with only a few buyers,<sup>36</sup> and trades are generally concentrated among a few key vendors who make most of the profits.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>31</sup>United States, Department of Justice, “Three Germans who allegedly operated dark web marketplace with over 1 million users”; and Martin Horton-Eddison and Matteo Di Cristofaro, “Hard interventions and innovation in crypto-drug markets: the escrow example”, *Global Drug Policy Observatory, Policy Brief*, No. 11 (2017), pp. 16–27.

<sup>32</sup>Naoki Hiramoto and Yoichi Tsuchiya, “Measuring dark web marketplaces via bitcoin transactions: from birth to independence”, *Forensic Science International: Digital Investigation*, vol. 35, art. No. 301086 (December 2020).

<sup>33</sup>Venkataraman Bhaskar, Robin Linacre and Machin Stephen, “The economic functioning of online drugs markets”, *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, vol. 159 (2019), pp. 426–441; and *World Drug Report 2022*.

<sup>34</sup>Fernando Caudevilla and others, “Results of an international drug testing service for cryptomarket users”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 35 (2016), pp. 38–41.

<sup>35</sup>Monica J. Barratt, Jason A. Ferris and Adam Winstock, “Safer scoring? Cryptomarkets, social supply and drug market violence”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 35 (2016), pp. 24–31; and Andréanne Bergeron and others, “The success rate of online illicit drug transactions during a global pandemic”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 99, art. No. 103452 (2022).

<sup>36</sup>Lukas Norbutas, “Offline constraints in online drug marketplaces: an exploratory analysis of a cryptomarket trade network”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 56 (2018), pp. 92–100; and *World Drug Report 2022*.

<sup>37</sup>Scott W. Duxbury and Dana L. Haynie, “Network embeddedness in illegal online markets: endogenous sources of prices and profit in anonymous criminal drug trade”, *Socio-Economic Review*, vol. 21, No. 1 (January 2023), pp. 25–50; Scott W. Duxbury and Dana L. Haynie, “The network structure of opioid distribution on a darknet cryptomarket”, *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, vol. 34 (2018), pp. 921–941; and Vincent Harinam, “Dealings on the dark web: an examination of the trust, consumer satisfaction, and the efficacy of interventions against a dark web cryptomarket”, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2021.

A VPN, or virtual private network, securely connects computing devices or networks over the public Internet. It extends access to private networks, enhancing security, reducing communication costs and offering flexibility for remote work. VPNs can bypass Internet censorship. While encryption is common, it is not inherent to a VPN. The connection is established through tunnelling protocols, and a public Internet-based VPN can offer some benefits of a private wide area network.

17. Most markets are in English, but the Russian language-oriented Hydra became the world’s largest darknet market in 2019 before being taken down in 2022.<sup>38</sup> Shipments across international borders have declined with time, and cryptomarkets mostly serve national markets.<sup>39</sup> These cryptomarkets may use caches or drop-off points for delivery. The seller provides the location of the drugs using global navigation satellite system-enabled technology on an encrypted instant messaging app. The buyer can then pick up the drugs without ever meeting the seller.<sup>40</sup> Recently, there has been an emergence of marketplaces in Asia and South America, and the overall geographical distribution of markets may be changing, with the expansion of the darknet to those regions.<sup>41</sup>

18. The average transaction size on cryptomarkets is also increasing. Apparently, there has been a shift towards an increasing amount of wholesale sales of “ecstasy”-type drugs and, secondarily, opioids (“wholesale” was defined as listings priced over \$1,000).<sup>42</sup> This trend underlines that cryptomarkets are anchored in offline drug markets and can serve as virtual brokers, linking wholesalers with sellers who make stock-sourcing purchases for offline distribution.<sup>43</sup> When the scheduling of hydrocodone changed in the United States,

<sup>38</sup>Anastasia Meylakhs and Ramil Saidashev, “A qualitative analysis of the Russian cryptomarket Hydra”, *Kriminologisches Journal*, vol. 3 (2021), pp. 169–185; and Jonathan Reed, “World’s largest darknet market shut down, \$25 million in bitcoin seized”, *Threat Hunting*, 8 June 2022.

<sup>39</sup>David Décary-Héту, Masarah Paquet-Clouston and Judith Aldridge, “Going international? Risk taking by cryptomarket drug vendors”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 35 (2016), pp. 69–76; and Jakob Demant and others, “Going local on a global platform: a critical analysis of the transformative potential of cryptomarkets for organized illicit drug crime”, *International Criminal Justice Review*, vol. 28, No. 3 (September 2018), pp. 255–274.

<sup>40</sup>EMCDDA and Europol, *EU Drug Markets: Impact of COVID-19*; and Meylakhs and Saidashev, “A qualitative analysis of the Russian cryptomarket Hydra”.

<sup>41</sup>*World Drug Report 2022*.

<sup>42</sup>Judith Aldridge and David Décary-Héту, “Hidden wholesale: the drug diffusing capacity of online drug cryptomarkets”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 35 (2016), pp. 7–15; and *World Drug Report 2023*.

<sup>43</sup>Samantha J. Brown, Jonathan C. Reid and Wesley Myers, “Let’s talk about stealing sh\*t: online socialization and its potential to influence offline offending”, *Crime and Delinquency* (2023); and EMCDDA and Europol, *EU Drug Markets: Impact of COVID-19*.

it coincided with a sustained increase in trading in opioids through cryptomarkets.<sup>44</sup>

19. Despite several widely publicized arrests of administrators, the overall ecosystem has proved resilient, albeit volatile.<sup>45</sup> Marketplaces disappear at short notice, either as a result of law enforcement crackdowns or exit scams by administrators.<sup>46</sup> People using these systems adapt and introduce features that mitigate security weaknesses, for example, verification methods that enable users to continue with their username and reputation scores intact on a new marketplace.<sup>47</sup> The next evolution appears to be a migration away from using Tor software towards using the Invisible Internet Project (I2P) and similar “true” darknet tools that have their own networks, because law enforcement authorities have been able to launch successful interventions against Tor.<sup>48</sup>

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PGP, or Pretty Good Privacy, is a security program that allows secure communication through message decryption and encryption, digital signature authentication and file encryption. Developed by Phil Zimmermann in 1991, PGP is a pioneering form of public-key cryptography software. It encrypts and decrypts texts, emails, files and more, following the OpenPGP standard (RFC 4880) for data encryption.

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## 2. Social media: increased local availability

20. Conventional social media platforms have started to be used as local marketplaces for illicit drugs and uncontrolled substances with similar effects. There are currently thousands of small-time dealers who sell drugs in local online communities, but it is not known exactly how widespread the problem is and in which countries it is

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<sup>44</sup>James Martin and others, “Effect of restricting the legal supply of prescription opioids on buying through online illicit marketplaces: interrupted time series analysis”, *BMJ*, vol. 361 (2018).

<sup>45</sup>David Décarry-Héту and Luca Giommoni, “Do police crackdowns disrupt drug cryptomarkets? A longitudinal analysis of the effects of Operation Onymous”, *Crime, Law and Social Change*, vol. 67, No. 1 (February 2017), pp. 55–75; and Hiramoto and Tsuchiya, “Measuring dark web marketplaces via bitcoin transactions”.

<sup>46</sup>Bhaskar, Linacre and Stephen, “The economic functioning of online drugs markets”; and Joe Van Joe Van Buskirk and others, “The recovery of online drug markets following law enforcement and other disruptions”, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, vol. 173 (2017), pp. 159–162; and *World Drug Report 2023*.

<sup>47</sup>Isak Ladegaard, “Open secrecy: how police crackdowns and creative problem-solving brought illegal markets out of the shadows”, *Social Forces*, vol. 99, No. 2 (December 2020), pp. 532–559.

<sup>48</sup>Marie-Helen Maras and others, “Decoding hidden darknet networks: what we learned about the illicit fentanyl trade on AlphaBay”, *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, vol. 68, No. 5 (September 2023).

most predominant.<sup>49</sup> This inappropriate content is widely accessible to children and adolescents. Such activity is not restricted to individual platforms. The social media landscape is ever-changing, and the most popular apps vary over time and between age groups.<sup>50</sup> Each platform presents prospective sellers with a space that can be adapted to function as a drug marketplace.<sup>51</sup>

21. The process of using social media to procure drugs can start with the buyer searching drug-related hashtags or following profiles that advertise drug sales through use of pictures and videos of products, or captions, hashtags and emojis on related posts. Buyers can contact a nearby seller, who then discloses his or her contact information, typically using messaging apps with end-to-end encryption and temporary message capabilities, where the communication is deleted after a period, or virtual private networks. The final exchange of money for drugs usually takes place face-to-face at the local level through a public meeting or home drop-off, often within an hour.<sup>52</sup>

22. Social media provides a highly convenient acquisition method that has increased buyers’ options; this accessibility removes the age barriers found in conventional supply chains. The use of social media to buy drugs is more widespread among adolescents aged 16–17 years. Buyers who source drugs using social media are more likely to have lower self-control and mental health problems in the form

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<sup>49</sup>United States, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), “DEA Washington warns of deadly counterfeit drugs on social media”, press release, 23 July 2021; Ashly Fuller and others, “Understanding and preventing the advertisement and sale of illicit drugs to young people through social media: a multidisciplinary scoping review”, *Drug and Alcohol Review* (2023).

<sup>50</sup>Brooke Auxier and Monica Anderson, “Social media use in 2021” (Washington D.C., Pew Research Center, 2021); Emily A. Vogels, Risa Gelles-Watnick and David Massarat, “Teens, social media and technology 2022” (Washington D.C., Pew Research Center, 2022); United States, Department of Health and Human Services, Office, “Social media and youth mental health: the U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory” (Washington D.C., Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, 2023).

<sup>51</sup>Robin van der Sanden and others, “The use of Discord servers to buy and sell drugs”, *Contemporary Drug Problems*, vol. 49, No. 4 (April 2022), pp. 453–477.

<sup>52</sup>Silje Anderdal Bakken and Jakob Demant, “Sellers’ risk perceptions in public and private social media drug markets”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 73 (2019), pp. 255–262; Jakob Demant and others, “Drug dealing on Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram: a qualitative analysis of novel drug markets in the Nordic countries”, *Drug and Alcohol Review*, vol. 38, No.4 (May 2019), pp. 377–385; Leah Moyle and others, “#Drugsforsale: an exploration of the use of social media and encrypted messaging apps to supply and access drugs”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 63 (2019), pp. 101–110; and *World Drug Report 2023*, booklet 2.



of higher psychological distress and engage in compulsive gambling behaviour and excessive Internet use.<sup>53</sup>

23. Limited research finds that sellers mostly advertise cannabis and cocaine, followed by MDMA. One difference between cryptomarkets and social media markets involves the average quantities offered by sellers. Cocaine is offered in smaller quantities on social media (approximately 5 grams) compared with cryptomarkets (approximately 15 grams), and cannabis is offered in amounts of about 10 grams on social media compared with 20 grams on cryptomarkets.<sup>54</sup> This trade also involves the non-medical use of prescription drugs. Vulnerable patient groups can access prescription drugs for non-medical purposes through social media.<sup>55</sup> The United States Drug Enforcement Administration has found counterfeit pills advertised as opioids and benzodiazepines on popular social media apps.<sup>56</sup> On Twitter, fewer than 1 per cent of tweets related to drug sales involved the sale of opioids. A total of 90 per cent of these had embedded hyperlinks, but only half of them worked. The working links usually led to websites that were illegally selling prescription medicines.<sup>57</sup>

### 3. Legitimate e-commerce platforms

24. In the last few years, INCB global projects have promoted voluntary cooperation between Governments and e-commerce companies to prevent the misuse of their marketplaces for the illicit marketing of precursors, new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids. These projects monitor the posting of offers by suspicious vendors and purchase requests by potential buyers on major legitimate e-commerce marketplaces. Most of those suspicious

<sup>53</sup>Atte Oksanen and others, “Social media and access to drugs online: a nationwide study in the United States and Spain among adolescents and young adults”, *European Journal of Psychology Applied to Legal Context*, vol. 13, No. 1 (January 2021), pp. 29–36; Robin van der Sanden and others, “Predictors of using social media to purchase drugs in New Zealand: findings from a large-scale online survey”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 98, art. No. 103430 (December 2021); and van der Sanden and others, “The use of Discord servers to buy and sell drugs”.

<sup>54</sup>Kim Moeller, Rasmus Munksgaard and Jakob Demant, “Illicit drug prices and quantity discounts: a comparison between a cryptomarket, social media, and police data”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 91, art. No. 102969 (2021).

<sup>55</sup>Mackey, Liang and Strathdee, “Digital social media, youth, and nonmedical use of prescription drugs”.

<sup>56</sup>United States, DEA, “DEA Washington warns of deadly counterfeit drugs on social media”.

<sup>57</sup>Tim K. Mackey and others, “Twitter-based detection of illegal online sale of prescription opioid”, *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 107, No. 12 (December 2017), pp. 1910–1915; and Tim K. Mackey and Gaurvika Nayyar, “Digital danger: a review of the global public health, patient safety and cybersecurity threats posed by illicit online pharmacies”, *British Medical Bulletin*, vol. 118, No. 1 (June 2016), pp. 110–126.

posts are for precursors and newly emerging or non-scheduled substances – and not internationally scheduled substances – since only viewers with knowledge of those non-scheduled substances will notice them. Business-to-business marketplaces are more vulnerable to such misuse than their business-to-consumer equivalents.<sup>58</sup>

25. Under the GRIDS Programme, over 10 regional and interregional meetings have been organized with the goal of facilitating voluntary cooperation or public-private partnerships between Governments and the industries most vulnerable to misuse, namely, the manufacturing, marketing, movement and monetization (4M) industries and the Internet-related service industries.<sup>59</sup> The industries involved in the meetings have extended their cooperation to areas such as the use of e-commerce, social media, domain name registrars and search engines, with a view to preventing the online targeting of the 4M industries for trafficking in dangerous substances, namely, new psychoactive substances, non-medical synthetic opioids and their related chemical precursors. Through these meetings, over 100 practical recommendations have led to the creation of two sets of guiding documents on the promotion of public-private partnerships with Internet-related services, highlighting common issues, practical recommendations and easy-to-follow checklists for both Governments and their private sector partners.

26. The application of the recommendations contained in these documents has had practical results, including the identification of suspicious listings offering high-dosage tramadol products and ketamine hydrochloride on a major e-commerce platform in a country in Africa. Government authorities requested the e-commerce company to assist in identifying the vendor, which led to arrests and seizures of illicit products. Similarly, a major e-commerce company operating in Latin America identified multiple suspicious listings of kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*), a non-scheduled plant-based substance, and, utilizing the GRIDS Programme focal point network, was able to share the information with the appropriate authorities, leading to the identification and arrest of the online seller. While these cases resulted in the identification and arrest of those responsible for the marketing of the goods and seizures of illicit substances, such investigations are resource-intensive and in many cases, the contacted platforms simply delete such listings, usually within 24 hours.

<sup>58</sup>E/INCB/2022/4.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

## 4. Internet pharmacies and telemedicine

27. As highlighted by the Board in 2009,<sup>60</sup> the purchase of medicines outside legitimate supply chains was already a growing problem at that time. Recent studies have indicated that this issue persists in two thirds of countries worldwide that do not have laws explicitly regulating Internet sales of medicinal products. This poses a serious public health concern because many consumers use the Internet to self-diagnose and self-treat.<sup>61</sup>

28. The online sale of medicinal products is a growing aspect of health-care systems internationally. Internet pharmacies are platforms that offer to sell substances that require prescriptions, as well as illicit drugs. While there are many legitimate and licensed pharmacies, illegal sites dominate the global market.<sup>62</sup> Prescription drugs are a commonly searched health topic on the Internet, and the global trade in illicit pharmaceuticals is estimated to be worth \$4.4 billion. An international crackdown spearheaded by INTERPOL in 2021 shut down thousands of fake online pharmacies offering illicit products, mostly fake or unauthorized coronavirus disease (COVID-19) testing kits. Other research supports the observation that this is a rapidly growing phenomenon, but the actual size of the market is unknown.<sup>63</sup>

29. Internet pharmacies can be found through a simple online search using the terms “pharmacy”, “pharma” or “pharm”. Such searches elicit results that link to an Internet address (URL) that advertises drugs for sale and contact information. Here, the Internet pharmacies provide information on the availability of various substances, shipping terms and contact information on the eventual transaction and how to exchange the product for money.<sup>64</sup> They also post advertising links by commenting on social media posts on related subjects. In the comments section, they provide information on how to contact them using encrypted,

third-party messaging platforms and respond to enquiries on drug availability and prices.<sup>65</sup>

30. A survey conducted in the United States at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic found that 18 per cent of respondents bought prescription medications online, using social networking sites such as Tumblr, Wickr and Pinterest to identify Internet pharmacies.<sup>66</sup> In a survey of outpatients in Hungary, it was found that respondents who often purchased goods online were more likely to buy medications online.<sup>67</sup> A study comparing perceptions of safety when purchasing prescription drugs online found that Internet pharmacies were perceived as “relatively safe”, while the use of encrypted communication apps (e.g. Kik, QQ, Telegram and WeChat) to transact drug sales was perceived as less safe. Men were more likely to perceive all online platforms as at least somewhat safe.<sup>68</sup>

31. The key problem with Internet pharmacies is that no accountability exists to ensure the quality of purchased products. Estimates suggest that 96 per cent of Internet pharmacies fail to adhere to legal and safety requirements, and some have even stolen customer credit card information. It is impossible for consumers to assess whether drugs purchased from Internet pharmacies are counterfeit, unapproved or even illegal. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 50 per cent of medicines purchased from illegal sites are counterfeit.<sup>69</sup> Falsified medicines may be harmful, as they can contain low levels of active ingredients, substandard ingredients or even the wrong ingredients. Many Internet pharmacies do not ask for proof of the required medical prescription issued by the consumer’s physician. They may ask potential buyers to fill in a medical questionnaire, but such questionnaires are often incomplete.<sup>70</sup> Dubious marketing strategies exacerbate all these issues. Many Internet pharmacies do not declare the side effects of the drugs they offer for sale while advertising in a persuasive fashion that reveals an interest in sales and profits rather than consumer safety.

<sup>60</sup>Guidelines for Governments on Preventing the Illegal Sale of Internationally Controlled Substances through the Internet (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.XI.6).

<sup>61</sup>Hock, Xuan Lee and Wah Chan, “Regulating online pharmacies”.

<sup>62</sup>András Fittler and others, “Consumers turning to the Internet pharmacy market: cross-sectional study on the frequency and attitudes of Hungarian patients purchasing medications online”, *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, vol. 20, No. 8 (August 2018); and Neal Shah, Jiawei Li and Tim K. Mackey, “An unsupervised machine learning approach for the detection and characterization of illicit drug-dealing comments and interactions on Instagram”, *Substance Abuse*, vol. 43, No. 1 (2022), pp. 273–277.

<sup>63</sup>INTERPOL “Thousands of fake online pharmacies shut down in INTERPOL operation”, 8 June 2021; INTERPOL, “USD 11 million in illicit medicines seized in global INTERPOL operation”, 20 July 2022; and Grazia Orizio and others, “‘Save 30% if you buy today’: online pharmacies and the enhancement of peripheral thinking in consumers”, *Pharmacoeconomics and Drug Safety*, vol. 19, No. 9 (September 2010), pp. 970–976.

<sup>64</sup>Orizio and others, “‘Save 30% if you buy today’”.

<sup>65</sup>Shah, Li and Mackey, “An unsupervised machine learning approach”.

<sup>66</sup>Charlotte Moureaud and others, “Purchase of prescription medicines via social media: a survey-based study of prevalence, risk perceptions, and motivations”, *Health Policy*, vol. 125, No. 11 (November 2021), pp. 1421–1429.

<sup>67</sup>Fittler and others, “Consumers turning to the internet pharmacy market”.

<sup>68</sup>Moureaud and others, “Purchase of prescription medicines via social media”.

<sup>69</sup>Hock, Xuan Lee and Wah Chan, “Regulating online pharmacies”; Bryan A. Liang and Tim Mackey, “Searching for safety: addressing search engine, website, and provider accountability for illicit online drug sales”, *American Journal of Law and Medicine*, vol. 35, No. 1 (2009), pp. 125–184; and Orizio and others, “‘Save 30% if you buy today’”.

<sup>70</sup>European Medicines Agency, “Buying medicines online”. Available at [www.ema.europa.eu](http://www.ema.europa.eu); and Moureaud and others, “Purchase of prescription medicines via social media”.

## 5. Consequences for drug trafficking and the non-medical use of drugs

32. The Internet has increased international trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals. Transnational organized criminal groups purchase the requisite chemicals, sold as “research chemicals”, from clandestine chemical manufacturers to produce potent new psychoactive substances.<sup>71</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, those criminal groups demonstrated that they were able to adapt and find alternative sources when lockdowns thwarted their original suppliers.<sup>72</sup> With regard to the international trade in precursor chemicals, the Internet has led to an increase in offers for these substances. Most precursor chemicals are “dual use”, and owing to the large volumes of licit trade, it is easy for traffickers to procure the substances, and difficult for law enforcement authorities to detect. For several years, suspicious online posts related to precursors have prompted criminal investigations and led to seizures of diverted precursors and the arrest of traffickers.

33. For Governments and law enforcement, there are challenges associated with investigations into posts on the surface web. The information gathered from monitoring Internet activity and accessing search records can provide an indication of traffickers’ interest in specific non-controlled chemicals. For example, INCB observed a positive correlation between the number of Internet search records of a particular MDMA precursor (3,4-MDP-2-P ethyl glycidate) and the number and scale of seizures of that same precursor. Since the substance has no licit use, an increase in search records concurrent with an increase in seizures may serve as a proxy for illicit drug manufacturing.<sup>73</sup>

34. The trend towards the use of conventional social networking sites and encrypted apps indicates increasingly localized distribution in combination with rapid availability. At the regional and local levels, the last step of drug distribution, it is difficult for law enforcement authorities to disrupt transactions between sellers and buyers given their ability to change meeting locations. This localized online distribution may prove to be more transformative in the longer run than other Internet-driven supply models. The utilization of global navigation satellite system technology and drop-off caches may further exacerbate this growth in availability.

<sup>71</sup>Jonathan Caulkins, “Radical technological breakthroughs in drugs and drug markets: the cases of cannabis and fentanyl”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 94, art. No. 103162 (August 2021); and Bryce Pardo and others, “The dawn of a new synthetic opioid era: the need for innovative interventions”, *Addiction*, vol. 116, No. 6 (June 2021), pp. 1304–1312.

<sup>72</sup>*World Drug Report 2021*, booklet 5, *COVID-19 and Drugs: Impact and Outlook* (United Nations publication, 2021).

<sup>73</sup>E/INCB/2022/4, paras. 201–203.

35. That availability has also increased the types of drugs that are otherwise difficult to procure in conventional markets.<sup>74</sup> Hallucinogens such as lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and psilocybin (hallucinogenic mushrooms) are widely available online. Other strictly regulated substances containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are also available through Internet-based markets. The misuse of prescription psychiatric drugs is an increasing global health problem. These products encompass sedatives, central nervous system stimulants and other drugs, including antidepressants, antipsychotics, mood stabilizers and anti-dementia drugs. Although they are available online, their presence is still negligible. An important exception is drugs used in the treatment of opioid dependency; these have a substantial online presence, not only in the United States but also in Europe.<sup>75</sup>

36. The online presence of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids is a serious cause for concern. The continuous introduction of new and modified versions of synthetic opioids challenges regulatory and law enforcement authorities internationally.<sup>76</sup> Many cryptomarkets have rules against fentanyl, and administrators attempt to ban predatory vendors, but such vendors still manage to sell it covertly. About 10 per cent of cryptomarket drug listings are for opioids, and less than 1 per cent of all drug advertisements are for fentanyl. With some 300 active fentanyl vendors, there was an estimated 27.3 to 39.3 kg on the market during the period 2 January to 27 March 2019<sup>77</sup> (1 kg of fentanyl has the potential to kill 500,000 people).<sup>78</sup>

## 6. Online information-sharing

37. People who use drugs share tips and dosing advice on various discussion forums.<sup>79</sup> While this information-sharing reflects an increase in marketing, it can also strengthen

<sup>74</sup>*World Drug Report 2023*, booklet 2.

<sup>75</sup>Jack Cunliffe, David Décary-Héту and Thomas A. Pollak, “Non-medical prescription psychiatric drug use and the darknet: a cryptomarket analysis”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 73 (2019), pp. 263–272; and Isak Ladegaard, “Instantly hooked? Freebies and samples of opioids, cannabis, MDMA, and other drugs in an illicit E-commerce market”, *Journal of Drug Issues*, vol. 48, No. 2 (April 2018), pp. 226–245.

<sup>76</sup>Kim Moeller and Bengt Svensson, “‘Shop until you drop’: valuing fentanyl analogs on a Swedish Internet forum”, *Journal of Drug Issues*, vol. 51, No. 1 (January 2021), pp. 181–195; and Pardo and others, “The dawn of a new synthetic opioid era”.

<sup>77</sup>Roderic Broadhurst, Matthew Ball and Harshit Trivedi, “Fentanyl availability on darknet markets”, *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, vol. 590 (2020), pp. 1–14; and Maras and others, “Decoding hidden darknet networks”.

<sup>78</sup>United States, DEA, “Facts about fentanyl”. Available at [www.dea.gov/resources/facts-about-fentanyl](http://www.dea.gov/resources/facts-about-fentanyl).

<sup>79</sup>Aldridge, Stevens and Barratt, “Will growth in cryptomarket drug buying increase”.

efforts to reduce the adverse consequences of drug use. Drug-checking services can achieve a wider reach by using the Internet to communicate warnings. Such services analyse samples often provided by people who use “ecstasy” in connection with the electronic dance music scene. They can identify discrepancies between what people who use drugs think they are using and what they are actually consuming. The Internet provides a vehicle for rapidly sharing this information with other people using these substances. In cases where drugs are adulterated with dangerous substances or have unusually high potency, this information can save lives. Most people seeking information on a drug have never been in touch with drug-checking services before and may harbour a sceptical attitude towards warnings issued by official authorities. An additional benefit of drug-checking services is the identification of new psychoactive substances, which can then be communicated to authorities such as the European Union Early Warning System.<sup>80</sup>

38. There are several discussion forums dedicated to cryptomarket-related topics. Initially, libertarian political discussions were prominent, but they subsided in favour of discussions on more practical logistical issues, such as warnings against fraudulent vendors, unreliable administrators and online security measures. People also discuss the inherent risks of drug use, and because the forums do not prohibit discussions about trafficking, this information can be highly localized and includes warnings about adulterated drugs encountered.<sup>81</sup> While this knowledge-sharing is a positive element, it is unlikely to be associated with significant reductions in health-related costs, as cryptomarket users are seldom the most vulnerable among people who use drugs.<sup>82</sup>

39. With regard to types of drugs that can be manufactured by people who use drugs themselves, instructions on how to do so at low risk can be shared online. Instead of relying on synthesizing regulated precursors for methamphetamine production, people have learned to extract them from processed products that are legal to acquire, and have shared the procedures online.<sup>83</sup> A recent trend involves shifting to custom-made precursors, often “disguised precursors”, that

are closer to the desired end products and thus require little chemical processing.<sup>84</sup>

40. Another unintended side effect of knowledge diffusion through use of the Internet is seen in the influence on the social and cultural norms associated with drug use. The legalization of cannabis in some jurisdictions may have inadvertently reduced informal social control related to cannabis in jurisdictions where it is illegal, contributing to its further normalization. Social media influencers and dispensaries in regions where cannabis is legal promote its use as part of a healthy lifestyle, despite the known health risks.<sup>85</sup>

## 7. International treaties

41. The international drug control conventions can serve as a foundation for extradition and mutual legal assistance. Article 6 of the 1988 Convention covers extradition, and article 7 of the Convention covers mutual legal assistance. Both of these articles are relevant today, even though the Convention predates the widespread use of the Internet. Article 7, paragraph 2, states that mutual legal assistance may be requested for any of the following purposes: (a) taking evidence or statements from persons; (b) effecting service of judicial documents; (c) executing searches and seizures; (d) examining objects and sites; (e) providing information and evidentiary items; (f) providing originals or certified copies of relevant documents and records, including bank, financial, corporate or business records; and (g) identifying or tracing proceeds, property, instrumentalities or other things for evidentiary purposes.

42. To strengthen these efforts further, Member States are currently negotiating a new United Nations cybercrime convention on countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes. Various international organizations (INTERPOL, UNODC, WCO and WHO) are making use of the Internet to improve drug control, and existing international conventions address issues of cybercrime, but there is currently no legally binding international instrument on the subject. A diverse range of

<sup>80</sup>Claudio Vidal Giné and others, “The utility of drug checking services as monitoring tools and more: a response to Pirona et al.”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 45 (2017), pp. 46–47.

<sup>81</sup>Bancroft, “Responsible use to responsible harm”; and Martin, Cunliffe and Munksgaard, *Cryptomarkets*.

<sup>82</sup>Sumnall, “The harm reduction impact of cryptomarkets”.

<sup>83</sup>Sabrina Vidal and David Décarry-Héty, “Shake and bake: exploring drug producers’ adaptability to legal restrictions through online methamphetamine recipes”, *Journal of Drug Issues*, vol. 48, No. 2 (January 2018), pp. 269–284.

<sup>84</sup>Silvia L. Cruz and Raúl Martín-del-Campo, “Synthetic opioids as new psychoactive substances (NPS)”, in *Opioids: Pharmacology, Abuse, and Addiction*, Silvia L. Cruz, ed. (Cham, Switzerland, Springer International Publishing, 2022), pp. 363–383.

<sup>85</sup>Silje Anderdal Bakken and Sidsel Kirstine Harder, “From dealing to influencing: online marketing of cannabis on Instagram”, *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal*, vol. 19, No. 1 (March 2023), pp. 135–157; Brown, Reid and Myers, “Let’s talk about stealing sh\*t”; Samantha Hooper and others, “‘The perfect formula’: evaluating health claims, products and pricing on cannabis dispensary websites in two recently legalized States”, *Substance Use and Misuse*, vol. 57, No. 8 (May 2022), pp. 1207–1214; and Isak Ladegaard, “Cleansing frames: how digital ‘consumer reports’ of cannabis and psychedelics normalise drug-taking and neutralise its counter-cultural potential”, *Sociology* (2023).

stakeholders is providing input for the cybercrime convention: intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, as well as other non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions and companies from the private sector. On the basis of written submissions from Member States, the cybercrime convention will contain chapters on criminalization, general provisions, procedural measures and law enforcement, international cooperation, technical assistance, preventive measures, the mechanism of implementation and final provisions.

## 8. Regulatory efforts

43. National regulatory responses to synthetic opioids and their precursors range from the blanket criminalization of all substances related to a given chemical compound, to individual assessments of substances. When a few countries have less restrictive policies or do not enforce them, it enables others to exploit those loopholes.<sup>86</sup> With regard to synthetic opioids and related substances, this enables offenders to exploit the differences in national regulations and to purchase products in one jurisdiction and sell them at a premium in another. All the steps in this distribution chain are conducted online.<sup>87</sup> Some Governments have put in place specific legislation or regulations that cover Internet posts relating to precursors. According to INCB information, this is the case in India, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and the United States.

44. Illicit Internet pharmacies threaten global patient safety by selling drugs without a prescription directly to the consumer. The current legal, regulatory and law enforcement responses are inadequate. To stem the tide, regulatory authorities are increasingly attempting to use accreditation programmes to address these concerns.<sup>88</sup> The Board is aware of specific regulations applied in some countries, such as China, where all entities that sell precursors over the Internet are required to register with the competent national authorities. Some experts propose making Internet drug sales contingent on licensing through national Internet pharmacy programmes, even suggesting criminal penalties for all parties, including websites, search engines and health-care providers. In 2014, the “pharmacy” domain scheme was introduced to complement national accreditation

systems. Search engine companies require the “verification” of Internet drug sellers but are not legally accountable for facilitating illegal activities. Internet pharmacies based in the European Union must display a common logo on their website that directs to an online list of verified Internet pharmacies.<sup>89</sup>

## 9. Law enforcement action

45. The task of keeping track of all the various synthetic opioids and their analogues and precursors requires international cooperation. National law enforcement agencies need to be equipped with knowledge about the different names used for the chemicals and equipment in order to investigate suspicious posts on the surface web relating to the sale of precursor chemicals. It also requires voluntary cooperation with the private Internet industry and Government-initiated monitoring mechanisms to probe leads shared by INCB.<sup>90</sup> Leads provided by INCB on suspicious Internet posts related to precursors have resulted in seizures and the dismantling of criminal networks. In 2018, an investigation led to the seizure of nearly 10 tons of acetic anhydride, ephedrine and ketamine, as well as the identification of a methamphetamine shipment destined for Australia in 2022.<sup>91</sup>

46. Law enforcement and national judiciary authorities need to be equipped with the necessary tools and resources to respond in a coordinated manner. Trafficking and cybercrime are both priorities, and authorities should pursue multi-agency approaches, engage with industry and establish online investigations units, joint operational international task forces and coordinated actions.<sup>92</sup> Some experts on the investigation of cybercrime note that they currently face legal obstacles in fighting trafficking in precursors, specifically with regard to barriers to the retention of data relating to the registration of Internet protocol addresses and domains.

47. Law enforcement agencies have successfully applied novel investigative measures against trafficking in precursors and non-scheduled chemicals. These measures include

<sup>89</sup>European Medicines Agency, “Buying medicines online”; Hock, Xuan Lee and Wah Chan, “Regulating online pharmacies”; E/INCB/2022/4; and Liang and Mackey, “Searching for safety”.

<sup>90</sup>E/INCB/2021/4.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>EMCDDA and Europol, *EU Drug Markets: Impact of COVID-19*; Harinam, “Dealings on the dark web”; Mehdi Najafi, Hossein Zolfagharinia and Fatemeh Asadi, “Angels against demons: fight against smuggling in an illicit supply chain with uncertain outcomes and unknown structure”, *Computers and Industrial Engineering*, vol. 176, art. No. 109007 (2023); and Lukas Norbutas, Stijn Ruiter and Rense Corten, “Believe it when you see it: dyadic embeddedness and reputation effects on trust in cryptomarkets for illegal drugs”, *Social Networks*, vol. 63 (2020), pp. 150–161.

<sup>86</sup>World Drug Report 2022.

<sup>87</sup>Pardo and others, “The dawn of a new synthetic opioid era”; Peter Reuter, Bryce Pardo and Jirka Taylor, “Imagining a fentanyl future: some consequences of synthetic opioids replacing heroin”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 94, art. No. 103086 (August 2021).

<sup>88</sup>Hock, Xuan Lee and Wah Chan, “Regulating online pharmacies”; and Mackey and Nayyar, “Digital danger”.

the setting up of fake online advertisements for precursors or non-scheduled chemicals on business-to-business websites or social media or other platforms, and the use of sting operations to gather information on both prospective buyers and sellers of related chemicals. Further access to undercover activities would increase efficiency and enable better cross-border cooperation, including electronic data exchange, in investigations.<sup>93</sup> INCB conducted a training exercise on the investigation of suspicious Internet posts relating to precursor chemicals in June 2023. This highlighted the value of tailored training on the specificities of precursor-related Internet posts, which often appear on the surface web, in contrast to new psychoactive substance end products, which mostly appear on the darknet.

## D. INCB support to Governments to prevent exploitation of the Internet

48. In 2009, the Board issued the Guidelines for Governments on Preventing the Illegal Sale of Internationally Controlled Substances through the Internet, which recommended a wide range of actions, including administrative, legislative and regulatory provisions, to be taken by Governments to curb the illegal sale of internationally controlled substances, as recognized in Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 58/3.

49. In addition, the Board has developed practical tools to facilitate the international trade in internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances to ensure the availability of these substances for medical and scientific purposes. Those tools include the International Import and Export Authorization System (I2ES), and the INCB International Drug Control System (IDS) which enables the Board to monitor the utilization of controlled substances. To facilitate the international trade in precursor chemicals while preventing diversion into illicit channels, and to support Governments in addressing trafficking in new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids not under international control, INCB has also developed online systems to monitor trade and facilitate governmental cooperation, information exchange and joint investigations. These tools include PEN Online, PEN Online Light, PICS, IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence. To build the capacity of Governments to implement the three international drug control conventions, INCB Learning e-modules are available to competent national authorities.

<sup>93</sup>E/INCB/2022/4.

50. A further area in which INCB global projects have successfully promoted voluntary cooperation between Governments and e-commerce companies to prevent the misuse of their marketplaces was, in 2021, the targeted, time-bound Operation Acronym focused on trafficking in precursors over the surface web. INCB further assisted in identifying practical obstacles and legal challenges to investigations related to precursors and cybercrime. The obstacles and challenges identified included the following: (a) a lack of national regulations concerning the offering for sale or distribution, or the mediating in the sale or purchase, of precursors through a website or social media; (b) hesitation to initiate investigations into suspicious posts because they might represent scams rather than legitimate trade in precursors; and (c) a lack of sufficient proof of the buyer's or vendor's knowledge that a precursor proposed to be sold or bought online was intended to be used for the illicit manufacture of drugs, leading to a perceived lack of legal grounds to support the initiation of criminal investigations.<sup>94</sup> These obstacles and challenges need to be addressed in order to improve national authorities' ability to launch investigations into suspicious online posts.

51. The global nature of online drug distribution makes collaborative efforts necessary. Reducing trafficking in illicitly manufactured precursors requires recognition of the shared responsibility for preventing their diversion from licit channels and cooperation between national authorities and industry sectors.<sup>95</sup> These efforts are increasingly important for identifying new threats and developing effective responses. The GRIDS Programme builds national capacity to address trafficking in new psychoactive substances, synthetic opioids and their precursors and supports Governments in developing public-private partnerships to prevent the exploitation of the Internet-related service industry, including e-commerce marketplaces, social media, search engines and domain name registries/registrars.<sup>96</sup> The GRIDS Programme consists of online tools that provide the infrastructure to exchange information on organized criminal groups. These tools help prevent trafficking through the misuse of legitimate Internet-related services and include monitoring and surveillance lists for substances with no known legitimate uses. Such substances are used as substitutes for controlled precursors.

52. IONICS enables Governments to share information in real time on incidents involving new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids, while the GRIDS Intelligence tool facilitates communication between Governments on incidents relating to these dangerous

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>E/INCB/2017/4 and E/INCB/2016/1.

<sup>96</sup>E/INCB/2022/1.

substances, including instances in which they are being offered on the Internet.

53. Partnerships with the relevant business-to-business companies are an important element of efforts to provide an effective deterrent to the exploitation of the surface web for trafficking in precursors.<sup>97</sup> The GRIDS Programme provides a platform to foster cooperation with private sector partners working in relevant areas, namely, payment services, chemical and drug manufacturers, postal services, express courier services, freight forwarders, air cargo agents and private postal, express mail and courier services, as well as domain name registrars and newly emerging financial services and products such as e-wallet services, virtual asset service providers and cryptocurrencies. The outcomes of the dialogues between Governments and these sectors have been compiled into several practical guidance publications for practitioners' reference and use.

54. The GRIDS Programme also informs major e-commerce and social media companies that are keen to maintain their platforms free of illicit activities involving offers of suspicious and dangerous substances. The guidance provided includes information on voluntary cooperation measures, the monitoring of and investigations into suspicious posts and the adoption of a balanced approach to preventing Internet-facilitated diversion and smuggling.<sup>98</sup> Recent experiences from targeted operations supported by INCB indicate that follow-up investigations to identify prospective buyers and sellers are also needed to achieve lasting results.

## E. Law enforcement, public health and community responses to address the non-medical use of drugs

55. From a law enforcement perspective, the scale and diversity of illegal Internet-based activity pose considerable challenges for the implementation of the international drug control conventions. Law enforcement agencies worldwide struggle to establish a credible deterrent threat for trafficking offences in the online context, at both the wholesale and retail levels. Focused deterrence can increase the disruptive effects of law enforcement by prioritizing targets based on predefined high-value or high-risk transaction criteria.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>97</sup>E/INCB/2022/4.

<sup>98</sup>E/INCB/2021/1.

<sup>99</sup>EMCDDA and Europol, *EU Drug Markets: Impact of COVID-19*; Najafi, Zolfagharinia, and Asadi, "Angels against demons".

Darknet administrators are targeted in law enforcement crackdowns, arrested and prosecuted. Despite the appearance of new cryptomarkets and the migration of users to them after law enforcement crackdowns, the efforts are not in vain. Targeting the most active offenders reduces crime and creates uncertainty for others involved. That extra uncertainty adds costs throughout the distribution chain, as the demands on operational security procedures increase.<sup>100</sup>

56. Further, adding an element of communication may improve the efficiency of crackdowns.<sup>101</sup> While the Internet makes it difficult to identify targets, it also makes it much easier to contact them. Authorities could communicate to very active vendors that they are being specifically targeted in a programme, and that law enforcement is aware of their activities and is working on de-anonymizing them. This effort is complementary to arrests and is aimed at discouraging users, similar to how warning banners reduce the duration of other types of cybercrime.<sup>102</sup> Like all offending, the online trade in controlled drugs hinges on trust between sellers and buyers. This trust includes trust in the technical competencies of the platform administrators. Successful examples of disrupting that trust include the takeover of sites by law enforcement agencies, which then continue to run the site after arresting the original administrator. Such actions can reduce the overall level of trust among buyers and sellers in the technical infrastructure of the online drug trade, similar to how infiltration by undercover police officers places pressure on drug dealers to adapt their practices.<sup>103</sup>

57. The Internet also provides new avenues for public health and community responses that implement strategies for preventing drug use, providing treatment, aftercare and achieving social reintegration. Community participation and civil society play important roles in that regard.

<sup>100</sup>United States, Department of Justice, "Three Germans who allegedly operated dark web marketplace with over 1 million users"; Department of Justice, "Administrators of DeepDotWeb indicted for money-laundering conspiracy"; Décary-Héту and Giommoni, "Do police crackdowns disrupt drug cryptomarkets?"; Isak Ladegaard, "We know where you are, what you are doing and we will catch you: testing deterrence theory in digital drug markets", *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 58, No. 2 (March 2018), pp. 414–433; and Harold A. Pollack and Peter Reuter, "Does tougher enforcement make drugs more expensive?", *Addiction*, vol. 109, No. 12 (December 2014), pp. 1959–1966.

<sup>101</sup>Nicholas Corsaro, Rod K. Brunson and Edmund F. McGarrell, "Problem-oriented policing and open-air drug markets: examining the Rockford pulling levers deterrence strategy", *Crime and Delinquency*, vol. 59, No. 7 (October 2013), pp. 1085–1107.

<sup>102</sup>David Maimon and Eric R. Louderback, "Cyber-dependent crimes: an interdisciplinary review", *Annual Review of Criminology*, vol. 2 (2019), pp. 191–216.

<sup>103</sup>Bruce A. Jacobs, "Deterrence and deterrability", *Criminology*, vol. 48, No. 2 (May 2010), pp. 417–441; and Rasmus Munksgaard and others, "Better bang for the buck? Generalizing trust in online drug markets", *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 63, No. 4 (July 2023), pp. 906–928.

Drug-checking services are an example that constitutes a form of peer education, information-sharing and counseling, and can even contribute to early warning systems for new psychoactive substances. While those health and community responses have positive attributes, it is important to note that the objective of such measures should be to reduce the adverse consequences of non-medical drug use without condoning or encouraging drug trafficking.<sup>104</sup>

## F. Conclusions and recommendations

58. The Internet offers potential for improving international drug control and preventing non-medical drug use. The international trade in controlled substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes is facilitated through the Internet. Licit Internet pharmacies and telemedicine enable patients in remote locations to access essential medicines and consultations. Ongoing research at the global and national levels can improve the early detection of potential misuse of the Internet and detect non-licensed Internet pharmacies. The online sharing of information among people who use drugs and public health, and community services can reduce the adverse consequences of the non-medical use of drugs, serve as an early warning of new drug use patterns and connect people who use drugs with treatment and other health services. The primordial objective of Government action in this area remains the prevention of substance abuse, in particular among young people.<sup>105</sup> **The Board recommends that Governments conduct drug abuse prevention campaigns, using awareness-raising messages on drug-related risks circulated using social media.**

59. However, the Internet also provides new opportunities for trafficking in and the non-medical use of controlled drugs. The various forms of Internet-facilitated drug and precursor trafficking outlined in this chapter constitute transnational cybercrimes that require effective regulatory and technological actions by Governments, international organizations, and the private sector. The challenges posed by the various incarnations of Internet-facilitated drug trafficking – the use of cryptomarkets, social networking sites, encrypted apps, e-commerce platforms and illicit Internet pharmacies – all require legislative and policy measures to address their unique roles in trafficking in narcotic

drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals.<sup>106</sup> The global proliferation of legitimate online platforms for communication and trade in goods and services enables illegal traders to adapt such platforms to achieve their ends. Global communication and commerce increasingly rely on advances in information technology and digitalization. These advances also facilitate illegal activities, as more criminal offences are occurring online while merging with criminal offences occurring offline.<sup>107</sup> Even at the highest levels of the illicit global drug trade, contact is facilitated by the Internet and encrypted communications and growth in drug distribution using social media leads to an increase in the promotion of drugs at the regional level, increased availability and knowledge-sharing between people who use drugs.<sup>108</sup> Governments are therefore urged to ensure that the legal and operational means are available to prosecute illegal marketplaces operating on social media platforms.

60. Meeting these challenges requires cooperation between international organizations, national Governments, regulatory authorities and private companies working in the relevant sectors. The issues associated with identifying illegal content on the Internet are not limited to trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals. This question concerns a much broader problem of addressing online content that promotes illegal behaviours. Finding an appropriate balance between the interests of individuals, the public and the businesses concerned is difficult and contingent on time and place. Different countries have very different legal traditions, which complicates efforts to restrict an international phenomenon. The international community needs to consider this issue collectively, drawing on the expertise, across various organizations, of specialists in cybercrime and money-laundering as well as trafficking in drugs and firearms, counterfeiting and other forms of smuggling.<sup>109</sup>

61. These ongoing efforts are currently reliant on voluntary cooperation between Governments and social media companies. Internet-facilitated drug trafficking using conventional social media requires new and concurrent responses based on public-private partnerships. The potential for restricting this trade can be illustrated by the international cooperation around improved cooperation with Internet pharmacies. The aim is to engage the public and private sectors and civil society in new and innovative

<sup>104</sup>E/INCB/2016/1.

<sup>105</sup>E/INCB/2019/1.

<sup>106</sup>Hoffman, “Shedding light on telemedicine and online prescribing”; Mackey and Nayyar, “Digital danger”; and Tim K. Mackey, Liang and Strathdee, “Digital social media, youth, and nonmedical use of prescription drugs”.

<sup>107</sup>EMCDDA and Europol, *EU Drug Markets: Impact of COVID-19*; and Maimon and Louderback, “Cyber-dependent crimes”.

<sup>108</sup>World Drug Report 2023, booklet 2.

<sup>109</sup>E/INCB/2022/1.



ways.<sup>110</sup> Law enforcement investigations are most efficient when delivery couriers, financial service providers and Internet companies help enforce e-commerce regulations. Public-private partnerships aimed at regulating the e-commerce of medicinal products effectively should consist of implementing industry guidelines, advisories and warnings. Legislation should address the risks associated with illegitimate Internet pharmacies. Legal frameworks are fundamentally national and extradition requests involving suspects need to be harmonized on the basis of treaties or conventions.<sup>111</sup> The Board encourages States parties to develop private sector partnerships with those vulnerable-to-exploitation private sector entities to foster voluntary actions to protect the integrity, reputation and security of their services. This includes allocating sufficient resources and building national capacities and capabilities in the field of online investigations and improved cooperation at the national and international levels to develop an early detection system for Internet-based offences.

62. This requires a longer-term effort to build international consensus and improve the capacity of Governments to engage with the private sector. Public-private partnerships should include key industries, academia and non-governmental organizations working with people who use drugs in the development of effective responses. INCB is active in this area and, through Governments, engages several key industries from the private sector in the form of social media companies, online payment services and information technology providers.<sup>112</sup> The global nature of the Internet-based services used for trafficking gives rise to difficult questions regarding the provision of mutual legal assistance between national Governments and regulatory agencies. International action against traffickers is complicated by jurisdictional issues and differences in national legal standards relating to the authenticity of evidence gathered and the chain of evidence.

63. **In particular, with regard to the Board's efforts under its GRIDS Programme to assist Governments in addressing the threat posed by synthetic drugs, States parties are encouraged to:**

- **Identify private sector companies, industry associations and related stakeholders vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers of synthetic drugs, such as business-to-business, business-to-consumer and search engine services, Internet registries/registrars, social media and online financial services, so that they may work with them to help**

**prevent the trafficking of dangerous substances using Internet-related services.**

- **Use the OPIOIDS project's fentanyl-related substances list, and the Project's other lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate medical, scientific or industrial use, to encourage industry partners voluntarily to refrain from any manufacture, marketing, import, export or distribution of the substances on those lists except for the purposes of research and analysis.**
- **Work with the GRIDS Programme to facilitate public-private partnership engagement, dialogue and cooperation between Governments and industry using tools such as the Board's "Practical guidance for voluntary cooperation for e-commerce and Internet-related services by Government and industry to prevent trafficking of synthetic opioids, fentanyls and related dangerous substances".**
- **Nominate active GRIDS Programme enforcement focal points in their national police, customs, postal, health regulatory and drug control agencies to exchange suspicious shipment and seizure information through the INCB IONICS system to help foster joint actions with the private sector to deny, disrupt and dismantle trafficking networks that exploit Internet-related and e-commerce services.**
- **Utilize the real-time counter-trafficking tools available through IONICS, including GRIDS Intelligence HD, ELITE and other tools, to develop actionable intelligence that identifies and links traffickers that exploit Internet-related and e-commerce services.**

<sup>110</sup>E/INCB/2021/1.

<sup>111</sup>Hock, Xuan Lee and Wah Chan, "Regulating online pharmacies".

<sup>112</sup>EMCDDA and Europol, *EU Drug Markets: Impact of COVID-19*; and E/INCB/2022/1.



# Chapter II.

## Functioning of the international drug control system

### A. Promoting the consistent application of the international drug control treaties

64. The international drug control legal framework consists of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, as amended by the 1972 Protocol, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988. Together, these three instruments have been recognized by the international community as constituting the cornerstone of the international drug control system.

65. These conventions establish the legal framework for the licit trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals. They require States parties to create administrative structures responsible for monitoring the production and manufacture of and trade in substances scheduled under the conventions and they establish obligations for States parties to report to the Board on, inter alia, their expected licit requirements, actual consumption, international trade and seizures.

66. The conventions are aimed at fostering the availability of controlled substances for medical, scientific or industrial use while preventing their diversion into illicit channels. They also limit the production, manufacture, export, import and distribution of, trade in and possession of drugs exclusively to medical and scientific purposes.

67. In addition, the conventions contain provisions related to the treatment of drug-related behaviours, including the obligation for States parties to make certain drug-related

behaviours punishable offences. Furthermore, they provide that criminal justice responses to suspected drug-related crime should be consistent with the principle of proportionality and, accordingly, that crimes of lesser gravity may be subject to lesser penalties and crimes committed by people who use drugs may be dealt with through alternative measures to conviction or punishment, including measures of treatment, education, aftercare, rehabilitation and social reintegration.

68. The conventions also provide a legal basis for international cooperation, extradition and mutual legal assistance and require States parties to develop strategies aimed at prevention, and frameworks for the treatment and rehabilitation of people affected by drug use and dependence.

#### 1. Status of adherence to the international drug control treaties

69. The international drug control conventions continue to number among the most widely ratified international instruments, enjoying near universal adherence.

70. As at 1 November 2023, the 1961 Convention as amended had been ratified or acceded to by 186 States. Only 10 States had yet to become parties, namely, the Cook Islands, Equatorial Guinea, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, South Sudan, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Chad has ratified the 1961 Convention in its unamended form.

71. The number of States parties to the 1971 Convention remained at 184 during the period under review. Thirteen States had not yet become parties to that Convention, namely, the Cook Islands, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, Kiribati,

Liberia, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

72. The 1988 Convention remains the most widely ratified of the three international drug control conventions, having 192 parties (191 States and the European Union) after South Sudan deposited its accession on 20 October 2023. Equatorial Guinea, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Somalia and Tuvalu have yet to accede.

**73. The Board reiterates that universal ratification of the drug control conventions is imperative for strengthening the international drug control legal framework and for ensuring that traffickers do not target non-parties owing to actual or perceived weaknesses in the scope of control of scheduled substances.**

**74. Consequently, and in the spirit of common and shared responsibility, the Board encourages those States that have yet to accede to one or more of the international drug control conventions to do so without delay and to ensure their comprehensive implementation into national law. To that end, in the exercise of its mandate, INCB stands ready to assist in whatever manner is needed.**

## 2. Changes to the scheduling of substances under international control

### Narcotic drugs

75. On 15 March 2023, at its sixty-sixth session, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs decided, on the basis of the recommendations by WHO, to place etazene, etonitazepine, 2-methyl-AP-237 and protonitazene in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended. The decision of the Commission became effective with respect to each party on the date of receipt of the official communication by the Secretary-General.

### Psychotropic substances

76. Also at its sixty-sixth session, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs decided, by its decisions 66/5, 66/6 and 66/7, to include ADB-BUTINACA, *alpha*-PiHP and 3-methylmethcathinone in Schedule II of the 1971 Convention, bringing the total number of substances controlled under the 1971 Convention to 170.

77. The scheduling decision became fully effective on 13 November 2023, namely, 180 days after the date of communication by the Secretary-General.

### Precursor chemicals

78. In June 2023, the Board notified the Secretary-General of two series of closely related precursors of, respectively, amphetamine and methamphetamine, and “ecstasy”-type substances, proposing that they be included in the tables of the 1988 Convention. The proposal was made in response to a significant increase in seizures of P-2-P methyl glycidic acid and its methyl ester (“BMK glycidate”), and of the ethyl ester of 3,4-MDP-2-P methyl glycidic acid (“PMK ethyl glycidate”), which are alternative precursors to, respectively, P-2-P and 3,4-MDP-2-P, two precursors already under international control. The proposal, to include a total of 16 substances (esters and acids), was also made in line with Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 65/3 of March 2022.

79. In addition, in July 2023, the Government of the United States of America proposed that two precursors of fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances, namely, 4-piperidone and 1-boc-4-piperidone, also be included in the tables of the 1988 Convention.

80. Pursuant to the procedure set out in article 12, paragraph 3, of the 1988 Convention, Governments were invited to submit their comments and supplementary information for each of the 18 chemicals listed in the proposals to assist the Board in establishing assessments and making scheduling recommendations to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-seventh session.

81. In November 2023, following the analysis of information received from Member States, INCB recommended the scheduling of all 18 substances in Table I of the 1988 Convention. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs was to vote on the proposals in March 2024.

## 3. Submission of information by Governments to the Board

### (a) Statistical reports for narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals

82. In accordance with its mandate, the Board publishes its annual report and the report on the implementation of

article 12 of the 1988 Convention. The Board also publishes technical reports that provide Governments with an analysis of statistical information on the manufacture, consumption, utilization and stocks of and trade in internationally controlled substances, together with an analysis of estimates and assessments of requirements for those substances.

83. The Board's reports and technical publications are produced on the basis of information that parties to the international drug control treaties are obligated to submit. In addition, pursuant to resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Governments voluntarily provide information in order to facilitate an accurate and comprehensive evaluation of the functioning of the international drug and precursor control system.

84. The data and other information received from Governments enable the Board to monitor licit activities involving narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals and to evaluate treaty compliance and the overall functioning of the international drug and precursor control system. On the basis of its analysis, the Board makes recommendations to improve the workings of the system with a view to ensuring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical, scientific and industrial needs, while at the same time preventing their diversion from licit into illicit channels.

## Narcotic drugs

85. As at 1 November 2023, the Board had received annual statistical reports from 155 States (both parties and non-parties) and territories on the production, manufacture, consumption, utilization, stocks and seizures of narcotic drugs covering the calendar year 2022 (form C), or about 72 per cent of those requested. That number was slightly lower than the number of reports for 2021 received by 7 September 2022.

86. A total of 117 Governments, or 45 per cent of all Governments providing data, submitted their statistical forms on time, that is, by the deadline of 30 June 2023, which was fewer than in 2022 (121 Governments). As at 1 November 2023, 59 Governments (28 per cent) had not submitted their annual statistics for 2022. It is expected that several additional countries and territories will be submitting their data over the coming months. Of the countries and territories that have not submitted their reports, the majority are in Africa and the Americas (including the Caribbean), followed by Asia and Oceania; two European countries have not provided their annual statistical form. Some of those countries are in conflict and post-conflict

situations, which create additional obstacles to their drug control efforts, in addition to a general lack of human and financial resources.

87. Most countries that produce, manufacture, import, export or consume large amounts of narcotic drugs submitted annual statistics, although of differing quality. Accurate, complete and timely reporting is an important indicator of the effectiveness and efficiency of drug control systems, and the availability of good data is vital for the Board to accurately carry out the monitoring function accorded to it under the international drug control treaties. The quality of some data is a concern for the Board, in particular if they are data from major producing and manufacturing countries, as they indicate deficiencies in national mechanisms for regulating and monitoring internationally controlled substances. The Board urges Governments to continue to strengthen their national mechanisms to monitor the cultivation, production and manufacture of and trade in controlled substances. This may be achieved, in part, by improving and developing national data-collection systems, training staff of the competent national authorities and ensuring close cooperation with companies licensed to deal with internationally controlled substances.

88. As at 1 November 2023, the complete set of four quarterly statistics of imports and exports of narcotic drugs for 2022 (form A) had been received from 146 Governments (135 countries and 11 territories), or about 69 per cent of the 213 Governments requested. In addition, 26 Governments (about 12 per cent) had submitted at least one quarterly report. A total of 41 countries (about 19 per cent) had failed to submit any quarterly statistics for 2022.

## Psychotropic substances

89. The number of annual statistical reports on psychotropic substances submitted for 2022 (form P), in accordance with article 16 of the 1971 Convention, increased in comparison with the number submitted for the previous year. As at 1 November 2023, annual statistical reports for 2022 had been submitted by 154 countries and 13 territories. Of the 184 States parties to the 1971 Convention, 149 States parties, or 81 per cent, had submitted their annual statistical reports; and 100, or 67 per cent, of those 149 States parties had submitted their reports by the 30 June deadline. A small number of States parties continued to submit statistics through partner countries. Furthermore, the Board received annual statistics from four States that are not parties to the Convention but that submit national data on a voluntary basis. Additionally, for the first time, the Board obtained the annual statistics from San Marino, the statistical data of which had previously been included in those of Italy.

90. In addition, 113 Governments voluntarily submitted all four quarterly statistical reports for 2022 on imports and exports of substances listed in Schedule II of the 1971 Convention, as requested by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1981/7, and a further 31 Governments submitted at least one quarterly report for 2022. The Board notes with satisfaction the good rate of submission of the annual statistical reports on psychotropic substances for 2022 and the number of non-parties and territories that have submitted an annual report.

91. The Board notes with concern the high percentage of States parties that did not furnish form P. A total of 19 countries and territories in Africa failed to furnish form P for 2022. Likewise, 10 countries and territories in Oceania, 8 countries and territories in Asia, 8 countries in Central America and the Caribbean, 2 countries in Europe and 1 country in South America failed to furnish form P for 2022. Form P for 2022 was furnished by all countries in North America.

92. The Board takes note of the countries that have provided data regarding their use of psychotropic substances for the manufacture of preparations exempted from some measures of control pursuant to article 3 of the 1971 Convention: 12 countries reported using 37 substances for such purposes in 2022. **The Board recalls recommendation 13 of its annual report for 2019,<sup>113</sup> in which it called upon Governments to ensure that all aspects of article 3 of the 1971 Convention were correctly implemented if they wished to exempt a preparation from certain measures of control.**

93. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolutions 1985/15 and 1987/30, requested Governments to provide the Board with details on trade (data broken down by country of origin and destination) in substances listed in Schedules III and IV of the 1971 Convention in their annual statistical reports on psychotropic substances. As at 1 November 2022, complete details on such trade had been submitted by 152 Governments (91 per cent of all submissions of form P for 2022). A further 15 Governments submitted blank forms or forms containing incomplete trade data for 2022.

94. The Board notes with appreciation that a number of countries have already submitted consumption data for psychotropic substances on a voluntary basis, in accordance with Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 54/6.

95. For 2022, a total of 99 countries and territories submitted data on the consumption of some or all psychotropic substances. The Board appreciates the cooperation of the Governments concerned and calls upon all Governments

to report on the consumption of psychotropic substances on an annual basis, pursuant to Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 54/6, as such data are essential for an improved evaluation of the availability of psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes.

96. The Board notes with appreciation that reports on seizures of psychotropic substances were furnished by the Governments of Algeria, India and Iran (Islamic Republic of). **The Board acknowledges the interdiction efforts of the Governments concerned and reiterates its call for all Governments to furnish directly to the Board any information on interdictions of attempted diversions of psychotropic substances and keep it apprised of any developments in their trafficking.**

## Precursor chemicals

97. In accordance with article 12 of the 1988 Convention, parties are obliged to furnish information on substances frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. That information, provided on form D, assists the Board in monitoring and identifying trends in trafficking in precursors and the illicit manufacture of drugs. It also enables the Board to provide Governments with recommendations concerning remedial action and policies, as necessary.

98. As at 1 November 2023, a total of 114 Governments, including about 60 per cent of the States parties to the 1988 Convention, had submitted form D for 2022. However, the Board's analysis of the global precursor situation continued to be affected by late submission, the submission of incomplete or entirely blank forms, and the inability of some Governments to gather information at the national level and consolidate it into a single submission. For example, of the States parties that provided data on form D for 2022, only 68 reported the mandatory information on seizures of substances listed in Table I or Table II of the 1988 Convention, and only 56 reported seizures of non-scheduled substances. The level of the provision of details on the methods of diversion and illicit manufacture remained an issue of concern, as in previous years.

99. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/20, Governments are also requested to provide information regarding their licit trade in substances listed in Table I and Table II of the 1988 Convention on a voluntary and confidential basis. As at 1 November 2023, 105 States parties had provided such information for 2022 to the Board, and 91 had furnished data on licit uses of and/or requirements for one or more of the substances listed in Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention.

<sup>113</sup>E/INCB/2019/1, para. 806.

100. Information shared through the Board's Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS) continued to complement the aggregated seizure data received annually from Governments through form D. Specifically, the real-time communication of information on individual chemical and equipment-related incidents has provided concrete leads for national authorities to initiate backtracking investigations and cooperation to identify those responsible for diversion and trafficking.

101. As at 1 November 2023, PICS had registered users from more than 300 agencies in 130 countries. They shared almost 500 new incidents during the reporting period.

102. The seizure data reported and a detailed analysis of the latest trends and developments in trafficking in precursor chemicals under international control, as well as their non-scheduled substitutes and alternatives, can be found in the report of the Board for 2023 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.<sup>114</sup>

## (b) Estimates for narcotic drugs, assessments for psychotropic substances and annual legitimate requirements for precursor chemicals

### Narcotic drugs

103. The estimates of annual legitimate requirements for narcotic drugs and the assessments of annual legitimate requirements for psychotropic substances are essential pillars of the international drug control system. They enable both exporting and importing countries to ensure that trade in those substances stays within the limits determined by the Governments of importing countries and that diversion of controlled substances from international trade is effectively prevented. For narcotic drugs, the estimates of annual legitimate requirements are mandatory under the 1961 Convention as amended, and the estimates furnished by Governments need to be confirmed by the Board before becoming the basis for calculating the limits on manufacture and import. As at 20 November 2023, the Governments of 177 countries and territories, or 82.7 per cent of those requested, had submitted estimates of requirements for narcotic drugs for 2024. To ensure that Governments may import narcotic drugs for medical and scientific purposes, estimates are established by the Board for countries that are unable to supply them. In 2023, a total of 39 countries, in all regions of the world, operated on the basis of estimates established for them by the Board.

104. Governments are obliged to comply with the limits on imports and exports of narcotic drugs provided for under articles 21 and 31 of the 1961 Convention as amended. Article 21 stipulates, *inter alia*, that the total of the quantities of each drug manufactured and imported by any country or territory in a given year is not to exceed the sum of the following: (a) the quantity consumed for medical and scientific purposes; (b) the quantity used, within the limits of the relevant estimates, for the manufacture of other drugs, preparations in schedule III and of substances not covered by the 1961 Convention; (c) the quantity exported; (d) the quantity added to the stock for the purpose of bringing that stock up to the level specified in the relevant estimate; and (e) the quantity acquired within the limit of the relevant estimate for special purposes. Article 31 requires all exporting countries to limit the export of narcotic drugs to any country or territory to quantities that fall within the limits of the total of the estimates of the importing country or territory, with the addition of the amounts intended for re-export.

105. The system of imports and exports continues to be implemented by Governments without major challenges. In 2023, a total of 15 countries were contacted regarding possible excess imports or excess exports identified with regard to international trade in narcotic drugs that had been effected during 2022. As at 1 November 2023, five of those countries had responded. The Board continues to pursue the matter with those countries that have not responded.

### Psychotropic substances

106. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolutions 1981/7 and 1991/44, Governments are requested to provide to the Board assessments of annual domestic medical and scientific requirements for psychotropic substances listed in Schedules II, III and IV of the 1971 Convention. The assessments received are communicated to all States and territories to assist the competent authorities of exporting countries when approving exports of psychotropic substances. As at 1 November 2023, the Governments of all countries and territories except South Sudan (for which assessments were established by the Board in 2011) had submitted at least one assessment of their annual medical requirements for psychotropic substances.

107. However, 60 Governments have not submitted a full revision of their legitimate requirements for psychotropic substances for three years or more. The assessments valid for those countries and territories may therefore no longer reflect their actual medical and scientific requirements for such substances.

<sup>114</sup>E/INCB/2023/4.

108. When assessments are lower than the actual legitimate requirements, the importation of psychotropic substances needed for medical or scientific purposes may be delayed. When assessments are significantly higher than legitimate needs, the risk of psychotropic substances being diverted into illicit channels may be increased.

109. As in previous years, the system of assessments of annual requirements for psychotropic substances continues to function well and is respected by most countries and territories. In 2022, the authorities of 18 countries issued import authorizations for substances for which they had not established any such assessments or for quantities that significantly exceeded their assessments. No country was identified as having exported psychotropic substances in quantities exceeding the relevant assessment.

**110. The Board recommends that Governments continue to strengthen the capacity of competent national authorities to adequately estimate their medical and scientific requirements for narcotic drugs and assessments for psychotropic substances, including through the use of globally available e-learning modules, and also recommends that Governments enhance domestic data-collection mechanisms so that they can present estimates and assessments that reflect the national requirements used for medical purposes. The Board further recommends that Governments review and update the assessments of their annual medical and scientific requirements for psychotropic substances at least once every three years.**

## Precursor chemicals

111. In the context of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. The provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, 3,4-MDP-2-P and P-2-P, as well as, to the extent possible, preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means. The estimates are aimed at informing exporting countries about the legitimate requirements of importing countries for those substances, thus preventing their over-supply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes.

112. As at 1 November 2023, 185 Governments had provided an estimate of their annual legitimate requirement for at least one of the above-mentioned precursor chemicals. During the reporting period, 105 Governments reconfirmed

or updated their annual legitimate requirements for at least one substance.

113. Governments provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants and their preparations to the Board mostly on form D and can update them at any time throughout the year by means of individual communications. The latest annual legitimate requirements, as submitted by countries and territories, are regularly updated and published on a dedicated page of the Board's website. Annual legitimate requirements are also available to registered users through the PEN Online system.

114. Further details related to annual legitimate requirements can be found in the report of the Board for 2023 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention. In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled "Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine" are available on the Board's website.

## 4. Efforts to prevent diversion from international trade

115. The system of control measures laid down in the 1961 Convention as amended provides for the monitoring of international trade in narcotic drugs to prevent the diversion of such drugs into illicit channels. As a result of the almost universal implementation of the control measures stipulated in the 1971 Convention and the relevant Economic and Social Council resolutions, there has been only one identified case involving the diversion of psychotropic substances from international trade into illicit channels in recent years. In addition, the 1988 Convention requires parties to prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals from international trade to the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. The Board has developed various systems to monitor compliance with that aspect of the 1988 Convention and to facilitate cooperation between Governments to that end.

### Requirement for import and export authorizations

116. The universal application of the requirement for import and export authorizations laid down in the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention is key to preventing the diversion of drugs into the illicit market.



Such authorizations are required for transactions involving any of the substances controlled under the 1961 Convention as amended or listed in Schedules I and II of the 1971 Convention.

117. Competent national authorities are required by those conventions to issue import authorizations for transactions involving the importation of such substances into their country. The competent national authorities of exporting countries must verify the authenticity of such import authorizations before issuing the export authorizations required to allow shipments containing the substances to leave their countries. Information on the use of electronic import and export authorizations for trade in internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances is provided in paragraphs 308–314 of the present report.

118. The 1971 Convention does not require import and export authorizations for trade in the psychotropic substances listed in its Schedules III and IV. However, in view of the widespread diversion of those substances from licit international trade during the 1970s and 1980s, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolutions 1985/15, 1987/30 and 1993/38, requested Governments to extend the system of import and export authorizations to cover those psychotropic substances as well.

119. Most countries and territories have already introduced an import and export authorization requirement for psychotropic substances listed in Schedules III and IV of the 1971 Convention, in accordance with the above-mentioned Economic and Social Council resolutions. As at 1 November 2023, specific information had been made available to the Board by 205 countries and territories, showing that all major importing and exporting countries and territories now require import and export authorizations for all psychotropic substances listed in Schedules III and IV of the 1971 Convention. Upon request, the Board will make available, to all Governments, a table showing the import authorization requirements for substances listed in Schedules III and IV pursuant to the relevant Economic and Social Council resolutions. That table is also published in the secure area of the Board's website, which is accessible only to specifically authorized government officials, so that the competent national authorities of exporting countries may be informed as soon as possible of changes in import authorization requirements in importing countries.

120. **The Board reiterates its call to the Governments of the few remaining States in which national legislation and/or regulations do not yet require import and export authorizations for all psychotropic substances, regardless of whether they are States parties to the 1971 Convention, to extend such controls to all substances**

**listed in Schedules III and IV of the 1971 Convention as soon as possible and to inform the Board in that regard.**

## Discrepancies in international trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances

121. Discrepancies in government reports on international trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are regularly investigated with the competent authorities of the relevant countries to ensure that no diversion from licit international trade has taken place. Those investigations may reveal shortcomings in the implementation of control measures, including the failure of companies to comply with national drug control provisions.

122. Since June 2023, investigations regarding discrepancies for 2022 related to international trade in narcotic drugs have been initiated with 54 countries. As at 1 November 2023, replies had been received from 27 countries. The responses indicated that the discrepancies had been caused by clerical and technical errors in preparing the reports, reporting on exports or imports of preparations in Schedule III of the 1961 Convention as amended without indicating it on the form, or inadvertent reporting of transit countries as trading partners. In some cases, countries confirmed the quantities reported by them, resulting in the initiation of follow-up investigations with their trading partners. The Board encourages the countries that have not yet replied to investigate the discrepancies as a matter of urgency and to inform it of their findings.

123. Similarly, with regard to the international trade in psychotropic substances, investigations relating to data quality concerns for 2021 data were initiated with 111 Governments, out of which 53 Governments have responded. As at 1 November 2023, discrepancies involving 106 countries and territories were identified with regard to 2022 annual statistical data.

## Pre-export notifications for precursor chemicals

124. The submission of pre-export notifications by exporting authorities to importing countries and territories has proved to be the most effective tool to quickly verify the legitimacy of individual transactions and identify suspicious shipments. Article 12, paragraph 10 (a), of the 1988 Convention allows the Governments of importing countries to make it mandatory for exporting countries to inform them of any planned export of internationally controlled precursors to their territory. Since the publishing of the annual report of the Board for 2022, the Government of

Burkina Faso has officially requested to be pre-notified of any planned export of substances included in Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention to its territory, thus increasing the number of Governments that have invoked that provision to 118. The Governments of Belarus and the United States amended their initial requests to now include all substances in Table I and Table II of the 1988 Convention, respectively. **The Board encourages all importing Governments that have not formally requested pre-export notifications to invoke article 12, paragraph 10 (a), of the 1988 Convention.**

125. PEN Online, the secure web-based tool established by the Board, facilitates real-time communication between importing and exporting Governments with regard to international trade in precursors. As at 1 November 2023, the Government of one more country, Antigua and Barbuda, had registered with PEN Online, bringing the total number of registered countries and territories to 169. INCB calls upon the Governments that have not yet registered with the PEN Online system to nominate at least one focal point for that purpose as soon as possible and calls upon Governments to use PEN Online actively and systematically. The Board stands ready to assist Governments in that regard.

126. To assist Governments in exchanging information on the international movement of non-scheduled chemicals, the Board launched PEN Online Light, a system similar to PEN Online, in October 2022. Although the sharing of information about planned exports of precursor chemicals not under international control through the PEN Online Light system is voluntary, **the Board encourages Governments to use that system for the export of such substances from their territory. More information on the functioning of PEN Online and PEN Online Light can be found in the report of the Board for 2023 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.**

### Article 13 of the 1988 Convention: materials and equipment used in illicit drug manufacture

127. Article 13 of the 1988 Convention provides a basis for Governments to cooperate in preventing equipment for the illicit production or manufacture of drugs from reaching illicit laboratories. However, the potential of the article has not yet been explored to the extent possible. Indeed, law enforcement operations aimed at dismantling illicit drug manufacturing laboratories mostly focus on seizing the final product, illicit drugs, paying little attention to the information that seized equipment can provide to investigations. In order to increase specialized knowledge and promote

the sharing of operational investigative experience, PICS, the INCB platform dedicated to sharing information on seizures of precursor chemicals, also contains information on seized equipment. The Board's resources and tools to help raise awareness, support Governments in increasing the implementation of article 13 and guide international policy efforts and cooperation to that end are available on a dedicated page of the INCB website. **The Board encourages Governments that have not yet implemented article 13 of the 1988 Convention to examine ways to do so. Governments are also encouraged to make full use of the Board's available tools and resources related to illicit manufacturing equipment, including PICS.**

128. During the reporting period, the Board continued to cooperate with WCO to identify currently applicable Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System codes ("HS codes") and establish unique HS codes for the most relevant items of equipment included in the International Monitoring List of Equipment used in the illicit manufacture of drugs.<sup>115</sup> The unique HS codes will allow more effective monitoring of trade in those items and thus contribute to preventing their diversion into illicit channels.

## B. Ensuring the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes

129. In line with its mandate to ensure the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, the Board carries out various activities related to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. This includes monitoring action taken by Governments, international organizations and other bodies to support the availability and rational use of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes and providing, through its secretariat, technical support and guidance to Governments in their implementation of the provisions of the international drug control treaties.

130. The data available to INCB confirm the persistent disparities between regions in the consumption of opioid analgesics for the treatment of pain. Almost all such consumption is concentrated in Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Consumption levels in other regions are

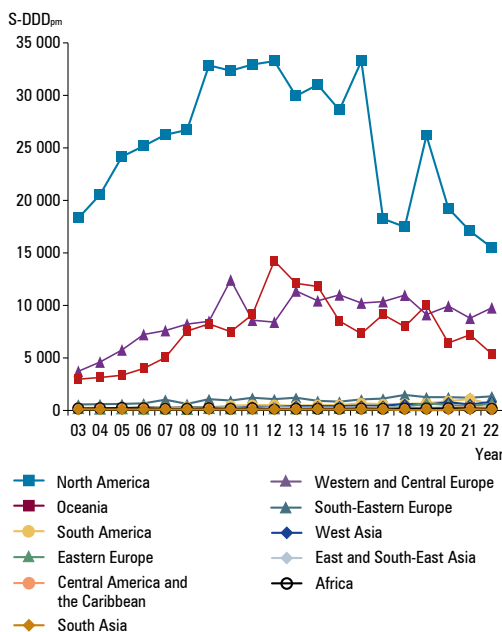
<sup>115</sup>The list includes certain items of equipment that are of international relevance and for which substantial evidence exists of their use in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, new psychoactive substances and precursors. It is available on the Board's secure website.

often not sufficient to meet the medical needs of the population. These regional imbalances are not due to a shortage of opiate raw materials. Supply has been found to be more than sufficient to satisfy the demand reported to INCB by Governments, but it is evident that a large number of countries may not be accurately reflecting in their reported demand the actual medical needs of their populations, and hence the disparity in availability.

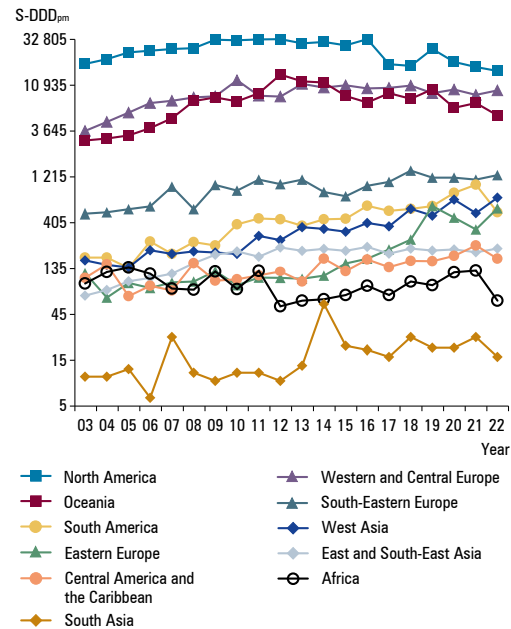
131. Regional analysis of the main trends in the consumption of the main opioid analgesics (codeine, dextro-propoxyphene, dihydrocodeine, fentanyl, hydrocodone, hydromorphone, ketobemidone, morphine, oxycodone, pethidine, tilidine and tramperidine), expressed in S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> per million inhabitants per day (S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), shows that the highest consumption of these drugs is in developed countries in Europe and North America.

132. The regional analysis confirms the persistence of a global disparity in the consumption of opioid analgesics. Regional S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> is calculated on the basis of the total population of the countries reporting consumption and the overall amounts of opioid analgesics reported as consumed. In 2022, the reported consumption in some countries in North America, Oceania and Western and Central Europe resulted in regional averages of 15,467 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> for North America, 9,720 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> for Western and Central Europe and 5,327 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> for Oceania. North America remains the region with the highest consumption of opioids for pain management in the world (see figures I and II).

**Figure I. Consumption of opioids for pain management in all regions, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants per day, 2003–2022**



**Figure II. Consumption of opioids for pain management in all regions, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants per day, 2003–2022 (semi-logarithmic scale)**



133. The levels of opioid consumption in North America, Oceania and Western and Central Europe are far higher than in all other regions in the world. A general upward trend in consumption was evident in South-Eastern Europe until 2018, when it reached 1,415 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, but it has stabilized at about 1,000 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in recent years (1,271 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2022). Consumption in South America had been increasing since 2017, when countries reported 537 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, although after an all-time high level of 1,006 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2021 it dropped to 520 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2022. In West Asia, consumption reached a record high level (737 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) in 2022, up from 509 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2021. In Eastern Europe, opioid consumption peaked in 2019, totalling 601 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, but in 2021 consumption decreased to 344 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>. However, it surged again in 2022 to 572 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>. The Board considers levels of consumption of opioid analgesics in quantities between 100 and 200 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> to be inadequate, and in quantities of less than 100 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> to be very inadequate. In this context, the average levels of consumption reported in 2022 in East and South-East Asia (217 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Central America and the Caribbean (170 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Africa (62 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and South Asia (16 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) are of particular concern.

134. Figures III and IV show consumption of opioid analgesics in total S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> by substance and region. This analysis highlights once again the predominance of fentanyl in most regions of the world. Consumption of oxycodone is highest in North America, Oceania, Western and Central Europe and West Asia, although the substance is also

consumed in other regions. Hydrocodone consumption is significant in the Americas. The share of morphine consumption is less pronounced in most regions with the lowest consumption levels, except for South America and South-Eastern Europe.

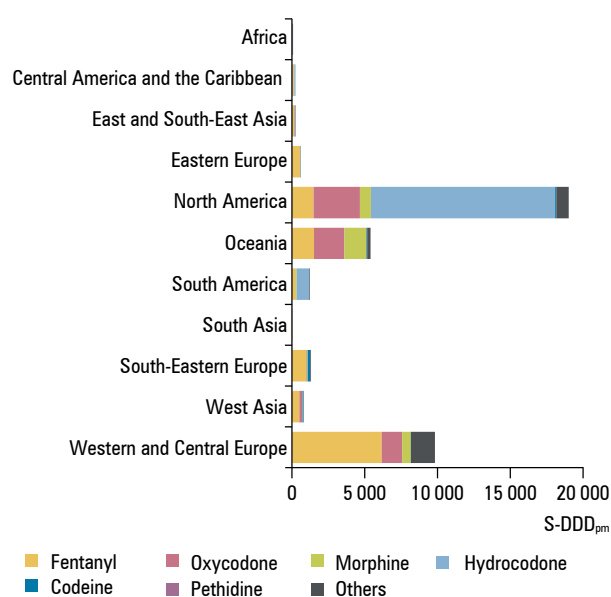
135. **The Board reiterates that there is an urgent need to increase the availability of and access to opioid analgesics and to improve their prescription and use, especially in countries reporting inadequate and very inadequate levels of consumption, and calls for targeted public policies supported by Governments, health systems and health professionals, civil society, the pharmaceutical industry and the international community.**

## 1. Patterns and trends in the production, manufacture, consumption, utilization and stocks of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances

### Narcotic drugs

136. In 2021, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, countries stockpiled certain substances, in particular fentanyl analogues, in response to concerns regarding the stability

**Figure III. Consumption of codeine,<sup>a</sup> fentanyl, hydrocodone, morphine, oxycodone, pethidine and other opioids, all regions, expressed in S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, 2022**



<sup>a</sup>Only codeine used directly for pain relief is considered. Codeine used for preparations included in Schedule III is excluded.

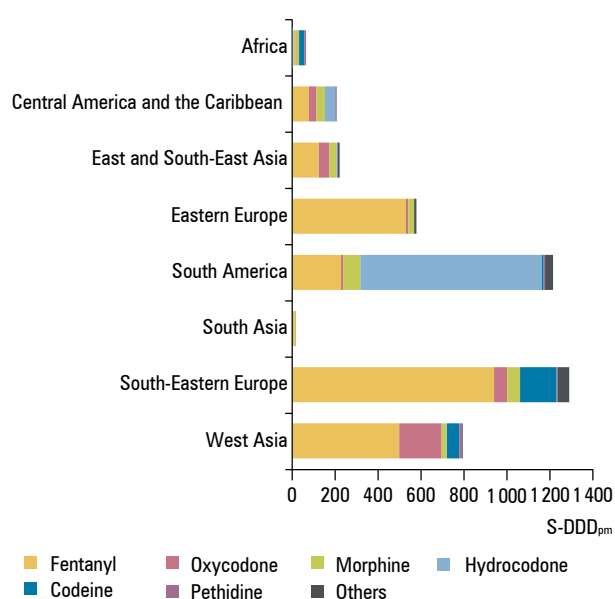
of the global medicine supply chain. The consolidated statistics on narcotic drugs for 2022 suggest a potential return to pre-pandemic levels for most indicators.

137. Analysis of the consumption of opioid analgesics, as reported by Governments to the Board, reaffirmed the persistent issue of unequal access to and affordability of opioid analgesics, such as morphine. A significant portion of the morphine produced worldwide is utilized for other purposes. In 2022, 9.9 per cent of the morphine available globally (quantities manufactured and opening stocks) was consumed directly, primarily for palliative care, an increase from the previous decade. However, of that 9.9 per cent, only a fraction (13.9 per cent) was made available to a large portion of the global population (80.2 per cent), primarily residing in low- and middle-income countries.

138. The consumption of morphine, along with other opioid analgesics, remains concentrated in developed countries in Europe and North America, and levels of consumption in other regions remain insufficient to adequately address the medical needs of their populations (see figure V). Another cause for concern is the continued decline in morphine production in 2022, a trend that commenced in 2015.

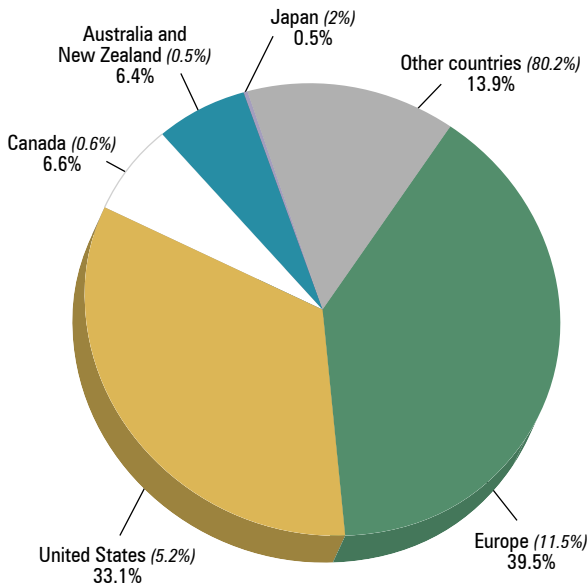
139. This imbalance does not stem from a shortage of opiate raw materials. Apart from opium, the production of which has been declining for several years, overall utilization

**Figure IV. Consumption of codeine,<sup>a</sup> fentanyl, hydrocodone, morphine, oxycodone, pethidine and other opioids, by regions with lowest consumption, expressed in S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, 2022**



<sup>a</sup>Only codeine used directly for pain relief is considered. Codeine used for preparations included in Schedule III is excluded.

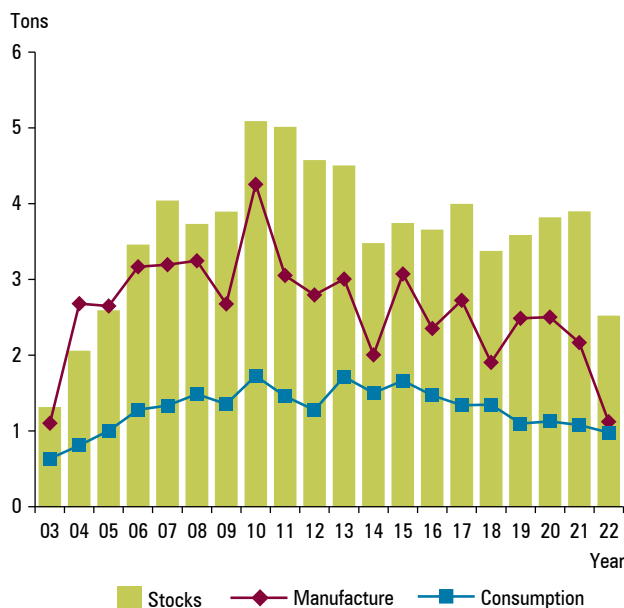
**Figure V. Morphine: distribution of consumption in relation to the share of the world population, 2022**



Note: Percentages in parentheses refer to share of the total population of all reporting countries worldwide.

of poppy straw and concentrate of poppy straw derived from both morphine-rich and thebaine-rich varieties remained high in 2022, with stocks increasing. This suggests that the supply exceeds the demand, even though the demand expressed by several countries may not accurately reflect the actual medical needs of their populations.

**Figure VI. Fentanyl: global manufacture, consumption and stocks,<sup>a</sup> 2003–2022**



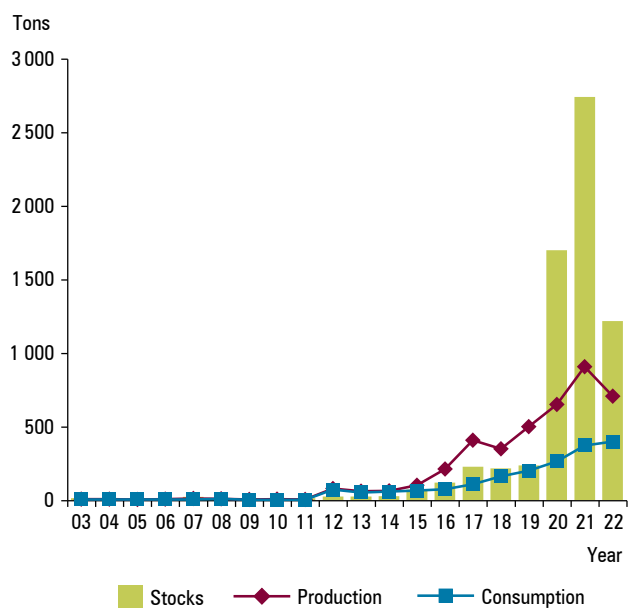
<sup>a</sup>Stocks as at 31 December of each year.

140. Global production of thebaine increased in 2022, while its utilization decreased. This trend was evident from the production of various semi-synthetic opioids derived from thebaine. The manufacture of oxycodone continued to decline in 2022, while consumption of the substance remained relatively stable. In addition, consumption of hydromorphone remained steady, but its production increased in 2022. Notably, consumption of hydromorphone was predominantly confined to the United States and remained stable, despite a decrease in its manufacture.

141. Among synthetic opioids, global manufacture of fentanyl decreased by half in 2022 compared with 2021, and consumption of the substance also declined (see figure VI). This downward trend could be attributed to ongoing concerns about overdose deaths linked to the misuse of fentanyl and similar substances.

142. The licit cultivation, production and utilization of cannabis have grown significantly since 2000, when more countries worldwide began employing cannabis and cannabis extracts for medical purposes and scientific research (see figure VII). Over the past 20 years, global cannabis production has consequently surged, reaching 797 tons in 2022. Given the substantial increase in the licit cultivation of cannabis plants for medical and scientific purposes in recent years, along with variations in yield and manufacturing processes, certain data are being clarified in collaboration with the relevant Governments to ensure consistency.

**Figure VII. Cannabis: global production, consumption and stocks,<sup>a</sup> 2003–2022**



<sup>a</sup>Stocks as at 31 December of each year.

143. In 2021, the Plurinational State of Bolivia reported the production of 24,960 tons of coca leaf, derived from the licit cultivation of coca bush. Meanwhile, Peru did not report production figures for 2022, but did report the export of 76 tons of coca leaf. Despite these figures, the global licit manufacture and consumption of cocaine continued to decrease, reaching the lowest levels in two decades.

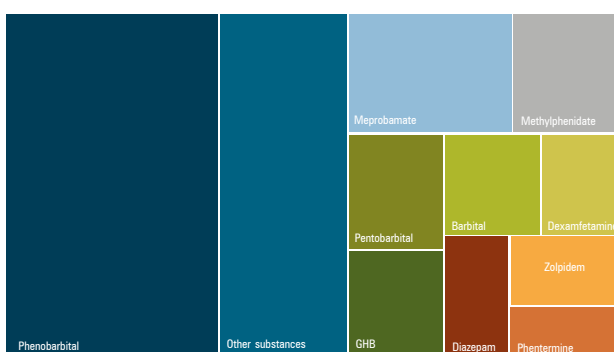
## Psychotropic substances

144. At the end of 2022, a total of 167 psychotropic substances were under international control, up from 166 at the end of 2021. Eutylone came under international control in November 2022 and was included by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Schedule II of the 1971 Convention.

145. A total of 1,049.3 tons of psychotropic substances under international control were manufactured in 2022. Of that quantity, 863.8 tons were sedatives, 160.3 tons were stimulants and 25.2 tons comprised hallucinogens, analgesics and other substances. With respect to specific substances, as can be seen in figure VIII, 10 psychotropic substances accounted for approximately 80 per cent of total global manufacture by gross weight in 2022. All other psychotropic substances combined made up about 20 per cent of overall manufacture in 2022.

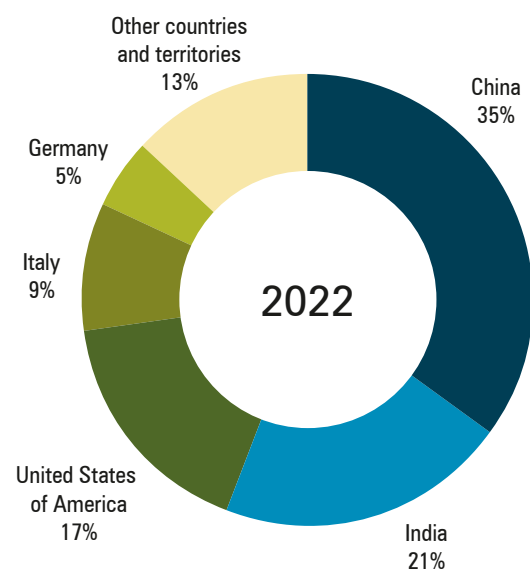
146. At 364.3 tons, phenobarbital was the most heavily manufactured internationally controlled psychotropic substance in 2022. Meprobamate was the second most heavily manufactured, at 97.1 tons, followed by methylphenidate (64.5 tons), pentobarbital (56 tons), GHB (51.9 tons), barbital (48.7 tons), dexamfetamine (40 tons), diazepam (39.6 tons), zolpidem (39.1 tons) and phentermine (29.1 tons).

**Figure VIII. Shares of manufacture of major internationally controlled psychotropic substances by gross weight, 2022**



147. With regard to the primary manufacturers of internationally controlled psychotropic substances, figure IX shows that five countries were responsible for more than 85 per cent of all global manufacture in 2022: China (35 per cent, or 363.2 tons), India (21 per cent, or 221.1 tons), United States (17 per cent, or 178.9 tons), Italy (9 per cent, or 91.7 tons) and Germany (5 per cent, or 55.2 tons). All other countries and territories combined were responsible for 13 per cent (139.1 tons) of global manufacture.

**Figure IX. Shares of total manufacture of internationally controlled psychotropic substances by gross weight, 2022**



148. With regard to international trade, seven benzodiazepines were among the most widely traded psychotropic substances in 2022 (see table below). Phenobarbital was the most widely traded barbiturate under international control, while methylphenidate was the most widely traded stimulant. Zolpidem was the most traded non-benzodiazepine non-barbiturate sedative. More than 158 countries and territories reported imports of diazepam. Imports of midazolam, phenobarbital and alprazolam were reported by 140 to 150 countries and territories.

149. With regard to the consumption of psychotropic substances, 99 countries and territories provided data regarding the consumption of at least one substance in 2022, a slight increase from the 96 countries and territories that provided such data in 2021. Reporting rates at the regional level varied widely; data on consumption in 2022 were provided by 16 countries and territories in Africa (28 per cent of the total number of countries and territories in the region), 25 countries and territories in the Americas (56 per cent),

**Table. Most widely traded internationally controlled psychotropic substances, 2022**

| <i>Substance</i> | <i>Total imports (kg)</i> | <i>Number of importing countries and territories</i> |
|------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Diazepam         | 44 929.92                 | 158  |
| Midazolam        | 14 541.02                 | 150  |
| Phenobarbital    | 205 429.06                | 148  |
| Alprazolam       | 9 618.90                  | 140  |
| Clonazepam       | 14 990.60                 | 135  |
| Lorazepam        | 8 882.25                  | 129  |
| Zolpidem         | 38 198.80                 | 117  |
| Methylphenidate  | 52 513.10                 | 115  |
| Bromazepam       | 12 617.66                 | 108  |
| Clobazam         | 7 457.22                  | 91   |

20 countries and territories in Asia (41 per cent), 32 countries and territories in Europe (74 per cent) and 6 countries and territories in Oceania (27 per cent).

150. Diazepam was the most manufactured benzodiazepine in 2022 in terms of gross weight, at 39.6 tons, accounting for 23 per cent of all benzodiazepines with a significant presence on the licit market. Diazepam was also the most widely traded internationally controlled psychotropic substance in 2022, with 158 countries reporting imports of the substance. The global average consumption of diazepam among countries that provided data has been declining, from a high of 2.67 S-DDD<sub>pt</sub> in 2019 to 2.01 S-DDD<sub>pt</sub> in 2022. Similarly, the number of countries providing consumption data has been declining since 2020, with 91 countries providing data in that year to 85 countries providing data in 2022.

151. In terms of gross weight, phenobarbital has been the most heavily manufactured psychotropic substance under international control since 2012. In 2022, total reported manufacture of the substance was 364.3 tons, up significantly from the 262.9 tons reported in 2021. Imports of phenobarbital were reported by 148 countries and territories in 2022, making the substance one of the most widely traded psychotropic substances under international control. In 2022, the total volume of global imports was 205.4 tons, up slightly from 189 tons in 2021.

152. The number of countries and territories providing data on phenobarbital consumption increased from 71 in 2021 to 83 in 2022. Among the countries and territories that provided data, Brazil reported the highest level of phenobarbital consumption in 2022 (4.95 S-DDD<sub>pt</sub>), albeit at a lower level than in 2021 (5.23 S-DDD<sub>pt</sub>).

153. Methylphenidate is the most widely traded stimulant among the psychotropic substances under international control. Global manufacture of methylphenidate decreased from 71.3 tons in 2021 to 64.5 tons in 2022. The number of importing countries and territories also dropped slightly, from 118 in 2021 to 115 in 2022. At the same time, the worldwide volume of imports of the substance fell from 63.8 tons in 2021 to 52.5 tons in 2022.

154. A total of 62 countries provided data on methylphenidate consumption in 2022, with some countries reporting a considerable reduction in consumption of the substance. Compared with the figures reported for 2021, the consumption of methylphenidate decreased considerably in Iceland, from 53.33 S-DDD<sub>pt</sub> to 29.47 S-DDD<sub>pt</sub>; nevertheless, the country reported the highest consumption worldwide in 2022. The consumption of methylphenidate in Canada, Denmark, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Sweden increased slightly in 2022. While the consumption of the substance decreased in Israel and the United States, Guatemala reported a significant increase, from 0.01 S-DDD<sub>pt</sub> in 2021 to 4.87 S-DDD<sub>pt</sub> in 2022.

155. Like diazepam and phenobarbital, zolpidem is one of the most widely traded psychotropic substances under international control. In 2022, 122 countries and territories reported imports of the substance, and consumption of zolpidem was reported in all regions of the world. The manufacture of zolpidem rose from 38.2 tons in 2021 to 39.1 tons in 2022.

156. The number of countries and territories providing data on consumption of the substance rose from 63 in 2021 to 64 in 2022. In 2022, Uruguay reported the highest level of consumption of zolpidem worldwide, at 23.82 S-DDD<sub>pt</sub>, followed by Portugal at 19.16 S-DDD<sub>pt</sub>. Overall, among the countries that provided data, the average consumption of zolpidem in Europe was significantly higher than in other regions.

## 2. Supply of and demand for opiate raw materials

157. The Board, in fulfilment of the functions assigned to it under the 1961 Convention as amended and the relevant resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, regularly examines issues affecting the supply of and the demand for opiates for licit requirements and endeavours to ensure a standing balance between that supply and demand.

158. The Board analyses the data provided by Governments on opiate raw materials and opiates manufactured

from those raw materials to establish the status of the supply of and the demand for opiate raw materials globally. In addition, the Board analyses information on the use, estimated consumption for licit use and stocks of those raw materials at the global level. A detailed analysis of the current situation as it pertains to the supply of and the demand for opiate raw materials is contained in the technical report of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs.<sup>116</sup>

## Cultivation, production and stocks

159. The combined total area cultivated with opium poppy varieties rich in morphine, thebaine, codeine and oripavine in 2022 declined by one third compared with 2021, with a decrease in production in almost all major producing countries. However, while the production of opiate raw materials rich in morphine decreased, the production of opiate raw materials rich in thebaine increased. With regard to demand for and stocks of raw materials, a different trend was registered. In 2022, demand for and stocks of opiate raw materials rich in morphine increased, but demand for and stocks of opiate raw materials rich in thebaine decreased. Regardless of these reductions in the cultivation and production of opiate raw materials, their supply remained more than sufficient to cover the global demand as expressed by countries in their reporting to the Board for 2023 and 2024.

160. Cultivation of noscapine-rich opium poppy for the purpose of opiate production in 2022 was reported only in the planning phase, by Australia and France, and not in those countries' reporting on cultivation and harvest. Consequently, the countries did not report any extraction of the morphine alkaloid from noscapine-rich opium poppy in 2022.

161. Even though noscapine is not under international control, a significant amount of morphine can be extracted from opium poppy rich in noscapine. **For the purposes of controlling the production of morphine, the Board requests the countries that cultivate opium poppy rich in noscapine to provide information in a consistent and regular manner about the cultivation of this variety, its intended use and to report to the Board on any extraction and use of the morphine alkaloid from it.**

162. While there was an overall decline in the area under cultivation with opium poppy for the extraction of alkaloids in 2022, India and Spain both saw an increase in the cultivation of morphine-rich opium poppy. India, which is the only opium-producing country included in the present analysis, also began to cultivate opium poppy for the production of poppy straw, which led to an increase in its stocks in 2022.

Türkiye significantly reduced its cultivation and production but remained a holder of large stocks. Australia and Spain remained the leading producers of raw materials rich in morphine in 2022 and the only producers of codeine- and oripavine-rich opium poppy, while Australia was the sole producer of opium poppy rich in thebaine. Hungary and Slovakia halted cultivation of opium poppy for the extraction of alkaloids in 2022, and France maintained similar levels of cultivation but significantly increased its production of raw materials rich in morphine.

163. The total production of opiate raw materials rich in morphine amounted to 304 tons in 2022, a decline compared with the 329 tons produced in 2021. The total production of opiate raw materials rich in thebaine increased to 187 tons in 2022 compared with 164 tons in 2021. Stocks of opiate raw materials rich in morphine decreased to 838 tons in morphine equivalent in 2022, down from 888 tons in 2021, while stocks of opiate raw materials rich in thebaine decreased from 373 tons to 302 tons in the same period. Total stocks of opiates expressed in morphine equivalent amounted to 500 tons, while total stocks of opiates expressed in thebaine equivalent amounted to 302 tons.

## Balance between supply and demand

164. Demand for opiate raw materials rich in morphine increased from 225 tons to 305 tons in morphine equivalent, while demand for finished opiates decreased from 280 tons to 268 tons in morphine equivalent. Inversely, demand for opiate raw materials rich in thebaine decreased in 2022 compared with 2021, from 122 tons to 105 tons in thebaine equivalent; however, demand for finished opiates increased from 104 tons in thebaine equivalent in 2021 to 109 tons in 2022.

165. On the basis of data reported by Governments, total stocks of opiates and opiate raw materials are fully sufficient to cover demand for medical and scientific purposes for morphine-based opiates for more than a year. The quantity of stocks expressed in morphine equivalent (838 tons) is sufficient to cover global demand at the expected level for 2023<sup>117</sup> of 321 tons for 31 months, well over the 12 months required by the Board. The quantity of stocks expressed in thebaine

<sup>117</sup>In order to ensure that supply can cover expected demand for at least one year in case of unforeseen supply issues, such as crop failure, the Board assesses stocks at the end of year to calculate whether they are sufficient to cover the projected demand for the following year. For the calculation, the Board determines the total amount of stocks at the end of the year and divides that number by the total amount of projected demand, then multiplies the resulting number by 12 to arrive at the total number of months for which the stocks would be able to cover the following year's demand at the projected level.

<sup>116</sup>E/INCB/2023/2.

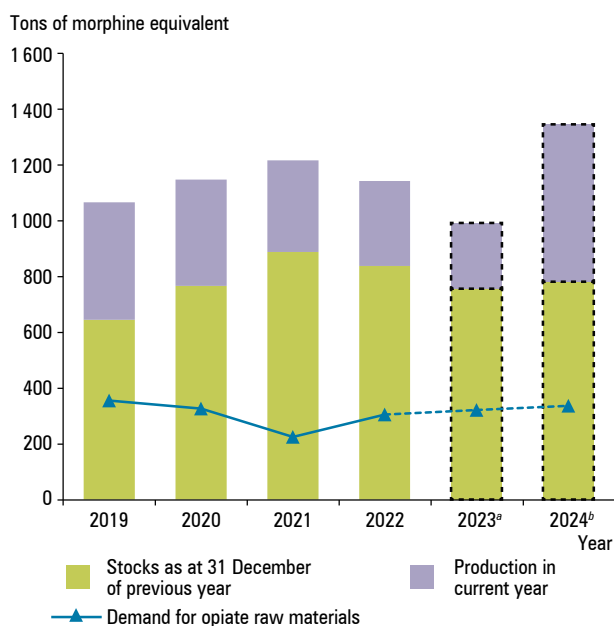


equivalent (302 tons) is sufficient to meet global demand at the level projected for 2023 of 144 tons for 25 months.

166. Figures X and XI below illustrate the relationship between production, stocks and demand in the current year and three preceding years, as well as the data-based projections for the upcoming two years.

167. **Even though the supply of both morphine-rich and thebaine-rich opiate raw materials is calculated to be sufficient to cover the demand for medical and scientific purposes as expressed by countries, the Board highlights that there are notable disparities between countries in the availability of narcotic drugs, owing, among other reasons, to the issue that many Governments do not accurately estimate their medical needs for opioid analgesics or have limited access to them. Consequently, and in line with the provisions and objectives of the 1961 Convention as amended, the Board emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability at the global level and calls upon countries with greater availability of and access to opiate raw materials and opiates to assist those countries with limited access and availability in their efforts to increase access to and availability of such substances and raw materials.**

**Figure X. Supply of and demand for opiate raw materials rich in morphine, in morphine equivalent, 2019–2024**



<sup>a</sup> Data for production and demand for 2023 are based on advance data (dotted line) submitted by Governments.

<sup>b</sup> Data for 2024 are based on estimates (dotted line) submitted by Governments.

## C. Overall treaty compliance

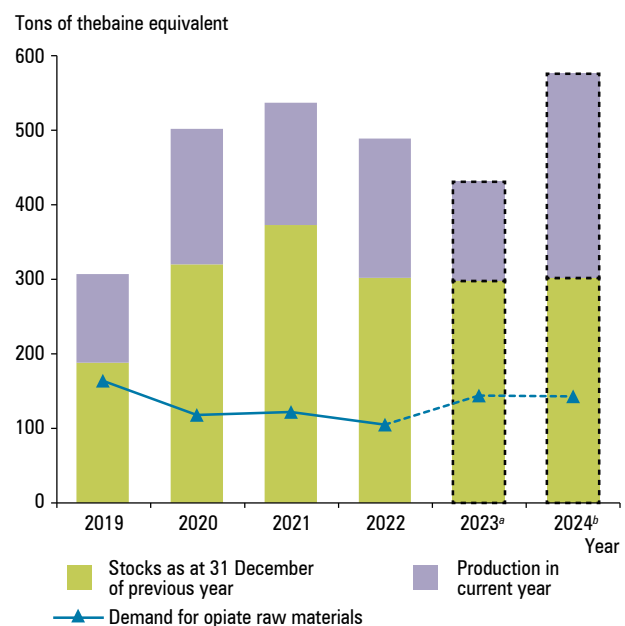
### 1. Evaluation of overall treaty compliance

168. By becoming party to the international drug control conventions, States commit to the adoption of a series of administrative, legislative and policy measures aimed at implementing their legal obligations under those instruments.

169. Such measures include: (a) establishing mechanisms for the monitoring of the licit production and manufacture of, and trade in, narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals; (b) ensuring the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes; (c) adopting legislation and policy to address drug-related behaviours, including trafficking and diversion; and (d) taking all practicable measures for the prevention of drug use and for the early identification, treatment, education, aftercare and social reintegration of persons affected by drug use.

170. The legal framework, made up of the three international drug control conventions, confers broad discretion

**Figure XI. Supply of and demand for opiate raw materials rich in thebaine, in thebaine equivalent, 2019–2024**



<sup>a</sup> Data for production and demand for 2023 are based on advance data (dotted line) submitted by Governments.

<sup>b</sup> Data for 2024 are based on estimates (dotted line) submitted by Governments.

upon States parties for the adoption of administrative, legislative and policy measures to implement their treaty obligations that they deem to be best suited to the particularities of their respective systems and that best correspond to their established priorities.

171. However, the conventions establish a series of parameters within which such discretion is to be exercised. These include the limitation of the use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances exclusively to medical and scientific purposes, the respect for human dignity and rights, the adequate provision of controlled substances to meet legitimate medical needs and the principle of proportionality in the formulation of criminal justice policy for drug-related offences.

172. The conventions also set forth the responsibilities and functions of the Board. Article 9, paragraph 4, of the 1961 Convention as amended states that the Board is to endeavour to limit the cultivation, production, manufacture and use of drugs to an amount required for medical and scientific purposes, to ensure their availability for such purposes and to prevent illicit cultivation, production and manufacture of and trafficking in and use of drugs. Article 9, paragraph 5, of the same Convention provides that the measures taken by the Board under the Convention shall be those most consistent with the intent to further the cooperation of Governments with the Board and to provide the mechanism for a continuing dialogue between Governments and the Board that will lend assistance to and facilitate effective national action to attain the aims of the Convention.

173. Although the wording is not identical, and that of the 1988 Convention is somewhat more restrictive, each of the three drug control conventions also confers a clear treaty monitoring function upon the Board. The Board's monitoring functions are set out in article 14 of the 1961 Convention as amended, article 19 of the 1971 Convention and article 22 of the 1988 Convention.

174. As the monitoring body established under the three drug control conventions, and in keeping with its obligation to foster cooperation with Governments through active dialogue, the Board reviews developments in States parties with the aim of supporting them to implement the conventions by assisting in identifying implementation gaps and proposing remedial action.

175. The Board's deliberations are informed by its ongoing interactions with States parties, including the submission of information and statistical reports by Governments to the Board, the exchange of official correspondence and meetings between government representatives and the Board, the undertaking of country missions by the Board and the participation of Governments in INCB initiatives.

176. The current chapter contains a selection of the Board's appraisals of the drug control situation in selected countries.

### (a) Australia

177. The Board continues to engage in dialogue with the Government of Australia and notes with appreciation the consistent cooperation of the authorities, in particular in providing information on legislative developments in the Australian Capital Territory and nationwide. In this context, the Board takes note of the Drugs of Dependence (Personal Possession) Amendment Act 2022, which was passed in the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory on 20 October 2022.

178. Under the Act, individuals found in possession of small quantities of specific drugs may, instead of being subject to a potential prison sentence, be issued a simple drug offence notice, which can be discharged by paying a fine or participating in a drug diversion programme assessment and harm reduction session. The Australian Capital Territory intends to monitor drug trends following the changes and will review the legislation three years following its implementation. By introducing these legislative changes, the Board notes that the Australian Capital Territory is availing itself of the prerogative granted to States under the international drug control conventions to apply alternatives to conviction or punishment for drug-related behaviours of a lesser gravity, in particular when committed by persons who use drugs.

179. The Board also takes note of the rescheduling of psilocybin and MDMA by the Department of Health and Aged Care from schedule 9 (Prohibited substances) to schedule 8 (Controlled drugs) within the national Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Medicines and Poisons. As of 1 July 2023, psychiatrists approved under the Authorised Prescriber scheme by the Therapeutic Goods Administration have been allowed to prescribe MDMA for post-traumatic stress disorder and psilocybin for treatment-resistant depression. For all other uses, psilocybin and MDMA will remain on schedule 9 of the Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Medicines and Poisons.

180. The Board will continue to closely monitor the drug control landscape in Australia, including with respect to the implementation of these legislative developments. The Board values its positive cooperation with the Government of Australia and looks forward to continuing its close dialogue on matters concerning the full and effective implementation of the drug control conventions.

## (b) Germany

181. During the reporting period, the Board continued to closely monitor drug developments in Germany and to engage with the Government on matters related to the legalization of cannabis for non-medical use, as announced by the country's coalition Government.

182. The Board has had ongoing discussions with the authorities in Germany and has taken note of the evolution of the originally planned control measures following concerns expressed by the European Commission, in particular with respect to the provisions on the sale of cannabis in speciality shops to adults for non-medical purposes.

183. The Board notes that the revised draft legislation, which is currently under consideration, has moved away from the immediate establishment of a retail distribution model to one that would initially permit cultivation of up to three plants in the home by adults for personal consumption, as well as cultivation of cannabis in cultivation associations. The Board takes note of the fact that a further stage provided for in the draft legislation would be the establishment of regional pilot projects with commercial supply chains. The draft bill is to enter the legislative procedure in the second half of 2023 and is expected to be submitted to the European Commission for consideration.

184. In its interactions with the Government of Germany, the Board has reiterated that measures to permit the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes are inconsistent with article 4, paragraph (c), of the 1961 Convention as amended, which requires States parties to take such legislative and administrative measures as may be necessary, subject to the provisions of the Convention, to limit the use of narcotic drugs exclusively to medical and scientific purposes. Article 3, paragraph 1 (a) (i), of the 1988 Convention requires the criminalization of the production, manufacture, extraction, preparation, offering, offering for sale, distribution, sale, delivery on any terms whatsoever, brokerage, dispatch, dispatch in transit, transport, importation or exportation of any narcotic drug or any psychotropic substance contrary to the provisions of the 1961 Convention as amended or the 1971 Convention. Moreover, article 3, paragraph 1 (a) (ii), of the 1988 Convention requires the criminalization of the cultivation of cannabis plant for the purpose of the production of narcotic drugs contrary to the provisions of the 1961 Convention as amended.

185. The Board acknowledges the public health measures taken by Germany, in particular those aimed at ensuring equal access to health care for all vulnerable population groups, including those in detention. The Government has also been undertaking initiatives to make information on

the negative effects of drug use more accessible in order to increase the uptake of care provision. The Board notes the efforts made by the Government to address the manufacture and export of and trafficking in new psychoactive substances and non-scheduled precursors.

186. The Board values its constructive relationship with the Government of Germany and looks forward to continuing its dialogue on matters concerning the implementation of the country's commitments under the drug control conventions.

## (c) Ghana

187. The Board has continued to monitor drug control developments in Ghana and takes note of the constitutional challenge to section 43 of the Narcotics Control Commission Act, which resulted in the invalidation of provisions that permitted the cultivation of specific types of cannabis for medicinal and industrial purposes.

188. On 27 July 2022, the Supreme Court of Ghana declared section 43 of the Narcotics Control Commission Act unconstitutional as it violated article 106 of the 1992 Constitution, which lays out the formal requirements of the legislative process.

189. Section 43 of the Narcotics Control Commission Act, which amended the relevant provisions of the Narcotic Drugs Act 1990, provided that a minister could grant a licence for the cultivation of cannabis with "not more than 0.3 per cent THC content on a dry weight basis for industrial purposes for obtaining fibre or seed or for medicinal purposes". In its judgment, the Supreme Court found that the Parliament had not complied with the mandatory constitutional requirements of the legislative process in passing the amendment as it had not been published within the required time frame and its explanatory memorandum did not meet the conditions required. As a result of those omissions, the provision was invalidated by the Court.

190. The Board will continue to monitor changes in the drug control policies of Ghana, including any updates to the country's legal framework with respect to the use of cannabis for medical purposes. The Board encourages the Government of Ghana to continue its constructive dialogue with the Board.

## (d) Lao People's Democratic Republic

191. During the period under review, the Board continued to closely monitor the ongoing developments in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and took note of the opium

survey undertaken with UNODC to determine the levels of cultivation in the country. The Board looks forward to the results, as this is the first such survey conducted since 2015.

192. The Board takes note of Decision No. 3789 on the Control of Hemp for Medication and Products, taken by the Ministry of Health in December 2022. Under the decision, the use of cannabis sativa L is authorized for medical purposes. A medical prescription is required for dried flowers with no more than 1 per cent THC and cannabis-related products for medical use containing up to 0.2 per cent THC and at least four times as much non-psychoactive CBD as THC. Health supplements, cosmetics, beverages and essential oils containing less than 0.2 per cent THC can be distributed and used without a medical prescription. All cannabis-based products must be registered with the Food and Drug Department.

193. Under Decision No. 3789, companies with approval from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Planning and Investment may engage in the cultivation, extraction, production, processing, storage, distribution, utilization, import, export and transport of cannabis. Pursuing any cannabis-related activities without such approval remains an offence under the Law on Narcotics and the Criminal Code.

194. As far as the use of cannabis for medical purposes is concerned, the Board reminds the authorities of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, at is does with all countries allowing such use of cannabis, of the requirements of the international drug control treaties pertaining to the control of cannabis for medical purposes, including articles 23 (establishing national agencies in order to control cultivation, production and management of the resulting crops) and 28 (adopting measures to prevent the misuse of, and illicit traffic in, cannabis leaves) of the 1961 Convention as amended, as well as the mandatory reporting obligations to the Board under that Convention.

195. The Board looks forward to continuing to engage with the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to secure an INCB mission to the country to discuss issues related to the control system for narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals; progress in securing the mission has thus far been limited.

## (e) Philippines

196. During the period under review, the Board has continued to closely follow the drug control situation in the Philippines, in particular since the election of the new Government.

197. The Board notes with appreciation the continued work of the United Nations, the Government of the Philippines and their partners on the implementation of the United Nations Joint Programme on Human Rights and notes the participation of the Government of the Philippines in various activities under the initiative, including those aimed at strengthening forensic investigative techniques.

198. On the issue of human rights and drug control, the Board has continued to stress the need to address the alleged widespread extrajudicial targeting of persons suspected of drug-related activities in the Philippines and welcomes the measures taken by the incoming Government to allow for those allegations to be investigated and the steps taken towards ensuring accountability for those involved. At the same time, the Board notes that, given the number of alleged extrajudicial acts of violence committed against persons suspected of involvement of drug-related activities, further action is needed in order for all cases to be investigated and prosecuted, to ensure justice for victims and their families. In this connection, the Board has taken note of the resumption in July 2023 of the investigation by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, which was predicated on the finding by the Court that investigations and prosecutions by the national authorities with regard to the alleged crimes had been insufficient.

199. The Board continues to emphasize that any extrajudicial action purportedly taken in pursuit of drug control objectives is fundamentally contrary to the provisions and objectives of the three international drug control conventions, as well as to the human rights norms by which all countries are bound; that all drug control actions by States should be undertaken in full respect of the rule of law and due process of law; and that violations by law enforcement personnel should be impartially and independently investigated, and prosecuted and punished as appropriate.

200. The Board continues to engage in dialogue with the Government of the Philippines on drug control policies in the country and continues to actively seek an agreement with the Government on a country mission, in order to review its implementation of the three international drug control conventions. The Board notes with concern that, although the mission has been agreed to in principle by the Government of the Philippines, almost no progress has been made in the past several years in planning it further, despite extensive outreach efforts by the Board. Accordingly, the Board reiterates its call to the Government of the Philippines to facilitate the holding of the mission at the earliest opportunity.

## (f) Thailand

201. The Board continues to follow the developments regarding drug control in Thailand and takes note of several legislative developments that occurred during the period under review.

202. The new Narcotics Code has consolidated 24 previous pieces of legislation into a single law aiming to implement a health- and human rights-based approach to drug control and to address prison overcrowding, while focusing drug use reduction efforts on tackling major drug syndicates, trafficking and the drug supply chain. Through the Narcotics Code, Thailand aims to ensure proportionate criminal justice approaches by abolishing minimum mandatory punishments for drug offences of a lesser relative gravity and expunging the criminal records of persons who use drugs who voluntarily undertake drug treatment, thereby emphasizing rehabilitation and social reintegration.

203. Changes have also been introduced with respect to the legal status of cannabis under the country's Narcotics Code, in which narcotic drugs under national control are classified into five categories, pursuant to a notification by the Minister of Health endorsed by the country's Narcotics Control Board. In January 2022, pursuant to such a notification, cannabis plant was removed from the list of controlled narcotic drugs under the Narcotics Code, and only substances containing extracts of cannabis with a THC content of more than 0.2 per cent by dry weight were listed under category 5. This measure came into effect in June 2022, following which cannabis-infused drinks, sweets and other items became available for purchase.

204. The Board notes the information provided by the Government of Thailand that, while cannabis is no longer listed under category 5 of the Narcotics Code, controls remain in place and the use of cannabis plant and its components remains regulated by existing legislation.

205. These acts and measures regulate the use of cannabis in food, cosmetics and medical products, as well as the export and import of cannabis and hemp, while preventing the sale of cannabis to people below the age of 20 and pregnant women and discouraging the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes. The processing, distribution and sale of cannabis require a licence and commercial advertising and sale through vending machines and online are prohibited.

206. The Government of Thailand has also informed the Board that the above-mentioned measures have been tightened to control and regulate the use of the flowering or fruiting tops of the cannabis plants, including for traditional medicinal purposes.

207. The Board notes that the parliament of Thailand is considering a draft cannabis bill, which is envisaged to provide a comprehensive and overarching legal framework for cannabis and its use. The bill passed its first reading in June 2022 and remains on the parliamentary legislative agenda for further consideration.

208. The Board notes that the control measures governing the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes remain in flux within the country and has reiterated to the authorities that article 4, paragraph (c), of the 1961 Convention as amended requires States parties to take such legislative and administrative measures as may be necessary to limit the use of narcotic drugs exclusively to medical and scientific purposes and that article 3, paragraph 1 (a), of the 1988 Convention requires the criminalization of the production, manufacture, extraction, preparation, offering, offering for sale, distribution, sale, delivery on any terms whatsoever, brokerage, dispatch, dispatch in transit, transport, importation or exportation of any narcotic drug or any psychotropic substance contrary to the provisions of the 1961 Convention as amended or the 1971 Convention, and also requires the criminalization of the cultivation of cannabis plant for the purpose of the production of narcotic drugs contrary to the provisions of the 1961 Convention as amended.

209. The Board also notes that methamphetamine use in Thailand is reported to have increased significantly during the period under review, reportedly due to the increase in illicit drug manufacture in neighbouring Myanmar, flooding the region with an ever-cheaper supply. The Board notes that, in response to these developments, the Ministry of Health of Thailand has prepared a draft regulation under which anyone caught in possession of more than two pills of methamphetamine would be prosecuted as a drug dealer. Under current legislation, people caught with up to 15 methamphetamine pills do not face legal action if they agree to undergo drug treatment.

210. Within its mandate, the Board will continue to closely monitor the evolving drug control framework in Thailand and engage in a dialogue with the new Government, in particular in relation to the legislative developments on cannabis use.

## (g) Ukraine

211. While the Board remains concerned about the armed conflicts currently under way in many different regions of the world, in the period under review, it continued to monitor the developments in Ukraine related to drug control, which have taken place against the backdrop of the continued armed conflict with the Russian Federation and the resulting humanitarian emergency affecting the civilian population of Ukraine.

212. The Board notes with grave concern the continuous targeting of health infrastructure in Ukraine. According to the WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care, during the first year of the conflict, there were nearly 740 attacks on Ukraine that affected health facilities. These attacks have significantly affected the delivery of health-care services in the country, as well as the logistics associated with the provision of medicines and other supplies. Access to addiction treatment services has also been disrupted, affecting people with substances disorders throughout the country. The situation is particularly concerning in territories outside the control of the Government of Ukraine. Following the abrupt suspension of opioid agonist therapy, treatment has effectively been interrupted for patients in need.

213. The Board welcomes the ongoing efforts by WHO, the United Nations and EMCDDA to support Ukrainian institutions and experts in strengthening their capacity to identify and respond to drug-related security and health threats. In the Provinces of Kharkiv, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia, 12 United Nations inter-agency humanitarian convoys were able to deliver health kits, trauma supplies and medicines to treat non-communicable diseases. WHO, in cooperation with the Ukrainian health authorities, has put in place data-collection systems and monitoring tools to assess health-care system resources and the availability of services. EMCDDA has worked on ensuring continued access to opioid agonist therapy and HIV medicines by those in need, in particular those already receiving such treatments in Ukraine. In mid-March, a list of opioid agonist therapy and antiretroviral therapy sites and national contact points for refugees was compiled through EMCDDA and shared through WHO.

214. The Board reminds all Governments that, in acute emergencies, they may utilize simplified control procedures for the export, transportation and provision of medicinal products containing controlled substances. Competent national authorities may permit the export of medicines containing narcotic drugs and/or psychotropic substances in the absence of the corresponding import authorizations and/or estimates. Urgent deliveries do not need to be included in the estimates of the receiving country.

215. The Board takes note of the report of the State Bureau of Investigations of Ukraine on the illicit manufacture and sale of narcotic and psychotropic substances. According to the report, the Bureau detected and dismantled an illegal amphetamine laboratory, in which drugs were being manufactured on a large scale, in Chernivtsi Province. Also according to the report, criminal investigations have been initiated into more than 270 cases of trafficking in drugs and precursors since the outbreak of armed hostilities with the Russian Federation.

216. The Board will continue to monitor the humanitarian crisis and the impact of armed attacks on the situation in Ukraine, while pursuing dialogue with Member States concerning the provision of controlled substances as part of humanitarian aid. Within its treaty-mandated functions and responsibilities, the Board calls for the cessation of all attacks on the health sector in Ukraine and for the urgent provision of aid to the country's civilian population to help alleviate the human pain and suffering caused by the conflict.

## (h) United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

217. During the period under review, the Board continued to monitor drug-related developments in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and engage in constructive dialogue with the Government on all aspects of the implementation of the international drug control conventions.

218. The Board notes the decision of the United Kingdom to deny royal assent to the cannabis legalization bill of Bermuda on 6 September 2022. The bill had been reserved for royal assent by the Governor of Bermuda under section 35 (2) of the Constitution of Bermuda. According to a statement by the Governor, the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs had concluded that the bill, as drafted, was not consistent with the obligations of the United Kingdom and Bermuda under the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention.

219. In February 2023, as part of “From harm to hope: A 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives”, adopted in December 2021, the Government of the United Kingdom announced that 28 local authorities across England would receive funds totalling 53 million pounds to help people in drug and alcohol treatment. The funding is aimed at providing additional housing support, including from specialist housing case workers, to improve sustainable and long-term recovery from drug use disorders by facilitating independent living. Additional funds have been allocated to 151 local authorities across the country for the creation of over 50,000 facilities for drug and alcohol treatment and have been earmarked for a drug innovation fund supporting community-based projects intended to reduce the recreational use of drugs.

220. The Board looks forward to continued cooperation and dialogue with the United Kingdom on the country's institutional and legislative framework on drug control.

## 2. Country missions

221. Every year, the Board undertakes missions to States parties to the international drug control conventions aimed at engaging with national drug control stakeholders on their experiences in the implementation of their obligations under the three international drug control conventions.

222. Discussions are held with a variety of national drug-control stakeholders, including policymakers, representatives of regulatory bodies, health-care experts, people working in the fields of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration, law enforcement and border control officials, staff of forensic facilities and representatives of civil society groups, including those representing people with lived experience.

223. On the basis of the findings of each mission, the Board adopts a series of recommendations aimed at strengthening national drug control by suggesting specific courses of action to address challenges identified in each country. The recommendations are communicated confidentially to the Governments concerned for their consideration.

224. In the current report, information is provided on the missions that the Board undertook to Cyprus, Kyrgyzstan and the United States. Additional missions have been accepted in principle by the Governments of the Bahamas, Brunei Darussalam, Colombia, Cuba, Dominica, El Salvador, Eswatini, the Gambia, Greece, Honduras, Mexico, the Niger, the Philippines, Tajikistan, Thailand, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and Yemen, but plans for those missions have not yet been finalized. In addition, the Board has contacted the Governments of Bahrain, Belize, Cameroon, Djibouti, Grenada, Guinea, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Maldives, Mali, North Macedonia, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, South Sudan and Suriname, expressing its wish to carry out missions to those countries.

### (a) Cyprus

225. In September 2023, the Board undertook a mission to Cyprus to discuss the drug control situation in the country and the status of implementation of the three international drug control conventions, to which Cyprus is a party.

226. Since the Board's last mission to Cyprus in 1998, the country has gone through considerable changes. Cyprus joined the European Union in 2004 and started to apply European Union drug policies, for both supply and demand reduction and introduce drug policies based on health and human rights approaches. The National Addiction Authority

of Cyprus was established as an interministerial body that coordinates with all relevant stakeholders in the development and implementation of national strategies and action plans on drug control.

227. The Board took note of various drug control initiatives of the Government and the progress made, including the latest data on drug prevalence from its general population survey of 2023.

### (b) Kyrgyzstan

228. During its mission to Kyrgyzstan, which took place in December 2022, the Board examined developments in the country's drug control policies, in particular in response to the needs of people who use drugs and the national security concerns arising from increased drug trafficking in the region.

229. The INCB delegation discussed with the Government and civil society representatives how, since the previous mission of the Board, in 1997, the extensive political and legislative changes in the country had affected the country's drug control landscape. Continual political and legislative reforms appear to have resulted in challenges and impediments to effective and balanced drug control.

230. The Board noted that the country's drug control efforts would benefit from the allocation of additional resources and also noted the need to improve coordination between the Government and civil society with a view to developing an informed and balanced approach to addressing the country's drug use and trafficking problems. Persistent socioeconomic challenges, such as a lack of access to affordable health care, have affected public health initiatives and priority concerns such as ensuring the availability of controlled medicines and limiting the spread of HIV, in particular in prison settings.

### (c) United States of America

231. An INCB mission to the United States took place in December 2022. The objective of the mission was to review the drug control situation in the country and to discuss with the Government its compliance with the international drug control treaties. In particular, the Board wished to obtain information on the institutional framework on drug control; the legislative and policy measures related to drug control at the federal and state levels, including with respect to cannabis; regulatory control mechanisms and reporting to the Board; supply reduction efforts; precursor chemicals control; and measures aimed at the prevention and treatment

of drug use and the rehabilitation and social integration of people who use drugs.

232. The Board noted that, in the previous two decades, the country had struggled with the public health effects of an “opioid epidemic” – made worse by the overdose deaths related to the consumption of synthetic opioids – which had claimed an estimated 1 million lives and exacted a major toll on public health and the country’s economy. The Board stands ready to assist the Government in addressing this matter through the tools it has at its disposal.

233. In response to this and other matters relating to the implementation of the provisions of the international drug control conventions, the Board noted that the Government had developed legal and policy frameworks governing all aspects of drug control, guided by the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy. It has a robust supply-reduction apparatus, is committed to international cooperation on drug control matters and is a major provider of financial and technical assistance at the international level.

234. Although cannabis remains subject to the highest level of control under the Controlled Substances Act, use of the drug has been legalized in several states for non-medical purposes. The Board has repeatedly expressed its concern that these developments may be inconsistent with the country’s legal obligations as a party to the three international drug conventions.

235. The Board continues to maintain a constructive dialogue with the Government of the United States on these matters.

### 3. Evaluation of the implementation by Governments of recommendations made by the Board following its country missions

236. Every year, the Board follows up on developments in countries that received INCB country missions three years prior and requests the Governments of those countries to provide information on legislative or policy actions taken to implement the Board’s post-mission recommendations and on any other drug-related developments that have occurred in the country since the mission was carried out.

237. As no missions were carried out in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2023, the Board invited the Governments of the countries and territories that had not yet submitted their reports or had submitted incomplete reports on the implementation of the recommendations

following missions undertaken in 2019 or earlier, namely Chile, Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Egypt, Madagascar, Mauritania, Montenegro, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan, as well as Kosovo,<sup>118</sup> to provide their pending reports.

238. The Board wishes to express its appreciation to the Governments of Chile, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Uzbekistan for submitting the information on follow-up to the Board’s missions to those countries and reiterates its call upon the Governments of Côte d’Ivoire, Madagascar, Mauritania, Montenegro and Sri Lanka, as well as the government of Kosovo,<sup>118</sup> to provide the information requested at the earliest opportunity.

#### (a) Chile

239. In March 2019, the Board undertook a mission to Chile, to discuss the Government’s implementation of the three international drug control conventions, to examine drug policy developments and to assess the drug-related challenges being faced by the country. In April 2023, the Government of Chile submitted a progress report relating to the institutional framework introduced to address both drug supply and demand reduction efforts and reporting on practical efforts relating to border control and drug use prevention.

240. The Board took note of the launch by the Government of its first national policy on organized crime. Implementation is being coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security; the policy brought together 17 government institutions to enhance inter-institutional coordination in order to better address organized crime. A key focus was improving areas such as container control, information analysis, the transfer of information and the updating of risk analysis systems. Concrete steps included the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the UNODC-WCO Global Container Control Programme to implement activities at two ports in the country.

241. Concerning drug use prevention, the Government reported that by the end of 2022, social reintegration services had been established in five regions of the country, with coverage to be expanded to three more regions in 2023. The overall objective was to contribute to the sustainability of the achievements made in treating children, adolescents, young people and adults; reducing the stigma attached to individuals with problematic use of various types of substances; and helping to create equal opportunities for

<sup>118</sup>References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).



children, adolescents, young people and adults facing social exclusion on account of their substance use.

242. The Government also provided information on the drug and alcohol treatment courts programme; those courts were used to provide an alternative procedure for adult and adolescent offenders with problematic use of psychoactive substances. The aim of the courts was to facilitate the identification of those who engage in problem drug use and to ensure that they receive treatment, helping them to lessen their consumption of such substances, as well as reducing the risk of recidivism. As at March 2022, the programme was operating 35 courts in 11 regions of Chile.

243. Finally, during the mission in 2019, it was observed that the Government was considering legislative provisions authorizing the self-cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes. While no update on this matter was provided in the progress report, the Board reiterates that authorizing the self-cultivation of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes may contravene the international drug control treaties, in particular the 1961 Convention.

#### (b) Democratic People's Republic of Korea

244. In September 2019, the Board undertook a mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in order to review the drug control situation in the country and the implementation of the three United Nations drug control treaties, including reporting to and cooperation with INCB, in accordance with the conventions.

245. The Board received a progress report from the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in June 2023, informing that the Drug Management Law of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was amended on 14 December 2021. Supply reduction efforts were reported to be further enhanced through the Law on Customs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which prohibits the import and export of illicit drugs and precursor chemicals and, pursuant to that law, the Customs Bureau was working in close cooperation with bordering countries to prevent the trafficking of illicit drugs and precursors.

246. At the time of the mission, the reported consumption of narcotic drugs for medical and scientific purposes in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was one of the lowest not only in Asia but in the world. The reported consumption of psychotropic substances for licit purposes was also very low, and the Board encouraged the Government to examine the causes for the underutilization of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical purposes. While the Government assured the Board that there were no

issues with the current legal framework that would result in reduced availability of substances for medical and scientific use, the Board urges the Government to continually review the mechanisms in place to ensure their adequacy.

247. The Ministry of Public Health confirmed that it had conducted an assessment of trade discrepancies in relation to psychotropic substances as raised by the mission and reported that no inconsistencies in such trade were noted during the global health crisis. The Board remains concerned that discrepancies relating to international shipments of both narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances continued to be identified, and the Board stands ready to assist the Government in addressing the matter to improve the Government's control and monitoring of international trade.

#### (c) Egypt

248. In June 2017, the Board undertook a mission to Egypt to review the Government's compliance with the provisions of the international drug control treaties and its cooperation with the Board.

249. Following upon previous reports, the Government of Egypt submitted additional information during the reporting period describing efforts to strengthen the drug control system in the country in line with the Board's recommendations.

250. The Board commends the Government of Egypt for the extensive information that it has provided, including data based on population surveys, such as the national comprehensive survey on narcotic drug demand, regarding the use of new psychoactive substances.

251. While welcoming the progress made in the implementation of its recommendations, the Board reiterates its encouragement to the Government of Egypt to actively use the INCB tools, including I2ES, PICS and IONICS, developed for Governments to facilitate the trade of internationally controlled substances and prevent trafficking in new psychoactive substances and to continue to take measures to promote the adequate availability of controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical purposes.

#### (d) Jordan

252. In October 2019, the Board undertook a mission to Jordan in order to discuss the Government's implementation of the three international drug control conventions and to examine drug policy developments in the country. The

Board received an initial response from the Government of Jordan in January 2022 with more detailed information on treatment and rehabilitation services being received in July 2023.

253. The Government reported that, due to the successful experiences of the Addiction Treatment Centre affiliated with the Public Security Directorate of the Anti-Narcotics Department, the Centre was expanded to 170 beds and is now equipped with sports facilities, pottery and sewing workshops and computer laboratories. The Government reported that the Centre observed treatment protocols that conform with the relevant international standards and that treatment was provided to 951 people in 2022. Based on these experiences, a further 40-bed facility was established to treat people who use drugs in one of the country's correctional and rehabilitation centres. While treatment services had been expanded in the northern and southern regions of the country, solutions were however still being sought for treating juveniles.

254. High levels of international cooperation were reported by the Government in order to deal with cross-border drug trafficking faced by the country. Ongoing efforts include exchanging information with liaison officers concerning drug smuggling networks, suspicious persons and smuggling routes and *modi operandi*. An Electronic Surveillance Office was also created to address drug trafficking operations via the Internet, including on social networking sites.

255. The Board takes note of the steps introduced by the Government of Jordan and understands that a draft national strategy to combat narcotic drugs has been pending with the office of the Prime Minister since 2020. The Government is urged to finalize this strategy as a matter of urgency in order to complement the initiatives already introduced to address the country's drug use situation and data collection methods.

### (e) Tunisia

256. In October 2018, the Board undertook a mission to Tunisia with a view to comprehensively discussing with the Government the various issues relating to national drug control and the measures necessary to achieve the objectives of the international drug control treaties at both the policy and technical levels. Additional information relating to the Board's recommendations were received in July 2023.

257. The Government reported that the third survey on the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs in schools was undertaken in 2021 as part of the Mediterranean School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (MedSPAD).

The survey revealed an increase in the use of drugs since the second MedSPAD survey in 2017, highlighting the need for the establishment of health-care facilities similar to the AMAL Center and of a national drug observatory.

258. The Minister of Health approved a national strategy in June 2021 for preventing and reducing the risks of, and treating, disorders related to the use of illicit psychoactive substances in community and prison settings, covering the period 2023–2027. The strategy was drawn up by two experts – national and international – within the framework of cooperation with UNODC, and an order for the delivery of methadone to Tunisia had been placed by the Global Fund as a part of the implementation of the national strategy and in the context of treatment for people who inject opioids.

259. The Board took note of the activities initiated by the authorities of Tunisia to reform legislation, prepare and implement a national action plan and introduce effective precursor chemical control, but is concerned that many of those reforms have not yet been finalized. The Government is urged to address these issues as a matter of urgency.

### (f) Uzbekistan

260. In March 2019, the Board undertook a mission to Uzbekistan to discuss the drug control situation in the country and the status of implementation of the three international drug control conventions.

261. In April 2023, the Government of Uzbekistan submitted a progress report on the implementation of the Board's recommendations following its mission to the country. The Government of Uzbekistan reported that measures had been taken to prevent the illegal distribution of pharmaceutical preparations outside pharmacies and to strengthen control over the quality of such preparations. The Board acknowledges that efforts have been made to strengthen the procedures for the import, export and transit of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors on the territory of Uzbekistan and to control the movement thereof.

262. The Board takes note of challenges posed to Uzbekistan by drug trafficking from Afghanistan and commends the Government for its supply-reduction efforts, in particular with regard to the work of law enforcement agencies aimed at eliminating channels used for the transit and sale of narcotic drugs and at coordinating and organizing operational and preventive measures to reduce the demand for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

263. With regard to the non-medical and non-scientific use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, the Board noted the information provided by the Government of Uzbekistan regarding the joint preparation of a survey, in cooperation with UNODC, to assess the prevalence of drug use in the country.

264. In 2020, the Government of Uzbekistan approved legislation to regulate matters relating to the treatment of drug use, based on the principles of legality, confidentiality and social protection, and to provide resources and equipment for drug use treatment services. The Government also approved a programme of measures for the further development of the drug use treatment service for the period 2022–2026.

265. The Board welcomes the willingness of the Government of Uzbekistan to register with and be trained to use the IONICS platform and the PEN Online system. The Board acknowledges the efforts made to set up preventive programmes, with the involvement of community-based institutions and civil society.

## **D. Action taken by the Board to ensure the implementation of the international drug control treaties**

### **1. Action taken by the Board pursuant to articles 14 and 14 bis of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended by the 1972 Protocol, article 19 of the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 and article 22 of the Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988**

266. When the Board has objective reasons to believe that the aims of the international drug control treaties are being seriously endangered by the failure of a State party to comply with the legal obligations contained therein, or there is a serious situation requiring cooperative action at the international level, the Board may decide to engage in a formal dialogue with the State in question with a view to fostering compliance with the treaties. This formal process is set forth in articles 14 and 14 bis of the 1961 Convention as amended, article 19 of the 1971 Convention and article 22 of the 1988 Convention, which establish the formal steps

and parameters under which these confidential consultations are to be held.

267. Since its inception, INCB has invoked these compliance-related provisions with respect to a number of States in order to initiate formal consultations with them to examine potential issues of non-compliance through active dialogue, requests for additional information and requests for remedial actions to be taken, as deemed appropriate.

268. Pursuant to the relevant provisions of the conventions, the fact that consultations have been initiated and the name of the State concerned are not publicly disclosed by the Board unless it decides to bring the situation to the attention of the parties, the Economic and Social Council or the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in cases where the State party in question has failed to give satisfactory explanations when called upon to do so or has failed to adopt any remedial measures that it has been called upon to take, or where there is a serious situation that requires cooperative action at the international level with a view to addressing non-compliance.

### **2. Consultation with the Government of Afghanistan pursuant to articles 14 and 14 bis of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs as amended by the 1972 Protocol**

269. In May 2000, the Board decided to invoke article 14 of the 1961 Convention as amended with respect to Afghanistan, having determined that the country had become the world's largest illicit producer of opium, seriously endangering the aims of the Convention. Pursuant to paragraph 1 (a) of article 14, the Board decided to propose to the then de facto authorities of Afghanistan the opening of consultations in order to identify possible courses of action to address the grave threats to international drug control posed by the situation in the country.

270. Consultations with Afghanistan continued pursuant to article 14 of the 1961 Convention as amended following the transition to a civilian Government in 2001 until its overthrow by the Taliban in August 2021.

271. In May 2018, the Board also invoked article 14 bis of the 1961 Convention as amended in order to call upon the competent organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system to provide technical and financial assistance to the Government of Afghanistan in support of its efforts to carry out its obligations under the 1961 Convention as amended.

272. With the question of the diplomatic representation of Afghanistan at the United Nations still being considered by the Credentials Committee, there was no communication between the Board and the de facto authorities of Afghanistan during the period under review. However, the Board continued to underscore the need to support the Afghan population in its meetings with partners, including UNODC, WHO, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the Economic and Social Council.

## Situation in Afghanistan

273. During the reporting period, Afghanistan continued to face significant challenges, including severe humanitarian needs, a substantially weakened economy and the further curtailment of the human rights of the civilian population by the de facto authorities.

274. Conflict-related security incidents continued to take place in Afghanistan. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) claimed responsibility for several high-profile attacks targeting civilians and the Taliban. Several armed clashes with the de facto authorities took place during the reporting period, which were mainly led by three resistance groups, namely, the National Resistance Front, the Afghanistan Freedom Front and the Afghanistan Liberation Movement.<sup>119</sup>

275. The de facto authorities of Afghanistan continued to make senior appointments within the Government and security and justice sectors at the central and provincial levels. All appointees were male and predominantly Taliban affiliates.<sup>120</sup>

276. The de facto authorities also continued to overhaul the justice system, in particular through the restructuring of courts, the disqualification of lawyers, the repeal of existing laws and the promulgation of edicts on the application of punishments purported to be consistent with sharia law. In November 2022, the de facto Ministry of Justice published five decrees, including one outlining the procedure for making laws, regulations and procedures. In January 2023, the leader of the Taliban issued a decision that declared all rules and regulations adopted by the former Government contrary to sharia law and void.<sup>121</sup>

277. Several anti-corruption decrees were issued by the leader of the Taliban during the reporting period, including decrees prohibiting the de facto officials from participating

in government contracts or employing relatives in institutions under their responsibility, and regulating the distribution, lease and sale of government land.<sup>122</sup>

278. Women and girls continued to be particularly affected by the systematic curtailment of human rights. In late 2022, the Taliban issued several decisions resulting in the exclusion of women from university education until the “right sharia environment in line with Afghan culture” has been established. In January 2022, the de facto authorities issued instructions for reopening educational facilities for girls’ classes up to the sixth grade in the provinces where they had previously been suspended. At the same time, another set of instructions were issued prohibiting private tertiary institutions from registering female students for entrance examinations until further notice, entailing the suspension of university education for women.

279. In December 2022, the Taliban announced a ban on women working for national and international non-governmental organizations. Additional measures restricting women’s rights have included the closure of women-owned and operated businesses and the banning of women from frequenting public parks.

280. On 5 April 2023, the de facto Ministry of Foreign Affairs verbally informed the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of UNAMA that with immediate effect, no Afghan woman would be permitted to work for the United Nations in Afghanistan, with exemptions applicable only to the education and health sectors. In response, the United Nations issued statements of condemnation on 5 and 11 April, indicating that it would request all United Nations national personnel, irrespective of gender, not to report to United Nations offices, with limited exceptions made for critical tasks.<sup>123</sup> In its resolution 2681 (2023) of 27 April 2023, the Security Council condemned the decision by the Taliban to ban Afghan women from working for the United Nations in Afghanistan.

281. Further limitations on women’s access to education have been condemned by the Secretary-General, UNAMA leadership, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Public protests in Afghanistan against the restriction of women’s rights have been violently repressed, with protesters facing warning shots, water cannons, threats, beatings, arrests and detention.

<sup>119</sup> A/77/914-S/2023/453.

<sup>120</sup> A/77/772-S/2023/151 and A/77/914-S/2023/453.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> A/77/914-S/2023/453.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

282. The Board notes with serious concern that Afghanistan continues to face a major humanitarian crisis. Rapid surveys by the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group and the Humanitarian Access Working Group found that 67 per cent of 129 responding organizations reported that female staff were not coming to the office following the ban of 24 December 2022 on Afghan women working in non-governmental organizations. As at March 2023, 77 per cent of women-led organizations had either fully or partially ceased their activities and 54 per cent did not have sufficient funding to continue activities.

283. The Secretary-General reported that projections indicate limited prospects for growth and poverty reduction because of limited investment in development, and that millions of Afghans are dependent on international humanitarian assistance flows. There is a critical shortage of humanitarian funding for 2023, with the Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 having received only 9 per cent of the total requirement of \$4.63 billion as at 2 June 2023.

284. Humanitarian organizations continued to supply food and livelihood support, health care, help to address acute malnutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene assistance, education, emergency shelter and household items to the Afghan population in need. The assistance continued despite the high incidence of interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities, including attacks on humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities and numerous gender-related incidents against female staff.

285. On 8 March 2023, the de facto authorities issued a decree banning cannabis cultivation in Afghanistan, stating that “in case of a violation, the plants would be destroyed, and violators would be punished according to sharia laws”.<sup>124</sup> On the same day, the de facto Deputy Minister of the counter-narcotics authority called upon countries in the region to cooperate in addressing drug and precursor trafficking and money-laundering and providing alternative livelihoods to farmers who had been affected by the earlier ban on the cultivation of narcotic drugs announced in April 2022.

286. It appears that the price of high-quality cannabis resin in Afghanistan increased by 10 per cent after the latest cannabis ban was issued. More information on drug-related developments in the country is presented chapter III of the present report.

<sup>124</sup> Ariana News, “IEA’s supreme leader bans cultivation of cannabis in Afghanistan”, 19 March 2023; and TRT World, “Taliban leader bans cannabis cultivation in Afghanistan”, 19 March 2023.

## United Nations action

287. On 16 December 2022, the General Assembly approved the decision of the Credentials Committee to “postpone its consideration of the credentials” for Myanmar, Afghanistan and Libya “and to revert to consideration of these credentials at a future time in the seventy-seventh session”, which ended in September 2023.<sup>125</sup>

288. In January 2023, in the face of limitations on women’s rights, a four-day United Nations mission to Afghanistan was conducted on behalf of the Secretary-General by the Deputy Secretary-General, the Executive Director of UN-Women and the Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations in order to express the Organization’s concerns about the exclusion of women from education and public life and to request the Taliban to reconsider these measures in light of the fundamental role played by Afghan women in the country’s continued development.<sup>126</sup>

289. On 16 March 2023, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2678 (2023), extending the mandate of UNAMA until 17 March 2024. In the resolution, the Security Council stressed the critical importance of a continued presence of UNAMA and called upon all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including relevant authorities and international actors, to coordinate with UNAMA in the implementation of its mandate and to ensure the safety, security and freedom of movement of United Nations and associated personnel throughout the country.

290. On the same day, the Security Council also adopted resolution 2679 (2023), in which it requested the Secretary-General to conduct and provide an integrated, independent assessment, after consultations with all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders. The Council requested that the independent assessment provide forward-looking recommendations for an integrated and coherent approach among relevant political, humanitarian and development actors, within and outside of the United Nations system, in order to address the current challenges faced by Afghanistan, including those relating to the humanitarian situation, human rights, especially the rights of women and girls, religious and ethnic minorities, security and terrorism.

291. On 3 July 2023, the United Nations country team launched the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan for the

<sup>125</sup> A/77/600, para. 11.

<sup>126</sup> UNAMA, “High-level UN delegation led by the Deputy Secretary-General calls on Afghanistan’s de facto Taliban authorities to reverse course on recent decrees limiting women’s and girls’ rights, says Afghans must not be abandoned”, 22 January 2023.

period 2023–2025, implementation of which had been paused because of the ban imposed by the de facto authorities on Afghan women working for non-governmental organizations in December 2022. The Strategic Framework is a planning instrument that articulates the approach of the United Nations to addressing basic human needs in Afghanistan, prioritizing the needs and rights of the most vulnerable, including women and girls, children and young people, internally displaced persons, returnees, refugees and ethnic and religious minorities.<sup>127</sup>

292. In May 2023, the Secretary-General convened a meeting of special envoys on Afghanistan to strengthen international engagement around common objectives. A special coordinator of the independent assessment mandated by the Security Council in its resolution 2679 (2023) attended the meeting as an observer. Participants highlighted the need for a strategy of engagement that allows for the stabilization of Afghanistan but also for addressing important concerns shared by the international community, which include the lack of inclusive governance, violations of human rights, the presence of terrorist organizations and the spread of drug trafficking.<sup>128</sup>

293. UNAMA continued to facilitate outreach meetings on governance-related issues, including principles of good governance, service delivery and girls' access to education, between local de facto authorities, ulama, civil society organizations, the media, young people and other community members in 16 provinces. In addition, UNAMA continued to promote regional cooperation by hosting monthly meetings of Kabul-based regional ambassadors in order to coordinate engagement with the de facto authorities. UNAMA noted with concern that the enforcement of the severe restrictions on Afghan female personnel of the United Nations was affecting United Nations outreach to Afghan stakeholders, particularly women.<sup>129</sup>

294. UNODC continued to provide an alternative development programme, which had reached more than 2,375 households, 47 per cent of which were female-headed, in Helmand, Kandahar, Laghman and Nangarhar Provinces. The programme, which is funded by the Governments of Italy and Japan, together with contributions from the United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan, supports farmers with improved vegetable production, poultry farming, cereal crop production, animal husbandry and dairy processing and by connecting beneficiaries to the local markets. UNODC also provided essential medicine,

medical equipment, supplementary food packages and basic hygiene kits to 24 drug treatment centres and seven drop-in centres.<sup>130</sup>

### 3. Supporting Governments' compliance with the treaties

#### (a) INCB Learning

295. INCB Learning is the Board's initiative to enhance the ability of Governments to estimate and assess their requirements for internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, in compliance with the three international drug control conventions. Since its launch in 2016, the programme has been supporting Member States and their competent national authorities in implementing the recommendations contained in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in 2016, and the reports of the Board for 2015, 2018 and 2022 on the availability of internationally controlled substances.<sup>131</sup>

296. The objective of INCB Learning is to promote the adequate availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances required for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their abuse and diversion into illicit channels. The submission to the Board of timely and accurate national reports of estimated requirements and statistical data for controlled substances and estimates of annual legitimate requirements for precursors is essential to achieving this objective.

297. INCB Learning supports Member States in fully implementing and complying with the international drug control conventions through training and awareness-raising. Capacity-building activities include regional training seminars, availability workshops, e-modules, bilateral consultations and, since mid-2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, online training sessions.

298. An INCB Learning subregional in-person training seminar and an awareness-raising availability workshop for officials from the competent national authorities of Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama were held in San Salvador from 13 to 17 February 2023. Over four days, 34 officials participated in 18 training sessions, which were dedicated to expanding knowledge of the provisions of the international

<sup>127</sup>UNAMA, "UN launches new Strategic Framework for supporting Afghan people", 3 July 2023.

<sup>128</sup>UNAMA, "Secretary-General's statement following two-day meeting of special envoys on Afghanistan", 3 May 2023.

<sup>129</sup>A/77/914-S/2023/453.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>E/INCB/2015/1/Supp.1, E/INCB/2018/1/Supp.1 and E/INCB/2022/1/Supp.1.

drug control treaties and further strengthening capacity for improved treaty implementation. A one-day awareness-raising availability workshop brought together specialists from Governments, WHO/the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and civil society to find ways to improve access to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical use in the subregion. Both activities were organized in close collaboration with the Government of El Salvador and CICAD.

299. On 8 and 9 June 2023, INCB Learning held a two-day virtual workshop focused on raising awareness of the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes as part of the Board's ongoing efforts to support Member States in ensuring that essential medicines are available, while preventing their diversion and abuse. The event brought together officials from the competent national authorities of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and a diverse group of stakeholders that included representatives from palliative care associations, experts in drug control and public health, and members of the international community. Over the two days, participants discussed various themes related to improving access to controlled substances for medical purposes, including regulatory frameworks, barriers to access, and the importance of national and international cooperation.

300. Both in-person and virtual INCB Learning seminars are evaluated anonymously by participants. In past years, the activities have received high ratings and evaluations have consistently shown that the content meets participants' expectations, the sessions are highly relevant and the learning materials are of a high quality.

301. E-modules are a valuable tool for closing knowledge gaps. To date, INCB Learning has developed five e-modules to support Governments in their implementation of the international drug control treaties. Available in English, French, Russian and Spanish, as well as Portuguese, the five e-modules offer interactive, self-paced training. The e-modules cover the following thematic areas: (a) the system of estimates of annual legitimate medical and scientific requirements for narcotic drugs; (b) the system of assessments of annual legitimate medical and scientific requirements for psychotropic substances; (c) the system of estimates of annual legitimate requirements for imports of precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants; (d) the international drug control framework and the role of INCB; and (e) ensuring adequate availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

302. Officials from competent national authorities continue to utilize the e-modules, and as at 1 November 2023,

1,462 officials, 67 per cent of whom were women, from 154 countries and territories had enrolled in INCB Learning e-modules. Successful completion of the modules is acknowledged with an online certificate; to date, 1,664 digital certificates have been issued. Those who have taken the modules come from all regions of the world and their countries are home to 95 per cent of the world's population. **The Board encourages Governments to continue to register officials of their competent national authorities for the e-modules and to provide feedback on the content of existing e-modules and suggestions for areas in which the development of further training is needed.**

303. In its capacity-building activities, INCB Learning works with key partner organizations such as the African Union Commission, CICAD, UNODC and WHO.

304. A compendium of frequently asked questions, which was first developed in 2021, is available on the INCB Learning website in English, French, Russian and Spanish. It provides information on compliance with the provisions of the three international drug control conventions and on the regulatory control and monitoring of licit trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals. Drug control officials can use the tool to find information related to, for example, the accurate submission of forms and timelines. Access to all the forms is also provided in the compendium.

305. To assist competent national authorities in their duties, all training materials have been consolidated and are now available on a dedicated page of the INCB Learning website. The page provides links to the text of the international drug control treaties in all six official languages and Portuguese, training materials, guidelines, tools and forms that support reporting to INCB.

306. INCB Learning newsletters are published regularly on the INCB Learning website and disseminated to competent national authorities upon subscription. The Board invites national drug control officials interested in INCB Learning activities and learning tools to subscribe to the newsletter by sending an email to [incb.learning@un.org](mailto:incb.learning@un.org).

307. **The Board is grateful for the contributions to INCB Learning made by the Governments of Australia, Belgium, France, the Russian Federation, Thailand and the United States and for the support offered by CICAD, and encourages Governments to consider actively supporting INCB Learning by participating in its activities and providing the resources required to ensure the programme's continuation and expansion.**

## (b) International Import and Export Authorization System

308. I2ES is an Internet-based electronic system developed by UNODC, with financial and technical support from Member States, and administered by the Board to allow for rapid paperless trade in internationally controlled substances. Launched in 2015 pursuant to numerous Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolutions, in particular resolutions 55/6 and 56/7, I2ES allows for the secure issuance and exchange of import and export authorizations between countries, reducing the processing time for authorizations and the risk of diversions from forged authorizations. The system is compliant with the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention, and its importance was recognized in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in 2016.

309. The INCB secretariat continually works to assist Governments in registering and implementing I2ES within their national drug control systems. Technical materials regarding the platform and its functions are available on the INCB website. The INCB secretariat also conducts webinars for interested Governments to demonstrate the functionality of the system.

310. I2ES is the only system approved by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs for the issuance and exchange of import and export authorizations pursuant to the provisions of the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1971 Convention. Recent developments regarding the use of electronic import and export authorizations among countries, including the views of the Board on those developments, are discussed in chapter III, section A, of the present report.

311. In the 12-month period ending on 1 November 2023, two Governments registered to use I2ES, bringing the total to 77 Governments that have an active administrator account. The number of Governments actively using I2ES is slowly growing, and the frequency with which Governments use the platform is increasing. During the 12-month period ending on 1 November 2023, authorities from 14 countries uploaded a total of 5,407 import authorizations and 1,202 export authorizations.

312. The Board has noted that some competent national authorities wishing to use I2ES face legislative and regulatory hurdles at the national level. These include limitations regarding how import and export authorization documents are approved and the means by which such documents can be transmitted or exchanged. Some countries require import and export authorizations for internationally controlled substances to be issued as physical documents.

313. The Board has also noted that a certain lack of features and technical limitations in I2ES make implementing the system difficult for some Governments. This includes the lack of a multilingual interface, support for nationally controlled substances and advanced statistical reporting functions. In addition, deeper integration between I2ES, other INCB systems and some national-level systems would allow for easier, quicker and more accurate data exchange between Governments and the Board.

314. Updates to I2ES and PEN Online will be provided in the context of the development of the next-generation international drug control system, the INCB initiative to update and expand the functionalities of the existing database, the International Drug Control System (IDS). IDS contains data that are provided by Governments pursuant to the provisions of the international drug control treaties and other international obligations enshrined in resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, as well as information that is provided voluntarily.

## (c) Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances Programme

315. The INCB GRIDS Programme focal point networks form the robust infrastructure that enables the rapid exchange of information and alerts and the development of intelligence and facilitates operational action to assist in investigations and in the dismantling of organized criminal groups trafficking in non-scheduled dangerous substances. As at 1 September 2023, there were 3,055 Project Ion focal points representing 633 agencies from 193 Governments and 21 international organizations, and 3,029 OPIOIDS project focal points representing 621 agencies from 188 Governments and 21 international organizations.

316. As a result of the expanding focal point network, the number of real-time incidents communicated through IONICS has consistently grown and, in 2023, exceeded 77,000. Consequently, Governments have been able to carry out investigations and analyses that have in turn led to seizures of dangerous substances, arrests of traffickers, prosecutions and disruptions of international trafficking networks.

317. Leveraging the Project Ion, OPIOIDS project and Project Prism (in relation to chemical precursors) law and regulatory enforcement focal point networks, INCB coordinated an operation (known as “Operation Knockout”) to identify emerging global trafficking sources and destinations of shipments of 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine, substances associated



with drug-facilitated sexual assault reported in a number of countries. The operation involved 160 law and regulatory enforcement officials from 76 national agencies and organizations and six international partners. This led to 671 seizures, amounting to more than 785 kg and 225 litres of drugs seized during the operational period. Of the total incidents communicated, 282 incidents involved carisoprodol (141 kg and 100 units); 224 incidents involved ketamine (516 kg and 7.2 litres); 101 incidents involved 1,4-butanediol (46 kg and 200 litres); 61 incidents involved *gamma*-butyrolactone (82 kg and 18 litres); and three incidents involved flubromazepam (51 grams and 10 units).

318. One of the pillars of the GRIDS Programme is its unique approach to public-private partnerships, assisting Governments in their efforts to foster voluntary cooperation with companies to prevent the exploitation of legitimate services by traffickers. In this work, the focus is on four key areas: manufacture, marketing, movement and monetization. In the 12-month period ending on 1 September 2023, expert group meetings and other related events were held, bringing together leading global private sector partners from a number of relevant sectors, including e-commerce platforms, social media companies, chemical and drug manufacturers and private postal and express mail and courier services. These events resulted in operational outcomes, as a substantial number of vendors of dangerous synthetic opioids were identified by INCB and, through law and regulatory enforcement focal points, removed from e-commerce platforms, thereby reducing the availability of fentanyl and related dangerous substances.

319. Between 1 November 2022 and 1 November 2023, five global alerts and special notices were circulated to Project Ion and OPIOIDS focal points for voluntary action by law, regulatory and private sector counterparts. This included an alert relating to emerging trafficking in tianeptine – a substance with opioid-like effects – and trafficking in bromazolam and flunitrazolam, both emerging novel triazolobenzodiazepines with no known legitimate use. The Board invites all relevant government authorities to communicate seizures and suspicious shipments involving these substances through IONICS.

320. Through the GRIDS Programme, in-person training courses were conducted, supplemented by distance-learning technologies. Between 1 November 2022 and 31 October 2023, 26 training events were held on topics that included raising awareness of new psychoactive substances and emerging opioids, information exchange using IONICS, intelligence development and targeting using the GRIDS Intelligence tool, safe handling of opioids and fentanyl, personal protective equipment, presumptive testing for synthetic opioids and interdiction methods. A total

of 533 law and regulatory enforcement officers and postal inspection officers, representing 58 Governments and two international organizations, took part in the training courses and also received access to the eLearning Individual Training Environment (ELITE) platform, which is offered in the six official languages of the United Nations. The Board recognizes the ongoing cooperation with its international partners, in particular UPU, whose 2018 cooperation agreement with INCB has significantly raised the awareness of postal operators worldwide about the safe handling of packages containing dangerous substances.

321. Also through the GRIDS Programme, the sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services was held in Vienna from 11 to 15 September 2023. The event brought together over 94 officers from 36 Governments, as well as several international organizations and private sector entities. Participants identified the latest *modi operandi* for trafficking in synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances, exchanged case studies and engaged in multilateral meetings to enhance cooperation across borders.

322. In addition, under the GRIDS Programme, the third international expert group meeting on expanding INCB lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate use and novel approaches for their identification in falsified, substandard or otherwise illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals was held in Vienna from 18 to 22 September 2023. The event was attended by more than 40 representatives from 16 Governments, as well as several international organizations and private sector entities.

**323. The Board encourages Governments and international organizations to enable their law and regulatory enforcement focal points to take advantage of the suite of INCB proprietary counter-trafficking tools, including the Project Ion Incident Communication System (IONICS) for secure real-time exchange of information on incidents involving new psychoactive substances; the GRIDS Intelligence HD strategic and operational targeting platforms; the eLearning Individualized Training Environment (ELITE) platform referred to in Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 66/2; and the Scanning of Novel Opioids on Online Platforms (SNOOP) tool for the detection and dismantling of online vendor marketplaces, along with the GRIDS Programme operational activities.**

## (d) Project Prism and Project Cohesion

324. Since 2003 and 2006, respectively, Project Prism (in relation to amphetamine-type stimulants and other synthetic drugs) and Project Cohesion (in relation to illicit manufacture of cocaine and heroin) have guided INCB operational initiatives on precursors. Supported and often engineered by the Precursors Task Force,<sup>132</sup> these operational initiatives have resulted in valuable analysis and helped to identify and address new trends in precursor trafficking, as well as gaps and weaknesses in the international precursor control system.

325. In October 2023, Operation Backup was launched under Project Prism with the aim of generating information on non-scheduled precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants (P-2-P methyl glycidic acid and its esters, and esters of 3,4-MDP-2-P methyl glycidic acid) and of fentanyl and its analogues (4-piperidone and 1-Boc-4-piperidone). The information gathered through Operation Backup will also support the review of the chemicals targeted by INCB for a possible scheduling recommendation to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in March 2024.

326. A closed, information-sharing meeting, organized under Project Prism, was held in Vienna in June 2023. The meeting facilitated the exchange of information among countries in Africa, Europe and West Asia on the diversion of and trafficking in pharmaceutical preparations containing pseudoephedrine originating in Africa.

327. During the reporting period, INCB issued three alerts through Project Prism. The first alert focused on a new method of concealment for the smuggling of pseudoephedrine; the second alert highlighted common characteristics of a series of shipments of glycidic acid derivatives of P-2-P and 3,4-MDP-2-P in the Netherlands; and the third alert raised awareness of the identification of a new designer precursor of MDMA and related “ecstasy”-type substances, the sodium salt of isopropylidene (2-(3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl)acetyl)malonate (IMDPAM).

**328. The Board commends all Governments that have supported the operational initiatives under Projects Cohesion and Prism, including the time-bound intelligence-gathering operations and case meetings. Further, in order to ensure that follow-up investigations of precursor cases**

**and suspicious shipments are conducted efficiently, the Board encourages all Governments to nominate suitable precursors focal points, if they have not done so, and to inform INCB of any changes or updates in a timely manner.**

## (e) Precursors Incident Communication System

329. PICS is an online platform for the sharing by competent authorities of real-time actionable information related to incidents and suspicious shipments involving precursors and equipment used in illicit drug manufacture. PICS automatically alerts users via email about new incidents. It allows users to conduct both free text and structured searches with several fixed and dynamic search options, enabling users to generate tailor-made reports for intelligence and analysis. It also enables the sharing of pictures and documents that can be used by countries in the conduct of backtracking investigations.

330. As at 1 November 2023, PICS had more than 600 registered users from 129 countries and territories and 300 organizations. Information related to over 4,300 incidents that had taken place in more than 80 countries and that involved nearly 300 substances had been shared through PICS. A total of 77 incidents included information related to equipment. In the reporting period, information on nearly 500 unique incidents involving nearly 1,200 communications on the substances involved (145 communications on substances in Table I, 218 on substances in Table II, 553 on substances included in the limited international special surveillance list of non-scheduled substances, 253 on non-scheduled substances not included in that list and 47 on cutting agents) was shared through PICS. Information on 14 cases involving laboratory equipment was also shared through PICS during the same period.

**331. The Board encourages Governments to make greater use of PICS and to share timely information on incidents relating to precursors and laboratory equipment with the requisite actionable details to enable the conduct of investigations by law enforcement authorities in the countries concerned.** The sharing of information through PICS enables the Board to issue alerts through Project Prism and Project Cohesion (see para. 327 above) and to update the limited international special surveillance list of non-scheduled substances. It also provides the basis for conducting time-bound intelligence-gathering operations.

332. Further details on the Board’s precursor-related operational activities can be found in the report of the Board

<sup>132</sup>The current members of the INCB Precursors Task Force are Australia, China, Colombia, Germany, India, Mexico, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Nigeria, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Switzerland, Türkiye, and the United States, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), UNODC, the World Customs Organization, the European Commission and the Inter-American Drug Control Commission.

for 2023 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

#### (f) Pre-Export Notification Online Light system

333. PEN Online Light is an online platform that is similar to PEN Online and that was launched in October 2022 for the voluntary exchange of information about legitimate planned exports involving chemicals that are not controlled internationally but that may be under national control in some countries. As at 1 November 2023, 12 exporting countries had used PEN Online Light to inform 50 importing countries and territories about 725 planned shipments of chemicals not under international control. **The Board commends those Governments that actively use PEN Online Light and encourages the authorities of all other exporting countries and territories to consider using it with a view to enhancing knowledge of international movements of substitute and alternative chemicals that may be used in the illicit manufacture of drugs.**

#### (g) INCB newsletter on precursors

334. To keep stakeholders abreast of developments and initiatives in the areas of precursor control and equipment that may be used in illicit drug manufacture, INCB publishes a newsletter on a quarterly basis, which is disseminated to all Project Prism and Project Cohesion focal points, competent national authorities and relevant partners. Available data indicate that the newsletter enjoys a high level of readership, giving an indication of the interest of the targeted audience for this service.



# Chapter III.

## Analysis of the world situation

### A. Global issues

#### 1. Precursor control in countries of conflict

335. The diversion of precursors from licit trade can happen at any stage along the distribution chain. While no country is immune from attempts by traffickers to obtain chemicals for illicit purposes, territories whose status is unclear or contested or, at any given time, is not effectively within the scope of control of an internationally recognized entity's competent national authorities are at increased risk of being targeted by traffickers. The scenarios that give rise to vulnerabilities vary in nature and include political instability, conflict and unresolved territorial disputes in various forms, and civil war or prolonged civil unrest, and the scenario in a given country may change over time. Places in which such scenarios exist are referred to as countries of conflict or conflict areas.

336. INCB has, on several occasions, expressed its concern about the implications such scenarios have for international precursor control and the risk of the territories concerned being targeted by traffickers for the diversion of precursor chemicals and/or activities associated with, or carried out in preparation for, such diversion. In addition to the outright diversion of precursors from companies located in conflict areas, past incidents involving conflict areas have included the placing of orders for precursors using the names of such companies as a front, the channelling of diverted shipments of precursors through the territory of countries of conflict, and the forging of import authorizations.

337. International trade in precursors outside the PEN Online system, which has become the central global system for the exchange of pre-export notifications pursuant to article 12, paragraph 10 (a), of the 1988 Convention, also brings about a higher risk of diversion. This applies to importing countries not using the system actively to monitor incoming notifications. It also applies to exporting countries not using the system, or not using it systematically, to notify importing countries of every planned shipment prior to dispatch. Of particular concern is the trade in pharmaceutical preparations containing scheduled precursors, especially ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which the Board and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs have recommended be monitored in the same manner as is the trade in the precursors that those preparations contain.

338. With regard to the trade in precursors destined for countries of conflict, INCB is aware of a number of practical challenges experienced by exporting countries. In particular, owing to the lack of integrity of controls in a disputed territory, the authorities of exporting countries are often unable to send pre-export notifications to and interact with an officially recognized counterpart who has both the legal authority and the capacity to provide adequate oversight and assurance regarding a shipment's end purpose or destination. There may also be a lack of compliance with the pre-export notification mechanism, namely, the practical requirement for the authorities of importing countries to view incoming notifications, a limited ability to verify the legitimacy of a shipment and/or insufficient clarification of the reasons for objecting to a shipment. All these factors leave the exporting country in a difficult position when deciding whether or not a proposed export can proceed.

339. INCB has observed that, as a result of economic considerations, shipments are being allowed to proceed more often than not, even when only the minimum requirements of article 12 of the 1988 Convention are being fulfilled. In a few notable cases in the past, the authorities of exporting countries have requested the exporting company to ensure the secure transportation and handling of the substances in the destination country up to their receipt by the importing company. **INCB commends all efforts that contribute to ensuring the availability of controlled precursors for legitimate purposes in all regions of the world, irrespective of a country's situation or a territory's status, while managing the risk of diversion. INCB further invites all Governments to work with the Board to devise appropriate ways and means of monitoring trade pursuant to article 12 of the 1988 Convention and handling pre-export notifications with a view to enabling the trade in chemicals to and from high-risk areas in a regulated manner.**

## 2. Ketamine: an update on recent developments and status of national controls

340. Ketamine belongs chemically to the phenyl cyclohexamine class of drugs, and like other drugs in this class, functions as a dissociative anaesthetic. First synthesized in 1962 and patented in Belgium in 1963, the substance has been used as a general anaesthetic in human and veterinary medicine. At sub-anaesthetic doses, ketamine is also used in selected conditions for the management of pain and depression. Given its affordable price and flexible modes of administration, its use as an anaesthetic is particularly important for developing countries and in emergency medicine. Ketamine, which is included in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines and the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines for Children, is not under international control.

341. Discussions on the control status of ketamine at the international level started in the early 2000s, with the substance first being pre-reviewed by the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence in 2002, then critically reviewed by the Committee in 2006, 2012, 2014 and 2015. While WHO recommended that ketamine not be placed under international control, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in its resolutions 49/6 of 2006 and 50/3 of 2007, expressed concern over the widespread abuse of and trafficking in ketamine and encouraged Governments to consider placing it on the list of substances controlled under national legislation and adopting a system of precautionary measures for the timely detection of its diversion.

342. To facilitate international trade in ketamine while ensuring compliance with national legislation, INCB sent a questionnaire on the national control status of the substance to all Governments in August 2008. Information on the import and export authorization requirements for ketamine from 123 countries and territories was then published and disseminated through the INCB Secure Portal for Governments ([www.incb.org/incb/en/secured/governments.html](http://www.incb.org/incb/en/secured/governments.html)).

343. In view of recent developments in the medical use of ketamine and increasing non-medical use and seizures reported by some Governments in recent years, the Board decided to request updated information on the national control status of the substance. Consequently, a questionnaire was sent to all Governments in April 2023. Replies from 88 countries and 6 territories had been received as at 1 November 2023.

### Updates on national control status and licit use

344. Responses giving information on legislative updates on the control status of ketamine were provided to INCB by 101 Governments in 2023, in comparison with the 128 that provided such information in response to the INCB questionnaire of 2008–2010.

345. Among those responding to the questionnaire sent by INCB in 2023, around 70 per cent reported that they had placed ketamine under national control. The level of control to which the substance is subject, however, varies from relatively strict control regimes under narcotics laws to weaker reporting or licensing requirements under medicines acts. Regardless of the control status, most respondents (70 countries and 3 territories) require import and export authorizations for international trade in the substance. A list of the countries and territories that require such authorizations for ketamine is updated regularly and is available to all Governments on the INCB Secure Portal for Governments. **The Board encourages importing Governments to issue a letter of no objection or other proof of the legitimacy of the import in cases where ketamine is imported from countries where it is controlled.**

346. Although only seven countries reported the licit manufacture of ketamine, almost all respondents import the substance for medical and scientific use, with some noting increases in trade volume in recent years. In addition to using ketamine as an anaesthetic for surgical and diagnostic procedures, several countries have also approved its medical use in controlled programmes as a treatment for patients with treatment-resistant depression. Some respondents

also reported ongoing projects and clinical trials to further explore the therapeutic potential of ketamine in practice.

347. Alongside its expanding medical use, more than 20 countries reported greater use of ketamine for recreational purposes and increasing seizures of the substance in recent years. Often consumed in small quantities together with other drugs at dance events, some Governments detected greater recreational use of ketamine at more party venues, and the emerging practice of ketamine injections and its use in chemsex<sup>133</sup> since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic as a public health emergency. Increases in both the number of seizures and the volume of ketamine seized were also reported. One country reported the emergence of ketamine analogues in response to the placing of ketamine under national control.

### Illicit manufacture of and trafficking in ketamine

348. More than 30 per cent of respondents to the INCB survey carried out in 2023 reported ketamine seizures or trafficking in ketamine involving their territory. This included both trafficking in pharmaceutical preparations and illicitly manufactured ketamine. Individual seizures typically involved small amounts, in the range of a few grams, although occasional bulk seizures of a few kilograms, and one seizure of 500 kg, were reported. The largest quantities were reported by countries in Asia, namely, Malaysia (2.6 tons seized in 2022), Myanmar (2.3 tons seized in 2022) and Thailand (nearly 1.8 tons seized in 2022), as well as China, with seizures amounting to almost 1.8 tons since 2021, with the alleged countries of origin being Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar. India has also been identified as the country of origin of a bulk seizure in Europe. Shipments were often seized at land border crossings or among international postal packages at airports.

349. In South America, diverted ketamine is trafficked for refinement into mixtures known regionally as “tuci” (or “tucibi”, “fake 2C-B” or “*cocaína rosada*”), which consist of varying combinations of ketamine, MDMA, amphetamine and/or various new psychoactive substances. Similar products are known in South-East Asia as “happy water” and “k-powdered milk”. Cases of “tuci” and “pink cocaine” have also been reported in Europe and North America.

350. Globally, ketamine seizures peaked in 2015, and have been increasing again since around 2018, both in terms of frequency of trafficking incidents and the amounts seized.

<sup>133</sup>The term “chemsex” refers to intentional sex under the influence of psychoactive drugs, mostly among men who have sex with men.

Given the resurgence of ketamine trafficking and non-medical use, the substance has also been one of the target substances in two INCB time-bound intelligence operations, Operation Trance and Operation Knockout, which were conducted in 2020 and 2023, respectively. In these operations, 50 and 224 ketamine incidents were reported, respectively, with over 517 kg seized in the most recent operation. In both operations, Western Europe and Central Europe were the main source regions of seized consignments of ketamine, accounting for some 80 per cent of the incidents reported. In 2023, more countries were identified in relation to ketamine trafficking compared with three years previously, with each continent having been identified at least once as either a place of origin, destination or transit. As at 1 November 2023, Governments had communicated 1,400 incidents involving a total of 5 tons of seized ketamine through IONICS.

351. Previously, seized ketamine had typically been diverted from licit markets. While diversion, and sometimes theft, from legitimate channels continue to be significant sources of supply for illicit uses, increasingly sophisticated illicit laboratories have enabled illicit operators to synthesize ketamine from various internationally non-scheduled chemical intermediates, a trend that started in Asia some 10 years ago. Since then, illicit ketamine laboratories have been dismantled in Belgium, Cambodia, Canada, China, including Hong Kong and Taiwan Province of China, India, Malaysia and the Netherlands (Kingdom of the). Some of the laboratories, in particular those in East and South-East Asia, were industrial in scale, and sometimes used legitimate front companies to import the necessary chemicals and equipment.

352. Despite an increase in reports of illicit ketamine manufacture, in their responses to the Board’s survey of 2023, only five countries reported that they were aware of seizures of ketamine in which the substance was suspected to have been illicitly manufactured; four of them reported illicit manufacture on their territories.

353. Similarly, information about ketamine precursors is scarce and not systematically reported, given that these chemicals are not under international control. Nevertheless, some countries submit such information to INCB. Reported seizures of ketamine precursors have predominantly involved two chemicals. Both substances are intermediates in the synthesis of ketamine and can readily be converted into the substance. The substances can be considered designer precursors, that is, they are made specifically to circumvent existing legislation. Seizures of the two substances peaked in 2014, around the time that China proposed that ketamine be placed under control in Schedule I of the 1971 Convention. China has also been the country that

most systematically reports the largest seizures of ketamine precursors. **The Board commends the Governments that voluntarily report seizures of ketamine precursors, their sources and related contextual information. Similarly, the Board commends Governments that use forensic profiling analysis to determine whether seized ketamine has been illicitly manufactured and from which chemicals. These efforts help to provide the evidence to prevent illicit ketamine manufacture while protecting legitimate supply chains, thus ensuring the availability of ketamine for legitimate purposes.**

### 3. Data collection and analysis practices of the Board

354. The regular submission of comprehensive and reliable statistical data from Governments to the Board is vital for the overall functioning of the international drug control system and the analysis of global trends. Good-quality data provide information that is necessary to not only ensure the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes but also to uncover diversions of controlled substances for illicit purposes.

355. The Board issues technical reports that provide Governments with statistical analyses on the manufacture, consumption, utilization and stocks of and trade in internationally controlled substances. Those reports are based on data that parties to the international drug control conventions are obligated to submit and data that Governments provide voluntarily pursuant to resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. On the basis of its analysis, the Board makes recommendations to competent authorities to ensure the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific needs while preventing their diversion from licit sources.

356. For narcotic drugs, the submission of estimates of annual licit requirements is mandatory under the 1961 Convention as amended, and the estimates furnished by Governments need to be confirmed by the Board before becoming the basis for calculating the limits on manufacture and import. To ensure that Governments may import narcotic drugs for medical and scientific purposes, estimates are established by the Board for countries that are unable to supply them. More information about the obligations of Governments to comply with the limits on imports and exports of narcotic drugs can be found in paragraph 104.

357. With regard to psychotropic substances, States parties to the 1971 Convention provide to INCB their annual statistics on psychotropic substances, as well as voluntary quarterly statistics on imports and exports of psychotropic

substances. INCB provides and updates the list of psychotropic substances under international control (“Green List”), forms (P, A/P and B/P) and training material to help competent national authorities to meet the requirements of the international drug control treaties and the requests contained in the relevant resolutions for the reporting of data.

358. With regard to precursors, the 1988 Convention, in its article 12, paragraph 12, requires Governments to provide to the Board information on the amounts seized of internationally controlled precursors and their origin, on any substance not included in Table I or Table II of that Convention which is identified as having been used in illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances, and on methods of diversion and illicit manufacture. Furthermore, pursuant to resolutions subsequent to the adoption of the 1988 Convention, Governments are requested to provide to INCB, on a voluntary basis, annual information on the licit trade in and use of substances listed in Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention, as well as estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of selected precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants. The 1988 Convention requires the Board to report annually to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs on the implementation of article 12.

359. To support Governments in complying with the provisions of article 12 of the 1988 Convention with regard to the monitoring of legitimate international trade in internationally controlled precursors, the Board developed a secure web-based tool, PEN Online. Since 2006, the PEN Online system has facilitated real-time communication between importing and exporting Governments regarding planned shipments of precursor chemicals in international trade, thus contributing to preventing the diversion of such chemicals into illicit channels.

360. The Board’s Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS) provides Governments with a platform for the exchange of real-time information on chemical-related incidents such as seizures, shipments stopped in transit, diversions and uncovered laboratories used for the illicit manufacture of substances and their equipment. PICS has provided leads for national authorities to initiate backtracking investigations and, on several occasions, the timely communication of details of precursor incidents has led to further seizures or has prevented diversions. PICS also serves as an early warning mechanism for the identification of emerging precursors and the *modi operandi* used for diversion, thus informing the Board’s scheduling assessments. Over the past year, a complementary focus of PICS has increasingly been the exchange of incident information on equipment used for illicit drug manufacture, with a view to enhancing the implementation of article 13 of the 1988 Convention (for more details on PICS, see paras. 329–331).



361. The statistical reports and other data provided by Governments pursuant to their reporting obligations under the three international drug control conventions and the voluntary information provided pursuant to the relevant resolutions are managed under the INCB International Drug Control System (IDS), PEN Online and I2ES, the latter two being web-based platforms that enable countries to engage in the trade in internationally controlled substances securely and rapidly.

362. These three systems are currently being updated to enhance their functionality, in order to better serve the needs of Member States. One of the main new features of the updated version of IDS, Next Generation IDS, will be a web-based portal that will enable Governments to provide reporting data more rapidly and accurately, track reporting errors and review historical data. Next Generation IDS, which will provide a protected and secure web environment for Governments, will also have a multilingual interface and deepened integration with PEN Online and I2ES.

363. In addition to carrying out its mandated functions under the international drug control treaties, the Board also assists Governments, through its GRIDS Programme, in addressing the public health threats posed by the increasing misuse of non-medical synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances. Under the GRIDS Programme, backtracking investigations are supported through IONICS, which provides national law enforcement agencies with a secure communication platform for the exchange of real-time information on seizures, stopped and suspicious shipments and diversion attempts involving new psychoactive substances, non-medical synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances. A further tool available under the programme is the GRIDS Intelligence HD targeting platform, which enables the development of actionable intelligence for use by national authorities in conducting targeted interventions. Both tools have, in numerous international investigations, produced results that have directly contributed to the dismantling of drug trafficking organizations around the world. The usefulness of IONICS, GRIDS Intelligence HD and PICS, however, depends largely on whether actionable information is provided through those tools in a timely manner and in an amount sufficient to ensure that immediate follow-up can be initiated to identify the traffickers involved.

**364. The Board urges Governments to enhance their national mechanisms for monitoring the cultivation, production, manufacture, and trade of controlled substances. Recognizing the challenges posed by the poor quality, irregularity, and often the lack of comprehensive data, the Board emphasizes the need for robust improvements in national data collection systems.**

#### 4. Free trade zones and trafficking in drugs and precursors

365. Free trade zones, also known as free zones or free ports, have played a pivotal role in promoting international trade and economic development across the globe. These designated areas, often exempt from many of the usual customs, import and export regulations, facilitate the movement of goods, foster foreign investment and create employment opportunities.

366. However, the very factors that make free trade zones attractive for investment and economic activity also make them susceptible to misuse for illicit activities, including the distribution and manufacture of counterfeit goods, money-laundering and trafficking in tobacco products.<sup>134</sup> While, on the one hand, the limited supervision, if any, exercised by customs authorities over shipments of goods from abroad into free trade zones, or from such zones to foreign countries, provides for the faster movement of goods, thereby lowering transaction costs, on the other hand, it allows contraband to move undetected through those zones. In general, softened customs controls in free trade zones have made the zones increasingly vulnerable to a wide range of abuses by criminal actors.<sup>135</sup>

367. Trade involving narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors carried out within and through free trade zones is governed by the international drug control conventions and related resolutions of United Nations bodies and by the revised Kyoto Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures.

#### Free trade zones and the international drug control conventions

368. The inherent vulnerability of free trade zones to serving as fertile grounds for trafficking in drugs and precursors is recognized in the three international drug control conventions. To address situations where limited control or a lack of control would make it possible for traffickers to use such zones as convenient depots for their contraband goods and to smuggle drugs across uncontrolled or insufficiently controlled borderlines, the 1961 Convention as amended, in its article 31, paragraph 2, and the 1971 Convention, in its article 12, paragraph 3 (a), require parties to exercise the same supervision and control in free trade zones as in other

<sup>134</sup>Kenji Omi, “‘Extraterritoriality’ of free zones: the necessity for enhanced customs involvement”, WCO Research Paper, No. 47 (September 2019).

<sup>135</sup>International Chamber of Commerce and Business Action to Stop Counterfeiting and Piracy, “Controlling the zone: balancing facilitation and control to combat illicit trade in the world’s free trade zones” (May 2013).

parts of their territories, provided, however, that more drastic measures may be applied. The commentaries to the two conventions suggest that the conditions often prevailing in free ports and free zones that may render such zones convenient for the operations of traffickers indicate the need to apply even stricter control measures in them than in other areas.

369. Article 18 of the 1988 Convention contains similar provisions regarding the application by parties of measures in free trade zones that are no less stringent than those applied in other parts of their territories, including with regard to substances in Tables I and II of that Convention, that is, precursor chemicals. Article 18, paragraph 2, of the 1988 Convention provides for additional measures that require more intervention by Governments in free trade zones. These include monitoring the movement of goods and persons in such zones; empowering competent authorities to search cargoes and incoming and outgoing vessels, and when appropriate, to search crew members, passengers and their baggage; establishing and maintaining a system to detect consignments suspected of containing narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals; and establishing and maintaining surveillance systems in harbour and dock areas and at airports and border control points in free trade zones and free ports.

370. The experience since the adoption of the 1988 Convention has revealed the need for attention to be devoted to preventing the diversion of precursors within free trade zones. Reflecting the depth of that concern, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1992/29, underlined the importance of applying suitable regulatory measures, in accordance with the provisions of article 18 of the 1988 Convention, to every stage of the receipt, storage, handling, processing and delivery of precursor and essential chemicals in free ports and free trade zones and in other sensitive areas such as bonded warehouses. Furthermore, in its resolution 1995/20, the Council urged Governments to ensure, as far as possible, that shipments entering or leaving such zones be subject, where permitted, to the controls necessary to safeguard against diversion.

## Free trade zones and the revised Kyoto Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures

371. Free trade zones represent an important means for facilitating trade. The revised Kyoto Convention defines a “free zone” as a part of the territory of a contracting party (to the Convention) where any goods introduced are generally regarded, insofar as import duties and taxes are concerned, as being outside the customs territory.

372. Although the revised Kyoto Convention states that customs authorities shall have the right to carry out checks at any time on the goods stored in a free zone, there is little consistency in the application of that provision among free zones globally. This is perhaps due to misinterpretation of the aforementioned definition of a free zone, which appears to confer extraterritorial status on such zones, leading to the limited involvement and authority of customs authorities.<sup>136</sup>

373. Other provisions of the revised Kyoto Convention, however, provide sufficient evidence to address this misconception. The fact that the Convention provides for the involvement of customs authorities in relation to requirements for the suitability, construction and layout of free zones, and that those authorities retain the right to carry out checks at any time on the goods stored in such zones, indicates that it is only for purposes of duties and taxes that goods located in the zones are considered as being outside the customs territory.

374. Furthermore, WCO has issued a publication entitled “Practical guidance on free zones” to ensure the adequate global application of customs procedures and surveillance in free zones. The core elements of the guidance include, inter alia, the full involvement of customs authorities in free zones, reporting to customs authorities and the use of data and information technology systems, customs audits in free zones, and the authority of customs officials to seize illegal goods and conduct on-site checks inside free zones.

375. A uniform application of the provisions of the international drug control conventions and the revised Kyoto Convention would greatly reduce the chances of free trade zones being misused for illicit activities. However, few countries have implemented the provisions of the revised Kyoto Convention, even though the number of contracting parties to the Convention has reached 129.

## Operation Insight

376. To increase the awareness of the control processes and procedures of free trade zones, and to better protect them from being misused for the diversion of and trafficking in precursor chemicals, INCB, WCO and the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme jointly implemented Operation Insight in the period 2022–2023. Designed as an exercise to understand the processes whereby precursor chemicals enter and exit through free zones, the joint operation was conducted at a limited number of locations.

<sup>136</sup>Omi, “‘Extraterritoriality’ of free zones”.

377. The preliminary findings of the operation revealed a lack of uniformity among the participating countries with regard to the territorial status of free trade zones and whether and how customs procedures are applied in them. In some countries, free trade zones were considered to be part of the customs territory, while in others they were not. The customs authorities in some countries conducted risk-based background checks on companies applying for tenancy in free trade zones and checks on their admissible activities, key employees and compliance records, while in others they did not. Similarly, divergent practices were reported regarding the authority of customs officials to conduct inspections, audits and investigations and to seize goods within the free trade zones. With regard to the submission of declarations and related data, the customs authorities of all participating countries reported having access to such data, although there were disparities in the quality of the data. Half of the locations reported that they had not implemented any cooperation mechanisms with operators and companies.

378. Although the joint operation was only conducted on a limited scale, the findings confirm the need for strengthening transparency in procedures and mechanisms in free trade zones. The divergence of practice among countries with regard to controls over free trade zones and the lower level of oversight by customs authorities in such zones, compared to the rest of the territory in which the zones are located, continue to be reasons for concern, as such factors make free trade zones vulnerable to exploitation by criminal organizations, enabling them to traffic drugs and precursor chemicals through the zones more easily. **Accordingly, the Board reiterates that States parties to the international drug control conventions are required to apply drug control measures in free ports and free zones that are no less stringent than those applied in other parts of their territories, and have the option of applying more stringent measures, as outlined in the conventions.**<sup>137</sup> **Ensuring that drug control measures are upheld in free ports and free zones is imperative to preventing trafficking in internationally controlled narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals.**

<sup>137</sup>Article 31, paragraph 2, of the 1961 Convention; article 12, paragraph 3 (a), of the 1971 Convention; and article 18 of the 1988 Convention.

## 5. Practices and challenges in the implementation of measures applied nationally to control non-scheduled precursor chemicals

379. One of the effects of scrutiny of data on the international trade in precursor chemicals is the greater attention given by illicit drug manufacturers to the possibility of sourcing the same chemicals in domestic markets. The Board drew attention to this trend in specific chapters of the INCB reports on precursors for 2020 and 2021.<sup>138</sup>

380. In an effort to take stock of existing precursor control measures applied to domestic markets, the Board conducted a survey in June 2021 and a follow-up survey in March 2023. By November 2023, 78 Governments and the European Commission had responded. Of those respondents, 62 provided detailed information on specific control measures. The survey also extended questions about domestic controls to other internationally non-scheduled chemicals found to have been used in the illicit manufacture of drugs.

381. Almost 80 per cent of the responding Governments reported that they had placed other non-internationally scheduled chemicals under national control, ranging from 1 up to more than 70 chemicals. The Board is also aware that some countries generically extend the definitions of chemicals under control by including entire families of derivatives of listed chemicals and other substances closely related to them. For example, Canada has applied such an approach to analogues and derivatives of 4-AP, which became subject to criminal prohibitions under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act of Canada in 2022.

382. The survey provided information about the number of non-scheduled chemicals that have been placed under international control. The survey revealed that 28 countries have placed 1 to 10 internationally non-scheduled chemicals under national control. In addition, three countries have enacted national controls for 11 to 20 such chemicals, and four countries have done so for 21 to 30 chemicals.

383. On the basis of the findings of the survey, the Board identified four key areas for preventing the domestic diversion of non-scheduled precursors from licit to illicit channels, namely: (a) manufacture; (b) distribution; (c) end uses; and (d) Internet-facilitated trade involving (non-scheduled) precursor chemicals.

384. The information provided in national responses assists the Board in updating its information package on the control

<sup>138</sup>E/INCB/2020/4 and E/INCB/2021/4.

of precursors, enabling enhanced dialogue with Governments and contributing to policy discussions on measures to address the proliferation of chemicals not included in Table I and Table II of the 1988 Convention. **The Board commends all Governments that have responded and provided important information on the scope and extent of their national legislation, including domestic controls over substances in both Table I and Table II of the 1988 Convention and additional chemicals that are not included in Table I or Table II but that are under national control.**

385. The use of non-scheduled chemicals, including designer precursors, in illicit drug manufacture is clearly a major challenge in international precursor control. In order to increase Governments' awareness, the Board has produced several resources and guidance documents, including the limited international special surveillance list of non-scheduled chemicals, which is updated annually, the Precursor Chemical Monographs and a guidance document to address the proliferation of non-scheduled chemicals. This latest document is the result of extensive consultations and a series of events convened or supported by the Board since 2020, and provides a full range of policy and enforcement options that Governments can choose to address the challenge of the use of such non-scheduled chemicals in illicit drug manufacture. Every year, as part of the information package circulated to all parties to the 1988 Convention, the Board also disseminates a compilation of national/domestic measures that Governments have adopted to control substances.

386. Lastly, in October 2022, the Board also launched PEN Online Light, an electronic platform similar to PEN Online that has been designed to allow the sharing of information about planned exports of precursor chemicals not under international control. PEN Online Light operates exclusively on a voluntary basis. Additional information can be found in paragraph 333.

387. Various industrial sectors that use chemical substances – whether they are internationally controlled or not – might, often unknowingly, be exploited by drug traffickers to source precursors for illicit drug manufacture. Voluntary cooperation with relevant industries is therefore a key element of effective precursor control. While industries dealing with known and controlled drug precursors are generally licensed/regulated by authorities, the categories of industry dealing with non-scheduled alternative or substitute chemicals not under international control are less known and may not be licensed/regulated. In 2022, the Board published a booklet containing a global review of categories of industry involved in the manufacture and distribution of and trade in chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs. The booklet aims to call the attention of Governments to the need to expand voluntary cooperation with industry to many more actors. In

this connection, the Board is also engaged with partners in developing methodologies that allow Member States to map their national industry landscapes, identify potential areas of intervention and strengthen the proactive and responsible participation of industry in preventing diversion.

## 6. Challenges and opportunities in promoting drug treatment and rehabilitation according to the UNODC and WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders after the COVID-19 pandemic

388. With the slowing down of the global COVID-19 pandemic and with WHO declaring the end of the disease as a public health emergency in May 2023, Governments around the world are striving to resume the provision of public drug use treatment and rehabilitation services to the most vulnerable populations. Considering the impact of the pandemic on treatment delivery and services, analysis of the persisting challenges and innovative approaches to treatment and rehabilitation can provide valuable input for the development of future public policies and approaches.

389. The Board has discussed the issue of the provision of effective treatment services in previous annual reports. It recently devoted specific chapters to the following topics: women and drugs (2016); treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration for drug use disorders as essential components of drug demand reduction (2017); improving substance use prevention and treatment services for young people (2019); and the hidden epidemic of the use of drugs among older persons (2020).

390. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the delivery of treatment services. The strain on health-care systems and the restriction of movement have disrupted the conventional methods of treatment in many national settings. Even before the pandemic, the global landscape of drug use treatment and rehabilitation services was marked by disparities, challenges and limitations that necessitated comprehensive, evidence-based responses. UNODC highlighted a substantial gap between the demand for treating drug-related disorders and actual treatment provision, with just one in five affected individuals receiving care in 2021. The pandemic has further exposed these inequities, disproportionately affecting vulnerable demographics.

391. In 2012, a joint statement was issued by 12 United Nations agencies and programmes, calling on States to close compulsory drug detention and rehabilitation centres and

implement voluntary, evidence-informed and rights-based health and social services in the community. Over 10 years later, however, many of these centres remain operational. In some cases, they operate as private clinics with the collaboration of patients' families, as observed in some parts of South America, or as prison-like facilities run by the State, outside the control and monitoring of the justice system, as seen in parts of Asia. In some countries in Africa, they can be found in hospital settings, and as the result of administrative and financial constraints. A report issued by UNODC and UNAIDS in 2022 indicated that compulsory drug treatment facilities in East and South-East Asia have not been closed as planned.

392. The shift in drug use patterns observed in many regions might have left Governments and communities unprepared. As a result, owing to the limited availability of proper treatment services, an increased number of patients have been directed to compulsory treatment facilities, where deteriorating conditions have been observed in some countries. Similarly, overcrowding and inadequate rehabilitation programmes in prison settings compound challenges, affecting both physical and mental well-being.

393. The provision of non-evidence-based treatment is not limited to compulsory settings. Many treatment and rehabilitation facilities around the world continue to employ interventions such as physical exercise, forced labour, excessive use of sedatives, forced religious conversion and punishment in isolation cells under the guise of "therapy". This includes facilities that have been licensed by Governments but that do not provide their staff with proper training or undergo monitoring in line with the UNODC and WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders.

394. According to UNICEF, the pandemic has underlined the need to strengthen mental health and psychosocial support for vulnerable populations, especially young people. In 2022, UNODC reported that young people were using more drugs than the previous generation, which could be particularly detrimental to their mental health. For example, national mental health plans in Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Thailand all emphasized the need to shift service delivery from institutional, specialized clinical treatment to strengthened community-based services and to place greater emphasis on rehabilitation, recovery, and social integration and support.

395. Remarkably, the pandemic has not only highlighted challenges in treatment and rehabilitation, but has also acted as a catalyst for innovation in treatment services. For example, the integration of telehealth and technology has emerged as a promising solution, especially in North America, overcoming traditional barriers to care and

enhancing patient engagement. Telehealth, shown to be feasible and acceptable, has the potential to provide evidence-based treatment and support remotely, increasing patient satisfaction.

396. Advancements in personalized and alternative treatment that have improved the rehabilitation process have also been observed. Initiatives such as the court diversion programme of Thailand underscore the importance of alternatives that prioritize rehabilitation over punitive measures. Such evidence-based programmes align with UNODC and WHO recommendations for effective drug disorder rehabilitation.

397. The successful adoption of quality standards was observed in many countries, reflecting Governments' efforts to improve the lives and dignity of patients who use drugs, as well as the readiness of the United Nations system to support and promote such endeavours. For example, from 2020 to 2021, two treatment centres in Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and the Dominican Republic took part in the UNODC initiative "Quality assurance: facilitating drug dependence treatment in accordance with the International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders in Latin America". In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, an assessment confirmed that the evaluated institutions met an average of 86 per cent of the key quality standards. In the Dominican Republic, 58 per cent of the facilities had medical doctors specialized in addiction medicine or addiction psychiatry on staff, with some (48 per cent) offering services for specific population groups, such as LGBTI individuals.

398. Elsewhere in the Americas, Ecuador has introduced treatment facilities that offer social support services, including education and vocational training assistance (74 per cent), employment and income generation support (48 per cent), and housing support (29 per cent). In Guatemala, most facilities provide motivational enhancement therapy, group counselling, individual counselling and twelve-step facilitation, as well as Internet- or web-based therapy. In Mexico, over half of facilities receive funding from the Ministry of Health, although only a small number cater to homeless people (8 per cent), Indigenous groups (6 per cent), or migrants, displaced persons and refugees (5 per cent). Overall, capacity for dealing with various types of drugs has increased, but the provision of specialized medical care and nursing support remains challenging, as does gender mainstreaming.

399. In Africa, the scarcity of comprehensive information and prevalence data continues to hinder efforts to gauge the full extent of the drug use problem and the availability of appropriate treatment. According to the latest field test report in French-speaking African countries prepared by

UNODC, in West and Central Africa, treatment systems for substance use disorders take the form of Government-run care centres within the health-care system, outpatient addiction treatment facilities and various types of hospitalization centres. These centres and facilities are mostly lacking in or provide inadequate opioid agonist treatment, except for in Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Togo. A number of positive developments have also been identified, such as the newly established Interministerial Committee for Combating Drug Abuse and Psychotropic Substances of Benin. However, the development of services for specific populations, such as women, children and prisoners, is still urgently needed in the region.

**400. The Board urges Governments to ensure access to voluntary, evidence-based treatment services, in line with the UNODC and WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders. In doing so, Governments should address systemic disparities and ensure inclusivity in treatment services, with special attention given to vulnerable groups. The Board also encourages Governments to continue to focus on initiatives to combat stigma and discrimination in relation to people who use drugs.**

**401. The Board supports the call by UNODC for Governments to close compulsory treatment facilities and to shift efforts and resources towards the provision of evidence-based treatment services and alternatives to imprisonment.**

**402. The Board encourages Governments to continue collaborating with the international community to strengthen management and monitoring capacities, as well as data collection and data-sharing, to inform and improve public policies and the provision of treatment and rehabilitation services.**

**403. Lastly, the Board urges Member States to implement continuous review mechanisms directed at licensed treatment facilities in their territories, with the aim of ensuring compliance with the UNODC and WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders.**

## 7. The impact of drug-related crimes on the environment

404. The intricate interplay between illicit drug economies and environmental degradation has emerged as a pressing concern, demanding comprehensive scrutiny and concerted action. The impact of illicit drug-related activities on the environment takes different forms around the

globe, including deforestation, contamination of rivers and soil, and animal and human poisoning. Indirectly, the illicit production, manufacture and trafficking of drugs can also be linked to other environmentally damaging activities, such as illicit mining. The impact of those activities often affects local communities most adversely, as it may destroy livelihoods and introduce violence and drug use to populations in remote areas. While the connection between illicit drug-related activities and environmental consequences still requires further research, there is growing evidence showing that there are significant linkages at play.

405. The illicit cultivation of drug crops occurs predominantly in remote and ecologically fragile areas, resulting in significant impacts on local ecosystems and biodiversity. According to UNODC, the tropical forests of Nigeria have become hubs for illicit cannabis cultivation, causing profound shifts in their ecological dynamics. Similarly, the Andean region has witnessed the expansion of illicit coca cultivation leading to substantial deforestation, soil degradation and loss of floral and faunal diversity. The Amazon basin, a biodiversity hotspot, faces threats due to illicit coca cultivation, with varying degrees of forest loss occurring across countries. In the Golden Triangle of South-East Asia, illicit opium poppy cultivation has played a pivotal role in forest degradation. In certain areas of Afghanistan, such as the southern province of Helmand, opium poppy cultivation has resulted in salinization because of poor drainage during irrigation.

406. Illicit drug production makes use of noxious chemicals that percolate into the environment, yielding widespread and harmful contamination. For instance, methamphetamine synthesis involves the use of hazardous chemicals, such as anhydrous ammonia, that are often disposed of in the environment without being properly treated. Within the relatively small geographic area comprising the southern areas of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the northern areas of Belgium, the concentration of dumping sites associated with synthetic drug production has led to significant soil and water contamination. Similarly, cocaine production in the Andean Amazon region employs substances such as sulfuric acid and kerosene, triggering ecological disruptions. Although the risks posed to public health and biodiversity by such activities may be relatively small in global terms, they may be significant at the local level.

407. The carbon footprint of illicit drug production has alarming implications for climate change. For example, according to statistical data provided by UNODC, the manufacture of cocaine produces significant carbon emissions, an estimated 8.9 million tons of carbon dioxide per year. It takes more than 300 litres of gasoline to produce 1 kg of cocaine, with legacy impacts ranging from water pollution to soil degradation, which have implications for both

animal and human health. The process of illicit drug production, characterized by inadequate waste management in remote locations, exacerbates its carbon emissions impact. In Cambodia and Myanmar, the utilization of precursor chemicals in the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs has created a specific negative impact on the fragile ecosystems of those countries due to the large amount of wood required in the process. Additionally, illegal gold mining and cryptocurrency mining (involving massive energy consumption for computing), often intertwined with drug trafficking, play a pivotal role in increasing deforestation and augmenting carbon emissions within the Amazon region.

408. Drug trafficking is connected to various forms of environmental exploitation. In Central America, drug cartels seamlessly diversify into illegal logging, illegal mining, and trafficking in wildlife. Notably, those activities are frequently accompanied by a range of convergent crimes, from bribery to violent crimes. Research in Central America indicates that drug trafficking can indirectly drive land-use changes by facilitating deforestation through illicit capital and land control practices, potentially resulting in greater environmental impacts than those caused by the direct actions of drug trafficking networks.

409. In Ecuador, the deterioration of the environment and the degradation of natural resources due to coca bush cultivation and cocaine production pose threats to vulnerable livelihoods at the northern border with Colombia, especially for those who depend economically on the harvest of shells and crabs. This situation has the potential to push local vulnerable populations into the illicit economy, including the activities of cocaine smuggling or smuggling subsidized gasoline to cocaine traffickers in the department of Nariño in Colombia for use in cocaine manufacture.

410. In Mexico, the confluence of illicit cannabis and opium poppy cultivation converges with the unlawful logging trade, particularly afflicting the Sierra Madre Occidental region. Across the Amazon basin, violent disputes between local communities and drug traffickers are routinely reported, often a result of complaints over land speculation and illegal occupation. The triple border area of Brazil, Colombia and Peru is a hotspot of illicit deforestation, driven by the illegal timber trade, as well as drug trafficking.

411. In Africa, increased law enforcement activities along traditional drug supply routes have shifted distribution patterns, with West Africa emerging as a significant hub. For instance, in Nigeria, outdoor cannabis cultivation processes involve labour-intensive tasks such as clearing, planting and harvesting, potentially resulting in greenhouse gas emissions from fuel and electricity use. Additionally, armed groups associated with drug trafficking also engage in illicit

activities such as elephant poaching and ivory trafficking, further impacting on the continent's landscapes and wildlife.

412. Efforts to eradicate illicit drug crops often have unintended environmental consequences. Aerial spraying of herbicides, such as glyphosate, can harm non-target species and result in soil and water contamination. In its report on human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem,<sup>139</sup> issued in August 2023, OHCHR confirmed that risks are posed by the aerial spraying of pesticides and other chemicals to the environment and the health of the affected population, and recommended that States and relevant stakeholders avoid aerial spraying for crop eradication and ensure that the eradication of illicit crops does not negatively affect the environment or the health of individuals.

413. In the report, OHCHR further recognized that some of the most prominent effects of illicit drug economies, such as deforestation, monocultures, pollution of waters and soil, and the high carbon footprint of in-house cultivation, pose a risk to access to a clean and healthy environment, which was recognized as a universal human right by the General Assembly in 2022.<sup>140</sup> This is evidenced, for example, in Colombia, where drug-related violence and displacement are intertwined, and eradication efforts can trigger further deforestation due to land-use changes, and in Myanmar, where analogous efforts aimed at eradicating opium poppy cultivation have caused soil erosion and the concomitant loss of indigenous agroforestry practices.

414. Striking a balance between addressing drug-related crime and minimizing environmental harm remains a complex challenge. Addressing the environmental impact of the illicit drug trade requires a holistic approach. International cooperation is essential, given the potential of drug-related crime to undermine ecosystems and human well-being. Coordinated responses encompass comprehensive law enforcement efforts, environmental protection measures and sustainable development strategies.

**415. The Board calls on Governments, with the support of the international community, to take urgent action to address such threats, prioritizing the safety and well-being of local, native and vulnerable populations, as well as the protection of the environment. Furthermore, the Board urges Governments to collaborate with the international community and with the United Nations system in improving the available research and data on the dynamics of illicit drugs and the environment and the related impacts across all regions of the globe.**

<sup>139</sup> A/HRC/54/53.

<sup>140</sup> General Assembly resolution 76/300.

## B. Africa

The Board notes with concern the insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical use in Africa and reiterates the importance of improving the availability of and access to internationally scheduled substances for medical purposes.

The role of Africa, in particular West and Central Africa, as a transit region for cocaine has expanded significantly, as corroborated by seizures, which reached an all-time high in 2021.

Trafficking in and abuse of tramadol, a synthetic opioid not under international control, are of growing concern in a number of African countries.

While assessing the extent of drug misuse and accurately estimating the number of people receiving treatment on the continent remain a challenge, the Board recognizes that Governments in the region are making progress in addressing substance use disorders.

### 1. Major developments

416. Drug control efforts and the availability of and access to internationally scheduled substances for medical purposes in countries in Africa continued to be affected by political instability, economic challenges and ongoing conflicts in parts of the region.

417. The role of Africa, in particular West and Central Africa, as a transit region for cocaine trafficking from South America to Europe has expanded significantly. In 2021, seizures of cocaine in Africa reached an all-time high in terms of both quantities of the drug seized as well as the number of seizures. While West Africa accounted for most of the cocaine seized, there are indications that other parts of the continent have also been affected.

418. The number of countries in Africa that permit the cultivation of cannabis for medical or scientific purposes has been growing in recent years. Some of the countries permit cultivation only for export, while others allow the use of cannabis for medical purposes domestically. For 2024, 12 countries in Africa submitted their estimates to the Board for the cultivation, production or consumption of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes.

419. The African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2019–2023), the fifth strategic framework that guides drug policy development in Africa, has been extended by Heads of State to 2025. The action plan is aimed at improving the health, security and socio-economic well-being of the people of Africa by addressing drug trafficking and problematic drug use in all its forms and manifestations and preventing the onset of drug use.

420. The Board continues to assist countries in meeting their reporting obligations under the three international drug control conventions, as well as in addressing their drug control challenges. The initiatives conducted by the Board within the framework of INCB Learning and the INCB GRIDS Programme can be found in paragraphs 422–425, 427–428, 430–432 and 434–437.

### 2. Regional cooperation

421. Since 1 November 2022, the Conference of the States Parties to the African Medicines Agency Treaty, the highest policymaking body of the Agency, has convened several extraordinary sessions to further accelerate the Agency's operationalization. In particular, the meetings considered the staffing structure of the Agency and the contribution by States parties to its budget. The meetings also adopted the revised terms of reference of the Agency's Director General and appointed the members of the Governing Board.

422. On 7 and 8 November 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme, in partnership with the UNODC Container Control Programme, organized a training event in Morocco for customs officers on awareness-raising and safe handling practices related to new psychoactive substances, synthetic opioids and other dangerous substances. The training also strengthened information exchange using the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools. In addition, it covered precursors-related aspects and platforms, including PEN Online, PEN Online Light and PICS.

423. On 8 and 9 November 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized a training event in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for postal and customs officers. The training focused on awareness-raising and safe handling practices related to new psychoactive substances, synthetic opioids and other dangerous substances, and also strengthened information exchange using the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools.

424. From December 2022 to January 2023, Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Zambia participated in the Board's Operation Knockout and exchanged



intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical carisoprodol, 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through the international post, express mail, courier services and related modalities.

425. From 23 to 27 January 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme delivered an awareness-raising and capacity-building workshop on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids and related chemicals for frontline officers from Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and the Niger, in partnership with the UNODC Nigeria Organized Crime: West African Response to Trafficking project. The workshop was aimed at strengthening information exchange in the region to aid in counter-trafficking efforts related to synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances using IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools.

426. In February 2023, the Eastern and Southern Africa Commission on Drugs was established, following the model of the West Africa Commission on Drugs, to review current policies, promote science-based drug policies and mobilize public awareness of drug issues in Eastern and Southern Africa.

427. From 21 to 23 February 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized an online stakeholder consultation on voluntary cooperation between Governments and freight forwarding services for the prevention of trafficking in dangerous substances. The event was attended by representatives from the public and private sector, including Kenya, and international organizations. Participants exchanged best practices and shared case examples related to the exploitation of legitimate ancillary logistics services, and discussed the next steps for promoting voluntary cooperation between Governments and their private sector partners.

428. On 21 and 22 March 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme, in partnership with the UNODC Container Control Programme, conducted capacity-building training in Tunisia for 20 customs officers on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids and related chemicals and on strengthening intelligence exchange using IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools. A second course was conducted by the INCB GRIDS Programme on 23 March 2023 for nine health regulatory officers at the headquarters of the Tunisian Ministry of Health.

429. On 26 March 2023, the UNODC Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa signed its new Regional Framework for Arab States (2023–2028) in cooperation with the League of Arab States and its 18 member States, including the following African countries: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia. The regional framework

focuses on the following areas: (a) taking a balanced approach to drug control; (b) strengthening the response to organized crime; (c) combating trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants; (d) taking action against corruption and financial crime; (e) preventing and countering terrorism and violence; and (f) strengthening crime and violence prevention and criminal justice. On the same occasion, the Arab Plan for Prevention and Reduction of the Dangers of Drugs to Arab Society: Towards Effective Handling of the Issue from a Social Perspective was signed, representing a regional social framework for combating drugs in the Arab States.

430. On 26 and 27 April 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme hosted a capacity-building training course in Morocco for enforcement officers from the police, the customs administration, the Royal Moroccan Gendarmerie and the Directorate of Migration and Border Surveillance. A second course was held on 29 April 2023 at the Moroccan Post headquarters. Both events focused on enhancing knowledge and skills to identify and safely interdict dangerous substances. Participants also received instruction on IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools to improve cross-border intelligence-sharing.

431. From 12 to 16 June 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized an interregional twinning event for trust-building, relationship development and active networking for officers from police, customs and regulatory agencies of Ghana, Nigeria, Thailand and Viet Nam, as well as the regional World Customs Organization (WCO) Regional Intelligence Liaison Office.

432. From 4 to 7 July 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized a twinning event for police, customs and postal security officers from Cameroon and the Congo, held in Yaoundé. The event focused on trust-building and networking for officers, and provided them with practical knowledge and skills to identify and safely interdict dangerous substances. Participants also received instruction on IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools to improve cross-border intelligence-sharing.

433. From 19 to 22 July 2023, the African Union held the Continental Technical Experts' Consultation on Synthetic Drug Supply Reduction in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, with the participation of some 70 experts from about 35 countries. The meeting was aimed at enhancing knowledge of current trends in synthetic drug trafficking in Africa, promoting inter-agency collaboration and strengthening mechanisms for real-time intelligence exchange. Experts were given information about the Pan-African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use supply reduction data-collection tool and about sharing best practices for information exchange for

interdiction operations. The INCB President participated in the event and delivered a statement, stressing the opportunities afforded by enhancing efforts for coordination, timely data-sharing and use of existing systems and platforms, including those offered by the Board, such as PEN Online, PEN Online Light, PICS and IONICS.

434. From 2 to 4 August 2023 the INCB GRIDS Programme conducted a regional expert group meeting on the prevention of trafficking in new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids through freight forwarding and third-party logistics services in Central and West Africa. The event took place in Lagos, Nigeria, and was attended by participants from the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Senegal, as well as the Universal Postal Union, and WCO.

435. From 11 to 15 September 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized in Vienna the sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services. The event brought together officers from 32 Governments and international organizations, including participants from Nigeria and South Africa. Several participating Governments also conducted bilateral and multilateral case meetings – facilitated by INCB – to enhance cooperation across borders.

436. Drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 39 countries in Africa, namely Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, the Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, the Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. There are now five e-modules that have been developed by INCB Learning, covering narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and methods for ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. E-modules are available to officials of competent national authorities at no cost upon registration through INCB Learning.

437. From 20 to 22 September 2023, a twinning event for trust-building, relationship development and active networking to increase awareness on trafficking in synthetic opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances in West and Central Africa was held in Côte d'Ivoire. The event also included training on intelligence development and sharing through the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools and brought

together officers from the WCO Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Western and Central Africa, WCO national focal points from Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Togo, as well as the Cameroon postal service.

### 3. Availability of internationally controlled substances (including reporting to the Board)

438. The three international drug control treaties require the States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor the licit commerce of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as well as monitor availability of these substances for licit medical and scientific purposes.

439. Over the last 20 years, the level of consumption of internationally controlled opioid analgesics in Africa, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants, has followed a fluctuating trend at a generally lower level as compared with other regions, ranging between a low of 1,355 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2013 and a high of 4,514 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2020. However, the amount reported decreased to 2,556 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2021. Of that amount, about half (1,238 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) related to fentanyl, 1,115 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> to morphine, 135 S-DDD to pethidine, 51 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> to oxycodone and smaller quantities to other less common opioids. The data on consumption are not provided on a regular basis by all countries in the region and therefore one country not reporting one year could significantly impact the regional total. Most probably, the fluctuation in the data is due to gaps in reporting rather than large fluctuations in actual consumption. The countries with the highest consumption of opioid analgesics in S-DDD terms were South Africa (827 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Tunisia (545 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Seychelles (239 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Mauritius (231 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Egypt (174 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and Cabo Verde (103 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>). More than 29 countries in Africa did not provide any data on the consumption of medicines containing opioid analgesics.

440. About two thirds of the countries and territories of Africa have regularly provided their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances as required under the 1971 Convention. Of the remaining countries and territories in the region, some have provided the required report at least once in the past five years, with the remaining failing to provide their statistical report at all in the past five years.

441. It remains challenging for the Board to determine the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in Africa as approximately half of the countries and territories

in the region have not provided consumption data to the Board on any psychotropic substance for the past five years. Determining availability is also hampered by the significant proportion of countries in the region failing to regularly provide their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances.

442. **The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. The Board encourages the countries and territories in Africa that have not provided the reports as required under the international drug control conventions to do so as soon as possible and take the necessary measures to ensure that their respective competent national authorities have sufficient resources to prepare the reports in a timely manner, in particular on consumption of psychotropic substances.**

443. As regards precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide – in the context of resolution 49/3 of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs – their estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirement estimates is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which are substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means.

444. Out of the 54 countries on the African continent, 41 (76 per cent) provided the Board with at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations. However, approximately 17 per cent of them have not updated their estimates for the above-listed substances in the past 10 years; this undermines the potential of annual legitimate requirement estimates as a tool to guide exporting countries as to the legitimate requirements of importing countries in order to prevent oversupply and diversion into illicit channels as well as ensure the availability of those substances for legitimate purposes. Six African countries have provided annual legitimate requirement estimates to the Board for the first time in the last five years. Those countries are Gabon, Lesotho, the Niger, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Togo.

445. Further information can be found in the technical reports of the Board on narcotic drugs,<sup>141</sup> psychotropic

substances<sup>142</sup> and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.<sup>143</sup> The publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

#### 4. National legislation, policy and action

446. The Government of Algeria enacted Law 23-05 of 7 May 2023, amending and supplementing Act No. 04-18 of 25 December 2004 on preventing and combating the use of and trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. The law provides penalties for various drug-related offences. It also provides for the development of a national strategy.

447. In January 2023, Botswana established a new Drug Enforcement Agency under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence and Security. The agency is mandated to collect and disseminate information on the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as well as to receive and investigate any complaints of an alleged or suspected breach of the law. The agency will also advise Government ministries and departments, public bodies, institutions, companies, statutory bodies and corporations on ways and means of preventing prohibited activities relating to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

448. On 26 June 2023, the Government of Ghana launched the National Drug Control Master Plan. The plan seeks to conceptualize and develop a comprehensive strategy for addressing the challenges associated with the production, cultivation, trafficking, sale, distribution and use of narcotic drugs in the country. The plan is built on six strategic pillars: (a) supply reduction; (b) demand reduction; (c) harm reduction; (d) cooperation and collaboration; (e) research; and (f) capacity-building.

449. On 12 July 2023, the Parliament of Ghana passed the Narcotics Control Commission Amendment Bill 2023, introducing changes to the controls that apply to the cultivation of cannabis for industrial and medicinal purposes. The amended bill granted the Ministry of Interior the authority to issue licences for the cultivation of cannabis in the country.

<sup>141</sup>E/INCB/2023/2.

<sup>142</sup>E/INCB/2023/3.

<sup>143</sup>E/INCB/2023/4.

450. On 18 November 2022, the Government of Mauritius amended the Dangerous Drugs Act 2000. The amendment contains provisions on how medical cannabis will be regulated and dispensed. It also contains provisions related to alternatives to conviction or punishment as well as rehabilitation of drug users.

451. On 21 March 2023, the Senate of Nigeria passed amendments to the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency Act. The amendments aim to strengthen the operations of the Agency, empower it to establish laboratories to carry out scientific investigations and analysis of controlled substances, update the list of dangerous drugs, review penalty provisions, enhance the power of the Agency to prosecute drug-related offences and issue subsidiary legislation on related matters. On 6 June 2023, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (Amendment) Act, 2023, was read the third time and passed into law.

452. In 2022, as a result of the Board's twinning initiative aimed at promoting industry cooperation in the area of precursor control, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania adopted a voluntary code of practice to further enhance the concept of public-private partnership in the country. The voluntary code of conduct complements the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the competent national authorities in the United Republic of Tanzania and members of the industry, including two pharmaceutical associations and a number of companies, in 2021.

453. On 14 December 2022, the Government of South Africa enacted the Drugs and Drug Trafficking Amendment Act No. 14 of 2022, amending the Drugs and Drug Trafficking Act No. 140 of 1992. The amended act criminalizes the manufacturing and supplying of any substance included in Schedule 1 to the Act ("substances useful for the manufacture of drugs"); and the use, possession and dealing in any drug included in Schedule 2 to the Act ("dependence-producing substances" as well as "dangerous dependence-producing substances"). The Cabinet member responsible for the administration of justice, the Minister, may, by notice in the Government Gazette, amend Schedules 1 and 2 to the Act.

454. On 22 August 2023, the Parliament of Uganda passed the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Bill, 2023, following an annulment by the Constitutional Court on 5 May 2023 due to the lack of a quorum. The bill allows cultivation of cannabis and khat strictly for medical and other authorized uses and sets penalties for a multitude of offences related to substances abuse.

## 5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

455. The number of countries in Africa that permit cultivation of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes has been growing. Some of the countries permit cultivation only for export, while others allow the use of cannabis for medical purposes domestically. For 2024, 12 countries in Africa submitted their estimates to the Board for the cultivation, production or consumption of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes, compared with 10 countries that submitted such estimates for 2023.

456. The role of Africa as a transit region for trafficking in drugs as well a target market has grown significantly in recent years. The following paragraphs illustrate this phenomenon for different drugs and different countries.

457. Trafficking in cannabis and cannabis resin remains concentrated in North Africa, although cannabis seizures are reported from countries across the continent. The available data suggest that the quantities of cannabis seized, particularly in Algeria and Morocco, continued to drop in 2022. For 2022, Algeria reported seizing 58 tons of cannabis resin (compared with 71 tons in 2021) and 5 kg of cannabis herb (compared with 8 kg in 2021). For the same period, Morocco reported seizing over 300 tons of cannabis resin in 2022 (compared with over 511 tons in 2021) and about 209 tons of *kif*, a dried material derived from cannabis (compared with 328 tons in 2021). The quantities of seized cannabis herb reported by the authorities of Egypt also decreased, from over 466 tons in 2021 to 368 tons in 2022, while the quantities of cannabis resin seized in the country in 2022 were higher than in the previous years (over 49 tons in 2022, 28 tons in 2021, over 44 tons in 2020, and over 39 tons in 2019).

458. In 2023, countries in North Africa continued to seize high volumes of cannabis in transit to Europe or destined for the North African market. In March and April 2023, the authorities of Algeria reported seizing over 2.5 tons of *kif*. In the first trimester of 2023, the Moroccan authorities reported seizing 24 tons of cannabis resin and 49 tons of cannabis herb. One incident in the port of Tangier involved nearly 5.5 tons of cannabis seized, along with 60 kg of cocaine; the substances, which were discovered hidden in a refrigerated container, were destined for Europe. Additional data on cannabis seizures for 2023 have so far been limited, which makes comparison with previous years difficult.

459. In 2022, trafficking in cocaine was reported across the continent. Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Eswatini, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea,

Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Togo, Tunisia, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia reported seizures of the drug in quantities ranging from a few grams to several tons. The largest quantities – over two tons each – were reported by Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea and Nigeria, all located along the Gulf of Guinea.

460. In the first half of 2023, countries in Africa continued to report large seizures of cocaine, thus indicating that trafficking in this drug remains a major challenge in the region. In April 2023, the Guinean navy seized more than 1.5 tons of cocaine from a Sierra Leone-flagged vessel. The drug was believed to be ultimately destined for markets in Europe. The authorities of Senegal seized over 800 kg of cocaine on a vessel 335 km off Dakar in January 2023. In February 2023, Libyan customs officers seized in the port of Al-Khoms 269 kg of cocaine that had been hidden in a container originating in Brazil. According to the Libyan authorities, this was one of the country’s largest seizures of cocaine. In February 2023, the authorities of South Africa seized 380 kg of cocaine in Durban harbour. In addition to maritime seizures, South African authorities also reported cocaine seizures at the airport, including 140 kg of cocaine found on business premises situated in an industrial area close to the airport.

461. The UNODC *Global Cocaine Report 2023: Local Dynamics, Global Challenges* commented that the role of Africa, in particular West and Central Africa, as a transit region for cocaine trafficking from South America to Europe has significantly expanded. This development has reportedly contributed to increased demand for cocaine on local markets; however, the lack of official data from the countries in the region continues to present an impediment to a clear understanding of the precise extent of use of that drug in Africa.

462. According to a transnational organized crime threat assessment for Nigeria, conducted by UNODC, Nigeria remains a transit hub for transnational cocaine and heroin trafficking. The report also indicates that criminal networks from Nigeria play an important role in drug trafficking and smuggling activities on the African continent as well as globally.

463. In 2022, the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme in Eastern and Southern Africa reported 204 seizures, including 10 kg of heroin, 20 kg of khat and 4,605 litres of chemical precursors. The Container Control Programme units in West Africa made 34 seizures, including 216 kg of cocaine and 9,462,110 pieces of unspecified medical products.

464. While trafficking by sea continues to be the primary means of arrival for illicit drugs entering or transiting across the continent, trafficking by air also presents challenges in the region. From 2021 and up until 1 June 2023, the joint airport interdiction task forces in Africa seized 413 kg of cocaine, 293 kg of khat, 782 kg of cannabis, 178 kg of heroin, 127 kg of psychotropic substances and 102 kg of precursors, as well as 297.6 kg of falsified medicines. Airports in Kenya and Ethiopia are also believed to have been targeted as stop-overs points for cocaine from Brazil destined for Europe.

465. Trafficking via international postal services, observed in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic, continues to be an important trend in the region, notably for cocaine bound for Europe.

466. As regards trafficking of pharmaceutical opioids, the UNODC *World Drug Report 2023* indicates that Africa accounted for half of the quantities seized worldwide between 2017 and 2021. This was reportedly mainly due to the non-medical use of tramadol, a synthetic opioid not under international control which remains a threat, in particular in North, West and Central Africa, including the Sahel region. Trafficking in tramadol continued in 2022 with Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo and the United Republic of Tanzania all reporting seizures of the substance. Data for 2023 have so far been limited. In the first half of 2023, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency of Nigeria reported some large seizures of tramadol, including over 3 million tablets seized in January 2023 in a warehouse and more than 1.2 million tablets seized during two operations in March 2023.

467. Trafficking in heroin continues to pose a challenge in the region. While the East African subregion is mainly used as an entry point for heroin from South-West Asia, the drug is trafficked through all subregions to reach consumer markets. For 2022, Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, the Gambia, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Togo and the United Republic of Tanzania reported seizures of the substance. In particular, South Africa continues to report large seizures of heroin. In July 2023, the Trilateral Planning Cell established by the authorities of Mozambique, South Africa and the United Republic of Tanzania to counter heroin trafficking through the southern route seized 250 kg of the substance at the border with Mozambique. The quantity of this single seizure is more than double the amount of heroin seized in the country in 2022 (over 106 kg). The drug was hidden in a concealed compartment of a truck.

468. Information regarding trafficking in other drugs is limited. However, several countries in the region reported seizing amphetamine, ketamine, khat, MDMA, methaqualone or methamphetamine in the course of 2022.

469. Although the information from the region is limited, the Board is aware that some countries in the region have recently been targeted by traffickers seeking alternative sources of supplies of amphetamine-type stimulant precursors, in particular pharmaceutical preparations containing pseudoephedrine. To address the situation, the Board has facilitated the exchange of actionable information and notes the efforts of the countries concerned in this regard.

470. More generally, and as in previous years, only a few countries in Africa have submitted to the Board the mandatory information for 2022 related to seizures of precursor chemicals, both the substances in Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention and chemicals not under international control. Such information is crucial for identifying emerging trends in precursor trafficking as well as weaknesses in precursor control systems.

**471. The Board wishes to remind Governments of their obligation under the 1988 Convention to provide it with information related to seizures of substances scheduled at the international level and of substances not under international control, including, when known, their origin.**

472. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in Africa can be found in the report of the Board for 2023 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.<sup>144</sup>

## 6. Prevention and treatment

473. Assessing the extent of drug abuse and accurately estimating the number of people in treatment on the African continent remains a challenge as detailed and reliable information and prevalence data provided from the region are scarce.

474. However, based on the information available, cannabis remains the main drug of concern for the majority of people in treatment on the African continent. According to the UNODC *World Drug Report 2023*, the estimated annual prevalence of cannabis consumption in Africa was 6.85 per cent of the population (approximately 53.6 million people). The prevalence was particularly high in West and Central

Africa, almost 10 per cent, reportedly owing to the prevalence of cannabis use in Nigeria. For opioids, including prescription opioids, the estimated prevalence of consumption stood at 1.24 per cent (approximately 9.67 million people). For opiates, mostly heroin, the estimated prevalence of consumption stood at 0.50 per cent (3.9 million people). The prevalence rates for the consumption of other drugs (i.e., cocaine, amphetamines and prescription stimulants and “ecstasy”) in Africa were below 0.4 per cent of the population in 2021. For many substances, including cannabis, the prevalence data for some subregions of Africa were not available. Africa is among the regions with the lowest proportions of women in drug-related treatment.

475. According to UNODC, Africa, where the population is young, is one of the regions where youth are the most vulnerable to using drugs. The annual prevalence of the use of cannabis in the population aged 15–16 (6.4 per cent) was similar to the prevalence of the general population aged 15–64 (6.85 per cent). The report estimates that 70 per cent of people in treatment in Africa are under the age of 35.

476. In 2023, the African Union launched the report of the 2023 Pan-African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use, which aims to improve health security and the socio-economic well-being of people in the region by addressing substance use and treatment.

477. The 2022 West African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use report entitled *Statistics and Trends on Illicit Drug Supply and Drug Abuse*, validated during an Economic Community of West African States Commission workshop in May 2023, identified cannabis, tramadol, amphetamines and cocaine as the most consumed drugs in the region. It further pointed to an increase in drug use among unemployed persons aged 15–25, compared with 2021 data.

478. The National Authority for the Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse of Kenya released a report on the 2022 national survey on the status of drugs and substance use in the country. The survey, which is conducted every five years, was undertaken in all 47 counties and involved 3,797 households and 3,314 individuals aged 15–64 years. Of that group, 44 per cent were 36 years old and above and the majority (54.5 per cent) were female. The survey found that the prevalence of cannabis use had almost doubled over the previous five years; according to the report, that could be attributed to the low perception of harm due to misinformation. The highest prevalence of lifetime use of cannabis was reported in Nairobi (6.9 per cent). Alcohol was identified as the most widely misused substance in the country, with an estimated prevalence of 19 per cent.

<sup>144</sup>E/INCB/2023/4.

479. In November 2022, the National Authority launched a framework for community engagement in the management of alcohol and drug abuse, the first such framework in Kenya. The main objectives of the framework are: (a) to reduce alcohol and drug use in the community; (b) to leverage joint initiatives and resources for alcohol and drug use prevention and management; and (c) to standardize and harmonize community efforts towards the reduction of alcohol and drug use.

480. A drug use survey conducted in the framework of the Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment for Nigeria found that 14.4 per cent of Nigerian adults (aged 15–64) had used at least one illicit drug in the previous year. In addition to the over 12.9 million cannabis users, the findings estimated 5.6 million non-medical users of pharmaceutical opioids and another 2.9 million non-medical users of codeine cough syrup in the country. The widespread non-medical use of opioids is a further major concern in Nigeria. The results of the survey are based on responses from 38,850 households and 9,344 high-risk drug users. In 2022, Nigeria published *Standard Operating Procedures: Medication-Assisted Treatment for Opioid Dependence in Nigeria – Methadone and Buprenorphine*, in preparation for implementing opioid-assisted therapy in the country.

481. A national school survey on substance use and associated patterns to assess the level of tobacco, alcohol, medicines and drug use among schoolchildren aged 15–16 in Senegal found that 9 per cent of students reported had smoked cigarettes, 10.4 per cent had consumed alcohol in their lifetime and 7.8 per cent had taken a tranquillizer or painkiller. The survey also found that the use of drugs is less frequent than the use of tobacco, alcohol or prescribed medicines, with 3.5 per cent of young people reporting a lifetime prevalence of psychoactive substances. The findings were based on 3,303 questionnaire responses from Senegalese students aged 15–16 in public and private secondary schools. The survey was conducted by UNODC.

482. In the course of 2023, the United Republic of Tanzania provided treatment services to at least 854,134 persons (434,847 men and 419,287 women) with varying drug use disorders. The country currently runs 15 opioid substitution therapy sites that use methadone and buprenorphine. These clinics, located across the country, provide treatment services to approximately 14,500 people on a daily basis, compared with 11,500 people in 2021. The majority of people receiving the treatment are men.

483. A third survey on the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs in schools, conducted in 2021 in Tunisia as part of the

Mediterranean School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (MedSPAD), revealed an increase in the use of drugs since the second MedSPAD survey in 2017.

484. Countries in North Africa, including Egypt, Libya and the Sudan, have continued implementing the UNODC Youth 4 Impact programme, which had been launched in 2022. In May 2023, UNODC launched the initiative in Algeria. The programme aims at helping young men and women, including those who are marginalized and at risk, to become more empowered to face life's challenges and to be more resilient against crime, violence and drugs.

485. On 3 January 2023, the Transitional Sovereignty Council in the Sudan launched the national campaign “Save your son” to tackle drug consumption, specifically the use of methamphetamine, which has dominated the market since the Sudanese revolution in 2019. Alongside government institutions, numerous non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations have participated in the campaign.

486. Algeria rolled out opioid agonist treatment programmes with the support of UNODC and Egypt in 2023. In Algeria, UNODC also assisted in the development of national guidelines for methadone agonist treatment, standard operating procedures for opioid agonist treatment and the finalization of the National Drug and Harm Reduction Strategy. As of June 2023, five centres are providing opioid agonist treatment programmes, with over 300 clients enrolled in methadone maintenance treatment.

487. In 2022, UNODC supported the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the national opioid agonist treatment programme in Egypt. The framework is being used for monitoring clients enrolled in such treatment and will also support the future evaluation of the programme. In 2023, UNODC delivered two training courses on the delivery of harm reduction services, particularly opioid agonist treatment, in Egypt.

488. In 2022/23, UNODC conducted a first-of-its-kind rapid situation assessment for women who use drugs in Egypt. The assessment provided valuable insights into the extent of substance use among women, as well as associated risk factors. The assessment offers governmental as well as non-governmental institutions a more comprehensive understanding of the services needed by women who use drugs, enabling them to prioritize the appropriate services.

## C. Americas

### Central America and the Caribbean

Central America and the Caribbean suffers from a high level of armed violence and insecurity, which is often linked to the activities and violent competition of drug cartels and street gangs.

In a number of countries in the region, the national plans on drug control may have expired. The persistent unavailability of recent epidemiological surveys on the prevalence of drug use in most countries in the region may be hampering the development of evidence-based drug control policies.

Countries in Central America and the Caribbean are increasingly being targeted by traffickers attempting to smuggle cocaine to markets in Europe.

#### 1. Major developments

489. Because of its geographical location at the crossroads of the main coca-producing countries and the consumer markets in North America and Europe, the region of Central America and the Caribbean continues to be used as a transit area for the large-scale trafficking of illicit drugs. Drug trafficking is increasingly linked to trafficking in firearms and poses a major challenge to stability and security in the region and the western hemisphere.

490. In November 2022, the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) of OAS published the *Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2022*. The report, covering the period 2016–2020, provides statistical information from 30 OAS member States on the illicit supply of drugs, including on trends in drug and laboratory seizures, illicit crop eradication and arrests. According to the report, the primary drug of concern varies by country, reflecting the variety of the illicit supply of drugs across the region. Cannabis stands out as the only drug in relation to which illicit supply was mentioned by all OAS member States that provided data for the report.

491. In December 2022, CICAD released the thematic national evaluation reports of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism for 2022, on measures to control and counter the illicit cultivation, production, trafficking and distribution of drugs and to address their causes and consequences. The reports indicated that, among the countries evaluated, there was a high level of compliance with the priority actions relating to drug supply reduction outlined

in the CICAD Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs for the period 2021–2025, including with regard to improving access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes and strengthening the exchange of information related to drug interdiction and border control measures to prevent drug trafficking. However, the reports also emphasized the need for further efforts in several areas, including the control of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances. For example, more than 60 per cent of countries in the Americas had not made progress towards establishing and/or strengthening early warning systems, and more than 70 per cent of such countries had not developed adequate regulatory approaches to enhance national control over the use of new psychoactive substances and synthetic opioids for non-medical purposes. Regarding the trafficking of drugs in small quantities, about one half of the countries that participated in the evaluation had only a limited range of programmes and strategies to prevent, at the national and international levels, the exploitation of at-risk populations by drug trafficking networks.

492. According to the study entitled *Weapons Compass: The Caribbean Firearms Study*, published by the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security of the Caribbean Community in 2023, the Caribbean region suffers from some of the world's highest rates of violent death, with firearms used in the majority of homicides. The study reviewed some of the factors that underlie gun violence in the Caribbean region, including gang violence, drug trafficking and access to illicit firearms. Information provided in the study regarding trafficking in firearms and their trade for cannabis involving Haiti and Jamaica corroborates the concerns of some regional experts regarding the links between drugs and trafficking in firearms. In its latest annual report on global trends, entitled "Global trends: forced displacement in 2022", the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees asserted that armed conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing the public order were among the reasons why there were more than 108 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide, including refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons, at the end of 2022. More than 40 per cent of a total of 2.6 million new individual asylum applications in 2022 were filed by nationals of Latin American and Caribbean countries, including Cuba, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua.

493. The UNODC report entitled "The online trafficking of synthetic drugs and synthetic opioids in Latin America and the Caribbean", published in 2022, analyses diverse aspects of the rapidly evolving phenomenon of the online trafficking of those substances in the region. According to the report, one estimate of the online drug trade suggested the likelihood that in mid-2021 about 30 organized criminal groups controlled the darknet synthetic drug markets in



Latin America and the Caribbean. The report concluded that further monitoring of the Internet and additional surveys on the online marketing of drugs are required to better estimate the magnitude of the illicit online market for synthetic drugs and synthetic opioids. The report also advocated for enhanced cooperation between anti-drug agencies and specialized cybercrime units to investigate this increasingly complex issue.

## 2. Regional cooperation

494. CICAD, INCB and UNODC continued to organize expert meetings and provide training for the competent national authorities of the countries of Central America and the Caribbean. Drug control officials from 16 countries in Central America and the Caribbean have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. An INCB Learning regional training seminar and an awareness-raising availability workshop, for officials from competent national authorities of Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama, were held in February 2023 in San Salvador. The officials participated in the two training events, dedicated to the implementation of provisions of the international drug control treaties. The one-day awareness-raising availability workshop brought together specialists from Governments, PAHO/WHO and civil society to find ways to improve access to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical use in the region. Both activities were organized in close collaboration with the Government of El Salvador and CICAD.

495. In Central America and the Caribbean, Container Control Programme units and AIRCOP task forces under the UNODC Passenger and Cargo Border Team are now operational in the Bahamas, Barbados, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago. The Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama participated in Operation Insight, a global operation launched in 2023 by INCB in cooperation with the Passenger and Cargo Border Team. The operation was designed to suppress the illicit trafficking of precursors of drugs and explosives through free trade zones and to raise the awareness of national control authorities regarding the vulnerability of such zones (see the report of the Board for 2023 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention).<sup>145</sup>

496. In November 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme held a training event in the Dominican Republic for law enforcement and regulatory officers focused on awareness-raising and safe handling practices related to new

psychoactive substances, synthetic opioids and other dangerous substances. The event was also aimed at strengthening information exchange using the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence HD targeting tools. The event included field visits to the customs facilities at the international airport in Santo Domingo and a forensic laboratory.

497. In December 2022, the GRIDS Programme conducted a capacity-building training event in Guatemala for officials from law enforcement and regulatory agencies on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances and on strengthening intelligence exchange using IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence HD. The event also included field visits to a forensic laboratory and the headquarters of the anti-narcotics police.

498. In August 2023, the GRIDS Programme conducted a capacity-building training event in Trinidad and Tobago for officers from the Regional Intelligence Fusion Centre of the Caribbean Community's Implementation Agency for Crime and Security on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances and on strengthening intelligence exchange using IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence HD. The event also included a field visit to the Trinidad and Tobago Forensic Science Centre. In the same month, the GRIDS Programme conducted a similar training event in Barbados for officers of the Joint Regional Communications Centre of the Caribbean Community's Implementation Agency for Crime and Security.

499. The sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held by the GRIDS Programme in Vienna in September 2023, brought together participants from 31 Governments and five international organizations. Several participating Governments also engaged in bilateral or multilateral case meetings facilitated by INCB that were held on the margins of the meeting. In addition, the GRIDS Programme, in collaboration with the WCO Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Central America, hosted its first "twinning" programme, in the form of an event to provide opportunities for trust-building, active networking and training on real-time trafficking incidents. The event was held in Central America in October 2023 and included the participation of law and regulatory enforcement officers from El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama. The officers developed practical skills for international operational cooperation, cross-border communication, and awareness-raising related to synthetic opioids.

500. UNODC continued to cooperate closely with inter-governmental organizations in the region, including the

<sup>145</sup>E/INCB/2023/4.

Caribbean Community, its Implementation Agency for Crime and Security, and the Central American Integration System. For example, officials from Guatemala and Honduras participated in several activities conducted in the framework of the UNODC programme entitled “Safe handling and disposal of seized drugs and precursor chemicals”. Officials from Costa Rica and Panama were among those participating in a regional training event on the investigation of cryptocurrency-enabled crime, organized in Panama in June 2023 within the framework of the UNODC Global Programme on Cybercrime. In addition, the UNODC global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) programme continued to strengthen the capabilities of forensic laboratories in the detection and analysis of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances in Latin America and the Caribbean, including in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

501. Over the course of 2022, the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs of CICAD continued to provide technical assistance to OAS member States and their national drug observatories through online and in-person training events, including webinars, training courses and round tables on a variety of topics related to research methods, drug information networks and early warning systems. The Early Warning System for the Americas (SATA) continued to collect, analyse and disseminate alerts on emerging drug threats issued by El Salvador and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay.

502. Building on earlier progress, the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies, in its third phase (COPOLAD III), continued to promote technical cooperation and political dialogue between the European Union and countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region in support of the implementation of more effective drug policies in the region. Countries participating in the programme included Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. In 2022 and 2023, the programme supported a wide range of activities, including training for national drug observatories on early warning systems, the exchange of experiences on care practices for people with drug-related problems, in particular women and vulnerable populations, the exchange of best practices regarding the use of special drug-related investigative techniques and expert meetings on the chemical concealment of cocaine.

503. A joint operation targeting firearms trafficking, Operation Trigger VII, conducted in September 2022 by

19 countries, including Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago, and supported by INTERPOL and the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security of the Caribbean Community, led to seizures of more than 300 weapons, ammunition and 12.6 tons of drugs, thus highlighting the convergence of trafficking routes and the use of firearms to control the illicit drug trade in the Caribbean. Several countries reported the trafficking of illicitly produced cannabis from Canada and the United States of America into the Caribbean subregion.

504. In May 2023, Antigua and Barbuda, the Dominican Republic, Grenada and Jamaica participated in Operation Caribe, a pilot operation of the fifth phase of the Seaport Cooperation Project (SEACOP V). SEACOP V is aimed at combating maritime trafficking and criminal networks in the Caribbean, Latin America and West Africa. The operation, which lasted for two weeks, was focused on leisure and commercial craft, and resulted in, inter alia, seizures of a total of more than 1.1 tons of cocaine in the Dominican Republic.

### 3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

505. The three international drug control treaties require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. The reports enable the Board to monitor licit activities involving internationally controlled substances and ensure the availability of those substances for medical and scientific purposes.

506. The consumption of opioid analgesics for medical and scientific purposes, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants, has gradually increased in Central America and the Caribbean, with some fluctuations over the last 20 years, reaching a regional total of 10,631 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2021, triple the level in 2002. Fentanyl accounted for most of the consumption of opioid analgesics in the region in 2021 (7,053 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), followed by morphine (1,680 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), oxycodone (1,211 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), pethidine (616 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and hydrocodone (70 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>). Consumption of opioid analgesics above 300 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> was, for example, reported by the Bahamas, Barbados, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The Board considers levels of consumption of opioid analgesics below 200 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> to be inadequate.

507. Of the countries and territories of Central America and the Caribbean, approximately three quarters have regularly provided their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances, as required by the 1971 Convention. Of the remaining countries and territories in the region, nearly all have failed to provide any statistical reports in the past five years, which hampers efforts to determine the availability of psychotropic substances in the region. It also remains challenging to determine the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in Central America and the Caribbean, as only a third of the countries and territories in the region have provided consumption data on any psychotropic substance to the Board for the past five years. The Board emphasizes the importance of ensuring the sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes in all countries worldwide, including in Central America and the Caribbean.

508. With regard to precursor chemicals, in the context of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means.

509. Out of the 20 countries in the region, 17 (85 per cent) had provided the Board with at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations. Of the countries that provided those estimates, five prohibited imports of ephedrine or pseudoephedrine (as a raw material or in the form of pharmaceutical preparations) into their respective territories. Two countries have not updated their estimates of annual legitimate requirements for ephedrine in all forms in the past 10 years, which undermines the potential of those data as a tool to inform exporting countries of the legitimate requirements of importing countries for those substances. Updating the estimates of annual legitimate requirements assists Governments in preventing oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes. In the last five years, three countries in Central America and the Caribbean, namely, the Bahamas, Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago have provided estimates of annual legitimate requirements for ephedrine for the first time.

510. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical

reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,<sup>146</sup> psychotropic substances<sup>147</sup> and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.<sup>148</sup> In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

#### 4. National legislation, policy and action

511. Antigua and Barbuda is drafting a new drug strategy, covering the period 2024–2028, which will replace the current national anti-drug strategy, covering the period 2019–2023. The Ministry of Justice of Cuba, in accordance with its resolution 635 of November 2022, updated the institutional plans on drug control that serve as the methodological bases for the development of the national programmes of each competent national authority. According to the information available, national drug policies and/or national plans on drug control in a number of countries in the region have expired.

512. In March 2022, the Government of El Salvador declared a state of emergency to address the deteriorating security situation in the country. Amendments were made to legislation in July 2023 which increased the duration of imprisonment for those found to be street gang leaders and permitted group trials of a larger number of people if they are accused of being in the same criminal group.

513. According to a report prepared by the National Anti-Drug Commission of El Salvador on the security and drug trafficking situation in the country, young people between 15 and 29 years of age have accounted for the highest incidence of arrests for drug-related crimes in recent years. In 2020, of the young people between 15 and 24 years of age in the country, about 340,000 (26 per cent) were neither students nor employed. Those young people, mainly from low-income backgrounds, became easy targets for organized criminal groups seeking to recruit them for criminal activities.

514. Haiti acts as a transit country for trafficking in illicit drugs, primarily cocaine and cannabis, which are mostly shipped onwards to the Dominican Republic, the United

<sup>146</sup>E/INCB/2023/2.

<sup>147</sup>E/INCB/2023/3.

<sup>148</sup>E/INCB/2023/4.

States and Western Europe. In 2023, gang violence in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, expanded at an alarming rate in areas of the city that had previously been considered relatively safe. Heavily armed criminal gangs targeted critical infrastructure, including ports and police stations, and gained control of major highways to the capital. According to government officials, 80 per cent of the cities in the country were under the control or influence of armed groups. Compared with the first quarter of 2022, criminal incidents, including homicides, rapes, kidnappings and lynchings, more than doubled in the corresponding period in 2023.

515. UNODC, in its assessment entitled “Haiti’s criminal markets: mapping trends in firearms and drug trafficking”, expressed concerns regarding the increased trafficking of sophisticated, high-calibre firearms and ammunition into Haiti by land, air and, most frequently, sea. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2645 (2022), in which the Council requested the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti to work with UNODC to support Haitian authorities in combating illicit financial flows, as well as trafficking and diversion of arms and related material, and in enhancing management and control of borders and ports, the Government of Haiti and UNODC agreed to improve cooperation between all relevant institutions, with a view to strengthening the national capacity to combat illicit trafficking, organized crime and terrorism and to increasing revenue collection.

516. The law enforcement authorities in Jamaica have expressed concern about the influence of the illicit production of cannabis on the environment, including in relation to the demand for water and pollution. While legally licensed cannabis production in the country must comply with environmental protection standards, illicit cannabis production continues to be a problem because of its impact on land and the availability of water for legitimate agricultural production in the country.

517. In 2023, the competent national authorities of Panama initiated the implementation of national legislation regulating the production of cannabis and its use for medical purposes in the country.

518. According to the annual report of the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme for 2022, published in January 2023, seven new port control units were recently established worldwide, including one in Santiago, Cuba, and three in the Dominican Republic, in Manzanillo and Puerto Plata and at the border with Haiti.

519. In 2022, Trinidad and Tobago and UNODC signed a memorandum of understanding on the country’s

participation in the Airport Communication Programme (AIRCOP), which is a multi-agency programme implemented by UNODC in partnership with INTERPOL and WCO in more than 40 airports in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, South-East Asia and South-Eastern Europe. AIRCOP is aimed at strengthening the capacities of international airports to target and intercept high-risk passengers, cargo and mail, as a contribution to, inter alia, the fight against illicit drugs and trafficking in persons. Since 2010, AIRCOP task forces have seized a combined total of more than 20 tons of illicit drugs, new psychoactive substances and khat, in addition to precursors, counterfeit medicines, weapons and currency.

## 5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

520. According to the *CICAD Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2022*, the total amount of cocaine seized in the western hemisphere rose from about 911 tons in 2016 to 1,091 tons in 2020. While, in Central America, the amount of cocaine seized steadily rose from 51 tons in 2016 to more than 71 tons in 2020, in the Caribbean, the amount seized decreased from 13 tons to 9 tons over the same period. The record level of illicit manufacture of cocaine in South America, which in 2021 reached a high of 2,304 tons of pure substance, has resulted in a further increase in cocaine trafficking affecting the Americas as a whole. According to UNODC, in 2022, customs and other law enforcement agencies participating in the efforts of AIRCOP and the Container Control Programme under the UNODC Passenger and Cargo Border Team seized more than 275 tons of cocaine, over 100 tons more than in the previous year.

521. Cocaine manufactured illicitly in Colombia is usually trafficked to North America either directly from ports on the Pacific or Caribbean coasts or through Brazil and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) northward towards the Caribbean and Central America.

522. According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, most of the cocaine seized in the European Union or in transit to Europe is concealed in cargo ships and shipped directly from the main cocaine-manufacturing countries, in particular Colombia; neighbouring countries in South America, in particular Brazil and Ecuador; or countries in Central America and the Caribbean. A route that runs through the Caribbean, involving other forms of sea transport, as well as air transport, also runs through North and West Africa, including the islands off the coast of West Africa. Cocaine hydrochloride

trafficked to Europe is often concealed in carrier materials and later extracted in Europe in dedicated extraction facilities.

523. In Costa Rica, the amount of cocaine seized decreased from 44.3 tons in 2021 to 24.8 tons in 2022, a decrease of 44 per cent. In the Dominican Republic, 31.1 tons of diverse illicit drugs were seized in 2022, about 5 tons more than the 25.9 tons seized in 2021. The seizures in 2022 included 27.7 tons of cocaine and 3.3 tons of cannabis herb. A further 2.8 tons of cocaine were seized the country in the first trimester of 2023. In Guatemala, 1.6 tons of cocaine were seized and 3.7 million coca plants were eradicated in 2022. In recent years, Guatemala and Honduras have reported the discovery of small coca plantations and a limited number of illicit cocaine laboratories.

524. In 2022, according to media reports, El Salvador registered the second largest cocaine seizure (12 tons) in the last 34 years, reportedly due to the Government's efforts to curtail gangs operating in the country. Moreover, in mid-July 2023, the Government stated that it had reached more than 290 days without a homicide in the country since the state of emergency was introduced.

525. In Panama, a total of 138.4 tons of drugs were seized in 2022, most of which was cocaine (108.8 tons), followed by cannabis herb (29.5 tons), representing a decrease of 6.8 tons in comparison with the amount of drugs seized in the country in 2021. In January 2023, a further 5.6 tons of cocaine and 2.3 tons of cannabis were seized in Panama. In Trinidad and Tobago, the amount of cocaine seized ranged from 130 kg to 380 kg per year in the period 2018–2021, with a decline being observed in 2022, when only 17 kg of the substance were seized.

526. According to the *CICAD Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2022*, increased cannabis cultivation and trafficking was reported by eight countries in the Caribbean in the period 2016–2020. Overall, from 2016 to 2020, the amount of cannabis seized in Central America and the Caribbean slightly increased. There were reports of innovations in cannabis trafficking in Central America, such as trafficking in liquid cannabis or cannabis suspended in wax. In Jamaica, the authorities noted a high international demand for cannabis cultivated illicitly in that country, due to its perceived superior quality.

527. In 2022, Costa Rica reported the largest total amount of cannabis herb seized in the country (25.1 tons) since 2000. In addition, more than 600,000 cannabis plants were eradicated and 13.5 tons of cannabis herb were seized in the country in the first half of 2023. Two tons of cannabis herb were seized and 5.3 million cannabis plants were

eradicated in Guatemala in 2022. In Honduras, cannabis seizures have been reported in all regions of the country in recent years.

528. While cannabis is locally produced in Trinidad and Tobago, the substance is also trafficked into the country from Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). In 2022, 580 kg of cannabis were seized in Trinidad and Tobago, a decrease from what was reported in the period 2018–2021, when, on average, 2,950 kg of cannabis were seized annually in the country. In the same year, 6,900 fully grown cannabis plants were eradicated, a decrease from what was reported in the period 2019–2021, when, on average, 163,000 cannabis plants were eradicated annually in the country.

529. Across Central America and the Caribbean, the number of arrests involving cannabis did not surpass 10,000 per year in each subregion in the period 2016–2020. According to CICAD, the relatively low number of arrests may have been due in part to the decriminalization of the possession of small amounts of cannabis, especially in the Caribbean, as well as the overall low number of countries in the Americas that provided such information (15 countries).

530. In Trinidad and Tobago, in the period 2020–2022, there was an average of 470 arrests per year for the possession of cannabis, which was a significant decrease from the previous period of 2018–2019, in which there was an average of 3,200 arrests per year. That decrease could in part be attributed to the amendment of the country's Dangerous Drugs Act in December 2019, which decriminalized the cultivation and possession of small quantities of cannabis.

531. Illicit opium cultivation and heroin manufacture and trafficking do not appear to be of concern for the countries in the region, except for Guatemala, which reported the eradication of almost 10 million opium poppy plants in 2022, and the Dominican Republic, which has reported a low-level prevalence of heroin use in recent years.

532. In August 2023, according to an open source of information, the competent national authorities of Trinidad and Tobago dismantled the first methamphetamine laboratory in the country. Since 2017, seizures of amphetamine and methamphetamine have been reported by several countries in the region, including the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago. Seizures of "ecstasy" have been reported by the Bahamas, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago. Seizures of LSD have been reported by Costa Rica and Honduras. Costa Rica, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago have reported seizures of ketamine in recent years.

## 6. Prevention and treatment

533. The Board has noted with concern the continued lack of recent epidemiological surveys on the prevalence of drug misuse in most countries in Central America and the Caribbean. In many countries of the region, the latest estimates of the annual prevalence of use of illicit drugs among the general population are more than 10 years old. For example, within the region, the most recent estimates of the prevalence of use of cannabis, cocaine and amphetamines among the general population aged 15–64 were made in 2018, in Haiti, and the most recent estimates of the prevalence of use of “ecstasy”-type substances and prescription stimulants among the general population were made in 2015, in Costa Rica and Panama. There are no recent estimates available to enable the production of estimates of the extent of opioid use in the region. **The Board reiterates its call to the countries concerned to prioritize the collection of data on drug use trends and treatment demand in order to inform the development of evidence-based drug control policy and encourages bilateral partners and regional and international organizations to provide support to this end.**

534. As estimated by UNODC in 2021, the past-year prevalence of cannabis use among the adult population was 3.1 per cent in Central America and 5.7 per cent in the Caribbean. In Jamaica, in 2016, the most recent year for which data are available, the past-year prevalence of cannabis use among the adult population was 18 per cent, which was, for purposes of comparison, higher than the global average of 4.3 per cent for 2021. According to the National Anti-Drug Commission of El Salvador, the most common combinations of substances for which patients in the country received treatment for polydrug use in 2022 were, in order of prevalence, cannabis herb with cocaine hydrochloride, cannabis herb with benzodiazepines and cannabis herb with “crack” cocaine or freebase cocaine.

535. According to the *World Drug Report 2023*, the annual prevalence of the use of cocaine among persons aged 15–64 years in Central America and in the Caribbean, as estimated in 2021, was 0.96 per cent and 0.19 per cent, respectively, and considerably lower than that in North America (1.88 per cent) and South America (1.62 per cent). According to the same source, the annual prevalence of the use of amphetamines and prescription stimulants among adults in Central America was 0.99 per cent, and that of “ecstasy” was 0.17 per cent. The annual prevalence of the use of those substances in the Caribbean was not provided. With regard to new psychoactive substances, Costa Rica and El Salvador reported the use of ketamine, mephedrone and synthetic cannabinoids among the general population aged 15–64 years in their territories in the period 2015–2018.

536. The percentage of people under 25 years of age in treatment for drug use in Central America and the Caribbean (37 per cent) is, according to UNODC, the second highest among all regions worldwide, after South America (52 per cent).

537. According to the best estimates from the latest UNODC/WHO/UNAIDS/World Bank data, published in 2023, among the population aged 15–64, about 20,000 people in Central America and about 100,000 people in the Caribbean inject drugs. The best estimate of the global prevalence of HIV among injecting drug users was 11.9 per cent. In Central America and in the Caribbean, where HIV prevalence data were available for one third of all people who inject drugs, this prevalence was estimated at 0.95 per cent and 10.8 per cent, respectively. Data from PAHO indicate that, while the number of new HIV cases in Latin America is estimated to have increased by 4.7 per cent from 2010 to 2021, with approximately 110,000 new cases in 2021, the number of new cases in the Caribbean decreased by 28 per cent over the same period, from an estimated 19,000 per year to 14,000 per year. It is estimated that 18 per cent of people with HIV in Latin America and in the Caribbean are unaware of their condition.

## North America

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The opioid crisis continued to have serious consequences in the countries of the region. An increasing number of opioid toxicity deaths over the period under consideration involved illicitly manufactured fentanyl, often mixed with other synthetic drugs, including stimulants or benzodiazepine analogues.

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The United States launched the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats, which is aimed at preventing the illicit manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs, detecting emerging drug trends, and drug use patterns, and responding to public health impacts, in partnership with Governments, as well as the private sector, civil society, hospitals and public health stakeholders.

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Illicit drug-related activity by cartels and criminal gangs in Mexico continues to result in high levels of violence, in particular homicides, in the country.

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## 1. Major developments

538. The opioid crisis resulting from an increasingly adulterated illicit drug supply continued to have serious consequences in North America. Drug overdose deaths in the United States have risen fivefold over the past two decades, with over 106,000 such deaths in 2021 alone. In Canada, there were more than 36,000 apparent opioid toxicity deaths between 2016 and 2022. An increasing number of opioid toxicity deaths over the period under consideration involved illicitly manufactured fentanyl, often mixed with other synthetic drugs, including stimulants or benzodiazepine analogues, reflecting the polysubstance nature of the crisis.

539. In response, all three countries of the region have strengthened their legislation related to precursor chemicals. In particular, Canada permanently scheduled a group of novel fentanyl precursors, which are analogues and derivatives of *N*-phenyl-4-piperidinamine (4-AP) and its salts, under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. This measure came into effect on 30 August 2023 and is intended to enable law enforcement authorities to continue acting against any illegal importation, distribution and use of those precursor chemicals. Derivatives or analogues of fentanyl precursors are also being placed under national control in the United States, including certain derivatives of 4-piperidone and halide analogues of 4-AP, effective 30 November 2023.

540. The President of the United States extended the national emergency with respect to global illicit drug trafficking, which had first been initiated by an executive order issued on 15 December 2021, beyond 15 December 2022. Under the order, international drug trafficking, including the illicit production, global sale and widespread distribution of illegal drugs, the rise in high-potency drugs such as fentanyl and other synthetic opioids and the growing role of Internet-based drug sales are considered to continue posing an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy and economy of the country.

541. During a ministerial-level meeting, which was held virtually on 7 July 2023, the United States Secretary of State launched the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats. The Coalition, formalized through a joint ministerial declaration signed by 81 Governments, is aimed at preventing the illicit production and trafficking of synthetic drugs, detecting emerging drug trends, and drug use patterns, and responding to public health impacts, in partnership with civil society, hospitals and public health stakeholders, as well as the private sector, including chemical manufacturers, shipping companies and social media platforms. The Coalition is expected to reconvene at the political level on the margins of various high-level political events.

## 2. Regional cooperation

542. Effective cooperation in law enforcement matters and in combating illicit drug manufacture and trafficking continued to be promoted through various regional mechanisms. At the 2023 North American Leaders' Summit, held on 9 and 10 January 2023, Canada, Mexico and the United States committed to coordinating actions and strategies to combat arms and drug trafficking that represent a shared threat to the three countries. The countries also agreed to continue their collaboration within the North American Drug Dialogue under an updated strategic framework to address illegal drug threats and strengthen public health approaches to substance use. That included increased distribution of overdose reversal medications and information-sharing on chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of fentanyl and other synthetic drugs.

543. Mexico and the United States continued to cooperate within the Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health and Safe Communities. On 9 March 2023, a second phase of the framework was launched, and the two countries agreed to further increase cooperation to combat the illicit manufacture and use of fentanyl, as well as arms trafficking, across the region. On that occasion, approximately \$25 million in funds stolen by criminal actors through embezzlement and fraud that were seized and forfeited by the United States Department of Justice were returned to the federal Government of Mexico. The funds were earmarked to be used to advance the goals of the Bicentennial Framework. On 13 April 2023, further collaboration was announced within the Framework, including public awareness campaigns and commitment to continued cooperation to dismantle the fentanyl supply chain on both sides of the border between the two countries.

544. On the same day, the first meeting of the senior-level Trilateral Fentanyl Committee was convened. The Committee, comprising senior-level officials from Canada, Mexico and the United States, recognized synthetic opioids, in particular fentanyl, as the foremost drug threat in North America, and the three countries agreed to work together to disrupt the global transfer, facilitation and supply of illicit fentanyl and the precursor chemicals and equipment used in its illicit manufacture before they reach North America. The Committee also pledged to coordinate international actions to mobilize other countries impacted by synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine, "captagon" and tramadol. The formation of the Committee was agreed during the North American Leaders' Summit in January 2023.

545. INCB has been supporting countries of the region in addressing the emergence of highly potent synthetic drugs through the activities of its Global Rapid Interdiction of

Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme, including through the use of tools such as IONICS, which facilitates the exchange of real-time information between national authorities. As of July 2023, over 2,200 incidents had been communicated concerning interdictions and seizures of opioids through the platform by law enforcement focal points for North America. On 9 December 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme provided in-person support for 33 law enforcement and regulatory officers from the Technical Group for Synthetic Drug Control of Mexico, focused on strengthening information exchange using the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence targeting tools.

546. Between December 2022 and January 2023, Mexico and the United States participated in the INCB Operation Knockout and exchanged intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical 1,4-butanediol, carisoprodol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through international postal, express mail and courier services and related modalities.

547. From 21 to 23 February 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized an online stakeholder consultation on voluntary cooperation between Governments and freight forwarding services for the prevention of trafficking in dangerous substances. The event was attended by more than 44 representatives from 10 Governments, three international organizations and six industry associations, including 13 participants from Canada, Mexico and the United States. Participants exchanged best practices and shared case examples related to the exploitation of legitimate ancillary logistics services and discussed the next steps for promoting voluntary cooperation between Governments and their private sector partners.

548. The GRIDS Programme convened, in Mexico City in June 2023, the second regional expert group meeting on the exploitation of Latin American and Caribbean e-commerce platforms for the marketing and sale of dangerous substances. The meeting was aimed at engaging stakeholders in discussions regarding the current trends in regional trafficking in synthetic drugs, fentanyl and related chemicals, challenges confronting e-commerce platforms and promising practices to prevent future exploitation by traffickers. More than 29 stakeholders, including representatives from the Governments of Mexico and the United States, international organizations, regional industry associations and leading private sector companies, participated in the event.

549. In Vienna in September 2023, the GRIDS Programme organized the sixth annual operational meeting on counteracting trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals

through postal, courier and air cargo services. The event brought together over 100 participants from 30 Governments and international organizations, including participants from Canada, Mexico and the United States. Several participating Governments also engaged in bilateral and multilateral case meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

550. Also in Vienna in September 2023, the GRIDS programme convened the third international expert group meeting on expanding the INCB lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate uses and novel approaches for their identification in falsified or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals. The event brought together nearly 45 participants from 20 Governments and international organizations, including participants from Canada, Mexico and the United States.

551. A total of 228 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of the three countries in North America have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The existing e-modules cover the topics of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

### 3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

552. The Board acknowledges the timely and thorough reporting of data by the competent national authorities of all three countries of the region, as required by the international drug control conventions and requested in the relevant resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, including the voluntary reporting of data on the domestic consumption of psychotropic substances.

553. According to the reported data, Canada and the United States have maintained a high level of availability of opioid analgesics, peaking in 2014 with a total of 75,408 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> for the two countries. However, availability has been steadily decreasing, falling to the levels of 20 years ago, at 48,867 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2021. In 2021, the United States reported the consumption of 31,860 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2021, with Canada reporting the consumption of 17,007 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> the same year. With regard to Mexico, the availability of opioid analgesics in the country has been much lower, as consumption has never exceeded 200 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, the threshold considered adequate by the Board, between 2013 and 2020. In 2021, Mexico exceeded the Board's threshold of



adequacy for the first time as it reported the consumption of 277 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>. Among all countries in North America, the most consumed opioid in 2021 was hydrocodone (mostly consumed in the United States), followed by oxycodone, fentanyl, hydromorphone and morphine.

554. Psychotropic substances, used for the treatment of a wide range of mental health and neurological disorders, have been manufactured and traded throughout the region for decades. The consumption of those substances as reported by Governments indicates that they are generally available for legitimate medical purposes.

**555. The Board highlights the importance of ensuring that narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are available for legitimate purposes, while putting in place adequate policies and practices to prevent their overprescription and misuse. The Board reminds Governments of the need to foster responsible prescription practices and controls on distribution to avoid diversion into illicit channels and overconsumption resulting in dependence and associated harms.**

556. With regard to precursor chemicals, in the context of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means. As at 1 November 2023, all three countries in the region had provided at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations, and all three have regularly updated their estimates for those substances, which contributes to preventing their oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes.

557. Further information and analysis of trends relating to the availability of internationally controlled substances are contained in the technical reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,<sup>149</sup> psychotropic substances<sup>150</sup> and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.<sup>151</sup> In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent

national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

#### 4. National legislation, policy and action

558. In support of the implementation of the National Drug Control Strategy and to address the illicit fentanyl supply chain, in April 2023, the President of the United States requested the United States Congress to approve the allocation of an historic sum of \$46.1 billion for National Drug Control Program agencies in 2024. The budget request for the fiscal year 2024 represents a significant increase in comparison with previous years. In addition to leading a coordinated global effort to disrupt the illicit trade in synthetic drugs, the budget foresees greater funding to support the expansion of prevention, treatment, harm reduction and recovery support services in the country.

559. The overdose crisis continued to have a significant impact across Canada, with health-care and social services being overburdened owing to the high toxicity and unpredictable content of illicit drugs being consumed. Since 2017, the Government of Canada has allocated more than 1 billion Canadian dollars to increase access to evidence-based treatment and services, as well as to raise awareness and prevent drug use and associated stigma. In the 2023 federal budget, a significant amount was allocated to support a renewed Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy and strengthen the public health-care system, including by increasing access to mental health and substance use services and implementing harm reduction, treatment and recovery strategies for people who use drugs.

560. On 17 November 2022, Bill C-5, amending the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act of Canada, received royal assent. The amendment repeals mandatory minimum penalties for all drug-related offences, aiming to increase the use of conditional sentences and require prosecutors to consider alternatives to laying or proceeding with criminal charges for simple possession of drugs. One of the stated motivations behind the amendment was to promote fairer and more effective responses to criminal conduct and address systemic racism and discrimination in the criminal justice system of Canada, while maintaining public safety.

561. On 21 January 2023, an exemption from parts of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act for the Province of British Columbia came into effect. The three-year exemption allows the province to not bring criminal charges against

<sup>149</sup> E/INCB/2023/2.

<sup>150</sup> E/INCB/2023/3.

<sup>151</sup> E/INCB/2023/4.

adults (aged 18 years and older) for the possession of a combined total of 2.5 grams of opioids, cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA. The exemption does not apply in certain circumstances, including if adults in possession of any quantity of those substances are found on the premises of schools, at licensed childcare facilities or in airports, where they could be charged with a criminal offence. The province is monitoring implementation, early outcomes, public awareness and unintended consequences, and the federal Government is carrying out assessments through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

562. In March 2023, in response to the overdose crisis in Toronto, Canada, the city's public health authority, Toronto Public Health, updated its submission to Health Canada for an exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to decriminalize possession of drugs for personal use in the city. If granted, the exemption would remove criminal charges for possession for personal use without use of any alternative sanctions. The exemption would apply to all drugs and substances listed in the Act, to all people, including young people (people aged 12 to 17) and to all areas of Toronto, except for childcare facilities, schools and airports. The exemption would also create a system of voluntary referrals to health and social support services. The original request for an exemption has been pending with Health Canada since January 2022.

563. A number of companies received approval from Health Canada amending their dealer's licence, allowing them to legally possess and produce limited amounts of controlled substances, such as psilocybin, cocaine, coca leaf, opium, morphine and diacetylmorphine, and to sell and distribute them in limited amounts to licensed dealers, such as pharmacists, practitioners, hospitals or holders of an exemption for research purposes under section 56 (1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

564. The Health Department of the Province of Alberta put in place a regulatory framework for the medicinal use of psychoactive substances (psychedelics), becoming the first province in Canada to introduce requirements and medical oversight for such use. As of 16 January 2023, service providers are required to hold a licence under the Mental Health Services Protection Act, except if taking part in an approved clinical research trial, and must meet quality and safety requirements under provincial regulations. In addition to Alberta, clinics providing psychedelic-assisted therapy have also opened in the Province of British Columbia.

565. In view of the lack of federal clinical practice guidelines, Health Canada issued information on its expectations regarding risk-management measures for clinical trials involving psychedelic-assisted therapy in December 2022,

based on some best practices emerging in literature. Measures included adequate training of therapists, the requirement to report any serious unexpected adverse drug reactions to Health Canada and the existence of written informed consent from every person and every product used in the trials, in order to meet good manufacturing practices.

566. Developments regarding access to some psychedelic substances have also taken place in the United States. In April 2023, Bill No. 5263, relating to access to psilocybin services by individuals 21 years of age and older, was passed by the legislature of the State of Washington. However, the Governor of the State partially vetoed the bill because of provisions conflicting with other regulations, including federal law obligations. This limits the scope of the bill to research in the medical use of psilocybin and, potentially, to a pilot programme pending the release of a final report by the Washington State Health Care Authority expected in December 2023. Bills related to psilocybin have been introduced in an additional 18 states in the country.

567. In May 2023, the Governor of the State of Colorado signed the Natural Medicine Legalization and Regulation (Bill SB23-290), which establishes the regulatory framework for licensing the cultivation, manufacture, testing, storage, distribution, transport, transfer and dispensation of natural medicine and natural medicine products. The licensing of facilitators, healing centres and other licensees is to begin no later than 31 December 2024. The legislation concerns psilocyn and psilocybin only, however, the range of substances will be expanded to dimethyltryptamine, ibogaine and mescaline (excluding *lophophora williamsii* ("peyote")) after 1 June 2026.

568. In May 2023, the Oregon Health Authority issued the first psilocybin service centre licence, in implementation of the state's Psilocybin Services Act. Under the Act, upon completion of a preparation session with a licensed facilitator, persons 21 years of age or older may access psilocybin services without prescription or referral from health-care providers. In addition, service centres will sell psilocybin products.

569. In Mexico, a commission to fight trafficking in illicit synthetic drugs, firearms and ammunition was created pursuant to a presidential decree issued on 12 April 2023. The commission aims to improve coordination among government entities of Mexico to support the investigation and arrest of individuals involved in the production and trafficking of fentanyl.

570. On 29 May 2023, Mexico established the National Commission on Mental Health and Addictions

(CONASAMA), a decentralized administrative body of the Ministry of Health. The Commission merges activities previously carried out by the Technical Secretariat of the National Mental Health Council (STCONSAME), the Psychiatric Care Services (SAP) and the National Commission against Addictions (CONADIC). The Commission develops policy, strategies and programmes for the prevention and treatment of mental health disorders, including drug use disorders. It is also responsible for the operation of the Observatory of Mental Health and Addictions of Mexico, which collects, analyses and interprets information on mental health and the consumption of drugs, with the aim of obtaining reliable national- and state-level data for decision-making. The Commission was established in implementation of the health policy priorities of the General Health Law, adopted in May 2022.

571. In May 2023, the Federal Law for the Control of Chemical Precursors, Essential Chemical Products and Machines for the Manufacture of Capsules and Tablets of Mexico was amended. The amendment strengthens actions aimed at controlling the production, preparation, disposal, acquisition, import, export, transportation, storage and distribution of chemical precursors, essential chemical products and related equipment through inter-agency coordination.

572. Following the launch of the review of the Cannabis Act by the Minister of Health and the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions of Canada in September 2022, an expert panel was formed to undertake an assessment of the legislative framework governing cannabis, engage with stakeholders to gather perspectives to inform the review, and provide expert advice on aspects of the legislative framework and its implementation that the Government could prioritize for improvement or reform.

573. The expert panel received a series of recommendations from various stakeholders, including the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction and industry representatives, as part of the consultation process for the review mechanism. The recommendations submitted to the panel incorporated issues related to improving competition within the cannabis industry, including the review of the licensing process and related costs; adjustments to THC limits; the review of cannabis promotion, packaging and labelling; surveillance of online cannabis distribution; and research on the equitability of access, the availability of the legal supply and pricing.

574. On 2 December 2022, amendments to the Cannabis Act and its regulations concerning cannabis research and testing and beverages containing cannabis came into force in Canada. The amendments increase the public possession

limit for cannabis beverages from 2.1 to 17.1 litres, a level similar to that of other cannabis products, such as edibles. Existing controls aimed at mitigating the risks of over-consumption and accidental consumption, such as child-resistant packaging and strict limits on the amount of THC per container, remain unamended. The amendments also facilitate non-therapeutic cannabis research involving human participants and allow analytical testing licence holders and federal and provincial governmental laboratories to produce, distribute and sell reference standards and test kits.

575. In April 2023, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the provisions of the provincial law banning the possession and cultivation of cannabis plants in Quebec for personal purposes are valid and operative under the Constitution of Canada. While the Federal Cannabis Act allows people to possess or cultivate four cannabis plants at home, the Cannabis Regulation Act of Quebec prohibits such possession and cultivation. In a unanimous ruling, the Court ruled that banning the possession of cannabis plants and their cultivation at home is a means of achieving the provincial law's public health and security objectives and such legislation is within the provinces' jurisdiction over property and civil rights and residual jurisdiction over matters of a local or private nature.

576. In the United States, as at 1 November 2023, 38 states, three territories and the District of Columbia allowed the medical use of cannabis products. On 31 March 2023, the Governor of the State of Kentucky signed into law Senate Bill 47, authorizing the medical use of cannabis in the state. The use of cannabis for medical purposes would be allowed for registered patients with qualifying medical conditions, such as cancer, epilepsy or post-traumatic stress disorder. Some provisions of the bill will not become effective until 1 January 2025.

577. In July 2023, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs issued Directive 1315, on access to Veterans Health Administration clinical programmes for veterans participating in State-approved cannabis programmes. Under the directive, health-care providers under the Department discuss relevant clinical information regarding cannabis use with veterans who request information or report cannabis use and document such information in the veteran's electronic health record. Clinical treatment decisions in relation to cannabis use must be made on a case-by-case basis and take into account the health and safety of veterans. Furthermore, veterans must not be denied Veterans Health Administration services solely because they are participating in a State-approved cannabis programme or because they acknowledge that they use cannabis. However, to comply with federal law, Veterans Health Administration health-care providers are prohibited from

recommending or registering veterans for participation in a State-approved cannabis programme, completing forms for them to that end, or making referrals to such programmes.

578. As at 7 November 2023, 24 states, two territories and the District of Columbia had enacted measures to regulate the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes. Most recently, the State of Delaware passed Bills HB1 and HB2. Both bills became law on 23 April 2023, without the signature of the Governor of the state, owing to his reservations regarding legalization. Persons over the age of 21 are allowed to possess, use, display, purchase or transport cannabis without penalty, and the legislation also establishes a regulated, taxed market for cannabis for recreational use similar to that for alcohol. Bill H.F.100, establishing a regulatory framework for the use by adults of cannabis for non-medical purposes, including a regulated market with taxation on cannabis products, was enacted in the State of Minnesota on 30 May 2023. The “issue 2” ballot initiative in a referendum held in the State of Ohio on 7 November 2023 was approved by voters. The initiative modifies Ohio law and allows for the possession and personal cultivation of cannabis as well as the licensing of cannabis growers and retailers.

579. **INCB underscores that article 4 (c) of the 1961 Convention requires States parties to take such legislative and administrative measures as may be necessary, subject to the provisions of the Convention, to limit exclusively to medical and scientific purposes the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution of, trade in, use and possession of drugs, and that article 3 of the 1988 Convention requires States parties to adopt such measures as may be necessary to establish as criminal offences under its domestic law, when committed intentionally:**

**(a) The production, manufacture, extraction, preparation, offering, offering for sale, distribution, sale, delivery on any terms whatsoever, brokerage, dispatch, dispatch in transit, transport, importation or exportation of any narcotic drug or any psychotropic substance contrary to the provisions of the 1961 Convention, the 1961 Convention as amended or the 1971 Convention;**

**(b) The cultivation of cannabis plant for the purpose of the production of narcotic drugs contrary to the provisions of the 1961 Convention and the 1961 Convention as amended.**

580. The proclamation by the President of the United States, who announced on 6 October 2022 a full, unconditional and categorical pardon for prior offences of simple possession of cannabis under federal law and the law of the District of Columbia, is being implemented by the United States Department of Justice. While the presidential pardon

does not expunge the existing conviction, it removes civil or legal restrictions, such as on the rights to vote, hold office or sit on a jury, and lifts barriers to housing, employment and educational opportunities.

581. As of March 2023, a cannabis company was authorized to import and acquire cannabis seeds and cultivate, produce and sell cannabis products with low levels of THC in Mexico. This is the first authorization related to commercial cannabis issued by the Federal Commission for the Protection against Sanitary Risks (COFEPRIS), the health regulatory agency of Mexico. The authorization was granted by the Commission in response to a decision by the Supreme Court of Mexico. In a public statement, the Commission emphasized that it did not have enough information to determine that future products would be safe for the purposes for which the company intended them to be used. In addition, the Commission, in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, filed complaints and non-conformity appeals seeking to reverse and invalidate the authorization in order to protect public health.

## 5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

582. According to the 2022 *Public Report on Organized Crime in Canada*, cocaine remained the primary commodity trafficked in Canada, and organized crime involvement in the markets for methamphetamine and fentanyl continued to increase. More than 350 organized crime groups were involved in the illicit market for fentanyl in Canada, while 21 such groups were involved in its illicit manufacture.

583. In December 2022, the Canada Border Services Agency seized nearly 2.5 tons of opium in Vancouver, British Columbia, the largest opium seizure by the agency to date. In addition, between 13 April and 14 May 2023 alone, the Agency made 15 seizures of ketamine, amounting to 89.8 kg, with a street value of over 6 million Canadian dollars. All the seizures were made at the Léo-Blanchette Mail Processing Centre.

584. There have been significant seizures of fentanyl by various law enforcement agencies in the United States. In 2022, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration seized a total of more than 57 million fentanyl-laced counterfeit prescription pills and nearly 6,000 kg of fentanyl powder. An additional 6,800 kg of fentanyl was seized by the United States Customs and Border Protection. The Drug Enforcement Administration estimated that the seizures amounted to over 379 million deadly doses of fentanyl. The United States Postal Inspection Service seized approximately 150 per cent more fentanyl in 2022 than in the previous year

and the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the United States Department of the Treasury designated nearly 100 individuals and entities for their role in the illicit drug trade, including trafficking in fentanyl and precursor chemicals.

585. According to data from the High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas programme, between the last quarter of 2021 and 30 September 2022, law enforcement officials seized more than 11 tons of fentanyl, nearly 3 tons of heroin, more than 150 tons of methamphetamine and nearly 170 tons of cocaine, representing nearly \$9 billion in street value. The programme oversees 33 regional areas in all 50 states of the United States, as well as Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands and the District of Columbia.

586. In the United States, seizures of illicit ketamine by drug enforcement agencies rose by 349 per cent between 2017 and 2022. In 2023, the United States Customs and Border Protection seized over 6 tons of ketamine, compared with 4.9 tons in 2022.

587. Fentanyl and methamphetamine seizures in Mexico increased in 2021, in comparison with 2020. The National Guard seized 168 kg of fentanyl in 2021, whereas less than 50 kg of the substance were seized in 2020. The quantity of methamphetamine seized reached more than 4.7 tons in 2021, compared with 1.36 tons in 2020. On the other hand, seizures of cocaine, cannabis, heroin and other psychotropic substances decreased.

588. Seized equipment and illicit narcotic drugs have been continuously destroyed in various regions in Mexico, often in large quantities. On 25 June 2023, the Office of the Attorney General of Mexico, through the Specialized Regional Control Prosecutor's Office (FECOR), in its Sinaloa Delegation, destroyed nearly 36 tons of various narcotic drugs and precursor chemicals and over 735,000 fentanyl pills, in addition to drug manufacturing equipment.

589. The illicit manufacture of and trafficking in drugs among cartels and criminal gangs continue to contribute to high levels of violence in Mexico. According to UNODC data, although intentional homicide rates in the country have fallen slightly over the past several years, the homicide rate remains one of the highest among countries worldwide, with more than 28 homicides per 100,000 people in 2021. Available data for 2022 and 2023 suggest that the rates of violence and homicide in the country have remained at the levels of 2021.

## 6. Prevention and treatment

590. According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, drug overdose deaths in the United States have risen fivefold over the past two decades. In 2021, there were over 106,000 deaths due to overdose of drugs, including illicit drugs and prescription opioids. The number of drug overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids other than methadone continued to increase, reaching more than 70,000 deaths in 2021, while deaths involving heroin declined from nearly 13,200 in 2020 to nearly 9,200 in 2021. In comparison, provisional data for 2022, published in May 2023, show that the overall reported number of drug overdose deaths occurring in the United States slightly decreased from 2021 to 2022. However, drug overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids (including fentanyl but excluding methadone) and stimulants with abuse potential (such as methamphetamine) continued to increase in comparison with 2021. The Board stresses the importance of the availability of and access to overdose-reversing medications, such as naloxone, which, if administered in a timely manner, have life-saving effects.

591. According to data released by Health Canada, there were a total of nearly 7,400 apparent opioid toxicity deaths in Canada in 2022, with over 2,200 such deaths in the Province of British Columbia alone. That was the second largest number of suspected deaths ever recorded in a calendar year in that province, after the more than 2,300 deaths recorded in 2021. Of all accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths in 2022, 81 per cent involved fentanyl and more than half also involved a stimulant (cocaine or methamphetamine), reflecting the polysubstance nature of the crisis in the country.

592. In the United States there has also been an increasing concern over overdoses involving opioids laced with other substances, including stimulants and benzodiazepines or analogues. In March 2023, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration issued a public safety alert on the sharp increase in the trafficking of fentanyl mixed with xylazine. The Administration reported that it had seized xylazine and fentanyl mixtures in 48 states and that, in 2022, approximately 23 per cent of the fentanyl powder and 7 per cent of the fentanyl pills it had seized contained xylazine. On 12 April 2023, the Government of the United States officially designated fentanyl adulterated or associated with xylazine as an emerging threat to the country, owing to the associated significant and rapidly worsening negative health consequences, including fatal overdoses and severe morbidity. Xylazine is a sedative approved for veterinary use in Canada and the United States.

593. Xylazine has also been identified in an increasing number of samples taken by law enforcement agencies across

Canada. According to Health Canada, the proportion of fentanyl samples that also contained xylazine increased from 1.4 per cent in January 2020 to 9 per cent in April 2023, with a peak near 12 per cent in June 2022. In addition, a number of provinces across Canada have issued toxic drug alerts about bromazepam having been detected in blood samples taken in investigations into sudden deaths; in some cases, the bromazepam had been laced with fentanyl. Bromazepam is a benzodiazepine not under international control. It is not approved for medical use in Canada. Naloxone, which is commonly used to counteract the effects of opioids and prevent overdose, does not reverse the effects of xylazine or benzodiazepines.

594. In implementation of its National Drug Control Strategy, the Government of the United States has accelerated a series of public health initiatives, in addition to actions targeting drug supply reduction. The initiatives include expanding the availability of and access to opioid overdose reversal products, including through the first approval of naloxone as a non-prescription drug, on 29 March 2023, by the United States Food and Drug Administration and by delivering naloxone to communities adversely affected by fentanyl. On 6 April 2023, the Government launched a national campaign to educate young people about the dangers of fentanyl and the life-saving effects of naloxone and has been working to make treatments for opioid use disorders a part of routine health-care delivery, including in prison settings.

595. On 22 May 2023, the United States Food and Drug Administration approved the first nalmefene hydrochloride nasal spray for the emergency treatment of known or suspected opioid overdose in adults and paediatric patients aged 12 years and older. It is the first approval of the substance for use in health-care and community settings in the United States. The approval was supported by safety and pharmacokinetic studies and the nasal spray was subject to a priority review, which allows approval within 6 months, instead of the 10 months required under standard review procedures.

596. To further address the drug overdose crisis in the United States, the National Institutes of Health has established a research network that will test harm reduction strategies, such as the distribution of naloxone and fentanyl test strips, in different community settings and will examine the efficacy of bringing harm reduction services and tools into communities by means of, or in the form of, mobile vans, peer support specialists, Internet- and smartphone-based tools and other types of outreach. The initiative is expected to provide a total of approximately \$36 million over five years and represents the largest pool of funding to date for that purpose.

597. The National Institute on Drug Abuse awarded New York University Langone Health and the Brown University School of Public Health with a grant to conduct research to measure the impact of some of the first publicly recognized overdose prevention centres in the United States, located in New York City and Providence, Rhode Island. As part of the research project, the first of its kind, the three sites are being evaluated between 2023 and 2027 in terms of fatal and non-fatal overdose rates and emergency department visits. In addition, the project is examining the community impact of the sites and estimating their operational costs and the potential cost savings they provide to health-care and criminal justice systems.

598. According to the United States 2022 Monitoring the Future survey, published in June 2023, levels of adolescent cannabis use in the United States decreased after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and remained relatively stable in 2022, with 31 per cent of 12th-grade students reporting cannabis use in the past 12 months. The use of narcotic drugs other than heroin increased slightly among 12th-grade students between 2021 and 2022, with 1.7 per cent reporting such use within the past year. Among the same group of students, the prescribed use of medications for attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder increased from 11 per cent in 2021 to 15 per cent in 2022. Building on results from the Monitoring the Future survey, the University of Michigan and Columbia University undertook a study that showed that young adults aged 19 to 30 years had nearly doubled their past-year use of non-LSD hallucinogens between 2018 and 2021, with past-year use at 3.4 per cent in 2018, compared with 6.6 per cent in 2021.

599. The 2022 Canadian Cannabis Survey results were published in December 2022. Most of the findings did not differ significantly from those of 2021. A new parameter on accidental consumption of cannabis was introduced in the 2022 survey. Among people who had used cannabis in the past 12 months, over 30 per cent indicated higher THC and lower CBD consumption, and over 60 per cent had obtained cannabis from a legal storefront, an increase from 53 per cent reported in the 2021 survey. Five per cent of respondents reported always obtaining cannabis from illegal or unlicensed sources, with online illegal markets remaining attractive owing to the ease of payment and the appearance of being a legal source. Most respondents also indicated that the occasional use of alcohol and cannabis posed no or only a slight risk, whereas the occasional smoking of tobacco and use of e-cigarettes with nicotine posed moderate or great risks.

600. In a report released on 29 March 2023, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction concluded that substance use had cost the Canadian economy over 49 billion Canadian dollars in 2020, up from 11 billion Canadian

dollars per year between 2007 and 2020. Lost productivity, including the value of work lost due to premature deaths and long- and short-term disability, had cost over 22 billion Canadian dollars in 2020, with opioid use having cost over 7 billion Canadian dollars in 2020, higher than in any other year. The report also analysed the related costs of health care and criminal justice and other direct costs.

601. In Canada, between April 2018 and March 2023, the “Know more” opioids awareness programme engaged in more than 1,300 in-person and virtual sessions at high schools, 68 events at post-secondary institutions, 43 events and festivals and more than 175,000 interactions with people, and placed awareness products such as posters and wallet cards in high-traffic areas of 16 post-secondary educational institutions. The programme raises the awareness of teenagers and young people across Canada about the facts surrounding the opioid overdose crisis, opioids, fentanyl, signs of an overdose, naloxone, the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act and the impacts of stigma on people who use drugs.

602. As of June 2023, there were 38 supervised drug consumption sites operating in Canada, and an additional 10 sites were awaiting approval by Health Canada. The sites provide health, social and treatment services, including access to clean drug use equipment, drug checking, emergency medical care in case of overdose, testing for infectious diseases, referrals for drug treatment and access to social services such as housing. Since 2017, there have been over 4 million visits to the sites and over 40,000 overdoses have been reversed at the sites. As possession of controlled substances is prohibited under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, an exemption under section 56 (1) of the Act is required to operate a supervised consumption site for medical purposes.

603. To facilitate access to prevention and health services for people who use drugs, the Inter-Institutional Committee for Risk and Harm Reduction was established in Mexico City in January 2023. The Committee comprises members from the National Commission against Addictions (CONADIC), the Psychiatric Care Services (SAP) and the Technical Secretariat of the National Mental Health Council (STCONSAME) of the Ministry of Health, the government of Mexico City and the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City, and is supported by civil society organizations. The purpose of the Committee is to ensure that prevention and treatment services for people who use drugs in the city are undertaken with respect for human rights and aim to decrease associated stigma.

604. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) of Mexico, in 2021, the Attorney General charged over 3,200 adolescents with alleged drug-related crimes, of which 90 per cent were charged for simple

possession of controlled substances, in particular cannabis and methamphetamine. Drug-related crimes represented a total of 14.4 per cent of the total number of criminal charges against adolescents in that year and were the third most common type of crime among that population, after robbery and various injuries. In comparison with 2015, the number of adolescents charged with alleged drug-related offences decreased by 23 per cent.

605. According to the Observatory of Mental Health and Addictions of Mexico, Mexico is going through an epidemiological transition in terms of the demand for treatment for use of methamphetamine, experiencing an increase in admissions for treatment in a greater number of states. In 2017, six states noted admissions for use of methamphetamine, which increased to 21 states in 2022. Between those years, the use of methamphetamine, ecstasy and stimulants increased by 218 per cent. In 2022, those substances accounted for over 46 per cent of requests for treatment.

606. According to the “Online survey on the use of cannabis and derivatives” carried out in Mexico in 2023, which was taken by nearly 13,500 people between the ages of 12 and 75, 28.3 per cent of survey respondents had used cannabis at some time in their lives and one in five identified herself or himself as a current user. The main reasons given for use included sleep and performance enhancement, stress reduction, socialization and experimentation.

## South America

Drug trafficking organizations continue to expand their operations in the Amazon Basin into illegal mining, illegal logging and wildlife trafficking, resulting in life-threatening risks to Indigenous populations. Such activities have been linked to bribery, extortion, fraud and money-laundering, as well as homicide, violent assault, sexual violence and forced labour in the Amazon.

The area under illicit coca bush cultivation in Colombia rose by 13 per cent to a second consecutive record high of 230,000 ha, while a record level of 95,008 ha of illicit coca bush cultivation was reported in Peru for 2022, representing an 18 per cent increase compared with 2021 and taking place most notably in the Peruvian Amazon.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations received a request from the Plurinational State of Bolivia to activate

the process for a critical review of the current classification of coca leaf as a narcotic drug in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended.

## 1. Major developments

607. South America is one of the three regions in the world that suffer the highest economic impacts of armed conflict, including between militias and drug cartels, together with the Middle East and North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, the effects of drug trafficking on the environment and the life of Indigenous communities are increasingly visible in the region.

608. Most notably, in the Amazon regions in Brazil, Colombia and Peru, which combined account for 79 per cent of the Amazon basin, drug trafficking organizations continue to expand their operations into illegal mining, illegal logging and wildlife trafficking. In the *World Drug Report 2023*, UNODC described the nexus connecting drug-related crime, crimes that affect the environment and convergent crime, which includes bribery, extortion, fraud and money-laundering, as well as homicide, violent assault, sexual violence and forced labour. This complex set of challenges affects the environment through a phenomenon known as narco-deforestation, which poses a significant threat to the world's largest rainforest and disproportionately affects Indigenous Peoples, people of African descent and other vulnerable populations through forced displacements, mercury poisoning and increased exposure to violence.

609. In Colombia, the presence of dissident factions of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP), namely, the Carolina Ramírez First Front and the Armando Ríos First Front, has been linked to numerous accounts of homicides, threats, extortions, forced recruitment of minors, internal displacements and other violent crimes. The violence is connected to disputes for territory and internal control of the factions, as well as the social control imposed by the organizations on local communities, and it affects mostly Indigenous populations. The violence is further fuelled by the presence of the Brazilian criminal organizations Red Command and First Command of the Capital, which collaborate with the Colombian organizations in order to traffic illicit substances and illicit mining spoils across the border. The Colombian Ombudsman issued *alerta temprano de inminencia* (early imminence alert) No. 0-17-23 in May 2023, demanding the prioritization of exceptional preventive humanitarian support to Indigenous communities in the Colombian Amazon, including the Yaigojé Apaporis Reserve in Vaupés Department, and the communities in the non-urban areas of La Pedrera, La Victoria, Mirití-Paraná and Puerto Santander

in Amazonas Department. According to the Ombudsman, these communities are at risk of violations of their right to life, freedom, integrity and security, including violations of international human rights law.

610. Drug-related crime and other forms of organized crime continue to affect politics in South America to different degrees, as illustrated by recent developments and ongoing investigations related to Ecuador and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). In July 2023, Hugo Armando Carvajal Barrios, former director of the military intelligence agency of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, was extradited by Spain to the United States for allegedly participating in drug-trafficking activities. He is charged with participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy; conspiring to import cocaine into the United States; using, carrying and possessing machine guns and destructive devices in connection with narco-terrorism and cocaine importation conspiracies; and conspiring to use, carry and possess machine guns and destructive devices in connection with narco-terrorism and cocaine importation conspiracies.

611. In Ecuador, presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio was murdered on 9 August 2023 after participating in a campaign rally. The violent act also left nine other people injured, including a candidate for the legislature and two police officers. Villavicencio held strong positions against drug cartels, criminal organizations and corruption. The homicide was declared a political crime by Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso, who also declared three days of national mourning and 60 days of state of exception.

612. In January 2023, the Attorney General's Office of Colombia announced the arrest of Margareth Chacón, a Colombian national accused of planning and financing the murder of a Paraguayan public prosecutor, Marcelo Daniel Pecci Albertini, who successfully pursued several high-profile organized crime cases. The homicide was committed in Colombia and Chacón had met with drug trafficking organizations in Mexico before leading the assassination in Cartagena, Colombia, and subsequently fleeing to El Salvador, where she was arrested.

613. In Brazil, the Brazilian directory of public security was published in July 2023. The report tracks violent intentional deaths at the national and state levels and analyses police lethality as well as casualties among the police forces. Data provided in the report also cover disappearances, violence against children and youth, domestic and sexual violence, firearms and public security spending. The report presents a trend of intentional violent deaths in Brazil since 2011, which peaked in 2017 with 67,078 deaths, decreasing in 2018 and 2019, falling to 47,765 deaths, and then remained relatively stable until 2022, when 47,398 such deaths were recorded.



Regarding the regional distribution of intentional violent deaths, the highest violent homicide rates were registered in Amapá, with 50.6 deaths per 100,000 population, Bahia (47.1) and Amazonas (38.8), in the north and north-east regions of the country. The report also presents an analysis linking the widespread violence in the country to the expansion of activities of the rival drug trafficking organizations – Red Command and First Command of the Capital – from their original territories in south-eastern Brazil (namely in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) into other states.

614. During the fifty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations in September and October 2023, the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela presented its third report (A/HRC/54/57), focusing on two areas: (a) the State apparatus and its mechanisms of repression and restrictions on civic and democratic space; and (b) the establishment of the Directorate of Strategic and Tactical Actions as part of the Bolivarian National Police in July 2022 as the continuation, in terms of structure, command and modus operandi, of the Special Action Forces (FAES). In the report, it is stated that the mission remains concerned about the great number of allegations of extrajudicial executions by security forces in the context of security operations against organized crime.

615. On 26 June 2023, the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia sent a letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations requesting to begin the process of a critical review of the current classification of coca leaf as a drug in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended, in accordance with article 3 of the Convention. In accordance with the same article, the request was brought to the attention of the parties, WHO and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs by the Secretary-General. The Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia will be notified once the review by WHO has been completed. The Plurinational State of Bolivia has a reservation to the 1961 Convention that allows the chewing of coca leaf for cultural purposes in its national territory. The Government constitutionally protects ancestral coca as cultural heritage, a renewable natural resource for biodiversity and a factor of social cohesion, and does not consider it to be a narcotic drug when in its natural state. The General Coca Law establishes a production limit of up to 22,000 ha of coca bush, as well as the authorized production areas with geo-referenced limits.

## 2. Regional cooperation

616. In 2022, cooperation between Brazil and Colombia was promoted through a pilot project for monitoring the illicit drug market in Brazil, implemented by UNODC in collaboration with the Integrated Illicit Crop Monitoring

System of Colombia, the National Police of Colombia and Brazilian law enforcement agencies. The project has held five technical workshops and trained around 300 representatives from security forces in four states of Brazil. The project aims to build a broader and more diversified monitoring system for the illicit drug market, with a focus on price and purity information. The initiative is part of the Centre of Excellence for the Reduction of the Illicit Drug Supply, a partnership between UNODC, the Brazilian National Secretariat for Drug Policy (SENAD) and UNDP.

617. Moreover, in 2022, the Global Programme on Cybercrime, in cooperation with the UNODC Laboratory and Scientific Service published, under the UNODC opioid strategy, a report entitled “The online trafficking of synthetic drugs and synthetic opioids in Latin America and the Caribbean”. This report has provided information on how organized criminal groups have used social media platforms, open forums and darknet markets for all phases of trafficking, from acquiring the precursors needed to manufacture synthetic drugs to selling the final products and monetizing revenues mainly through cryptocurrencies.

618. During 2022 and 2023, UNODC supported Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru in addressing the whole cycle of drug trafficking investigation in cyberspace, from the initial phases of a case to the trial. In this regard, 14 training courses were delivered focusing on legal aspects of the implementation of investigative techniques in cyberspace, challenges from the theory of the case to trial, blockchain, cryptocurrencies, the darknet, and forensic analysis in all its phases, with practical exercises and live demonstrations.

619. In January and April 2023, UNODC facilitated the exchange of best practices on asset forfeiture between Bolivian prosecutors, counter-narcotics police and officials of seized assets (Directorate for the Registry, Control and Administration of Seized Assets) and the Colombian Police and Prosecutor’s Office. In August 2023, 40 officers of the Special Force against Drug Trafficking and the Regional Centre for Anti-Narcotics Intelligence, based in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, participated in an international course on investigation and financial analysis. The training was conducted by the Federal Police of Brazil and strengthened participants’ skills in the use of financial analysis techniques and technologies in the fight against organized crime related to drug trafficking.

620. UNODC promoted a bilateral meeting between prosecutors from Argentina and Bolivia (Plurinational State of) in May 2023. The meeting was aimed at facilitating interaction among border prosecutors and making progress in the formation of joint investigation teams. This activity was a

continuation of the border visit made by UNODC to the city of Yacuiba, Plurinational State of Bolivia, in 2022.

621. On 13 December 2022, the Centre of Excellence of Brazil, jointly with the Integrated Illicit Crop Monitoring System of Colombia, published the study entitled “Dynamics of the illicit drug market in Brazil: comparative analysis of the prices of cannabis herb, cocaine and other drugs” in four States in Brazil. The study found that risks associated with each stage of the process, such as conflicts in the territory, customs controls and police action, could contribute to variations in drug prices. The study also found that disputes between different organized criminal groups, as well as the hegemony of an organization, could also influence price variation. For example, it was found that the price of cocaine base in Brazil increased as the product was transported further from the drug-producing countries.

622. In December 2022, Argentina hosted the forty-sixth plenary meeting of the Financial Action Task Force of Latin America, which supports countries in strengthening measures to tackle money-laundering and terrorist financing. The Task Force’s member States are Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. During the meeting, the mutual evaluation report on Ecuador was approved. Among the key findings, the report highlighted that, considering the country’s risk profile, although the work of the Economic and Financial Analysis Unit was outstanding, the number of disseminated financial intelligence reports was not appropriate given the seriousness of the threats identified, such as drug trafficking and smuggling. The plenary also approved the “Seventh enhanced follow-up report and second technical compliance re-rating report of Colombia”. The report recognizes the important progress being made by the country in addressing the compliance deficiencies identified in its 2018 mutual evaluation report. The country has been re-rated from partially compliant to largely compliant for two recommendations on customer due diligence.

623. The UNODC-INTERPOL-WCO Passenger and Cargo Border Team units made record seizures of precursor chemicals in South America. As a result of the coordinated work between Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Chile, 690 tons of chemical precursors intended for the production of cocaine were seized in November 2022 in 41 abandoned containers. That was the largest seizure of chemical precursors by a Passenger and Cargo Border Team unit since the programme’s inception in 2005 and constitutes approximately 80 per cent of the total chemical precursor seizures by the Passenger and Cargo Border Team for the entire year (over 830 tons).

624. In 2023, the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies (COPOLAD III) continued to support regional and international cooperation in drug control matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. Activities included a workshop for the exchange of information and intelligence and the improvement of chemical management and disposal systems, held in Quito in April 2023; a seminar on drugs, vulnerabilities and urban territories, held in Fortaleza, Brazil, in April 2023; a meeting organized by EMCDDA on the analytical capacity of national early warning systems and national drug observatories, including updates and new perspectives, held in Santiago in April 2023; and the workshop “Road maps for quality care, social inclusion and the fight against drug use stigma”, held in Montevideo in June 2023.

625. In December 2022, Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Uruguay participated in the Board’s Operation Knockout and exchanged intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical carisoprodol, 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through the international post, express mail, courier services and related modalities.

626. In April 2023, the GRIDS Programme held capacity-building training for 32 enforcement officers from police, customs and postal security in Uruguay, followed by training for 26 Paraguayan officials. Both events covered the safe identification and interdiction of dangerous substances. Participants also received instruction on IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools to improve cross-border intelligence-sharing.

627. In May 2023, the GRIDS Programme delivered two training courses in Brazil for 39 law enforcement and regulatory officers. Participants received instruction on the appropriate utilization of INCB operational tools and targeting platforms, IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition, to aid in intelligence exchange and investigation efforts.

628. In May 2023, the GRIDS Programme delivered an awareness-raising and capacity-building workshop on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids and related chemicals for 25 Peruvian front-line officers in Lima. The training emphasized capacity-building to enhance communications by authorities in Peru concerning safe handling and interdiction approaches for dangerous substances.

629. In September 2023, the GRIDS Programme organized the sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, in Vienna.

The event gathered law and regulatory enforcement focal points and forensic laboratory, chemical and toxicology experts, including from Argentina and Chile, to assess the latest intelligence on dangerous substances with no known legitimate use. Several participating Governments also conducted bilateral and multilateral case meetings to enhance cooperation across borders.

630. Also in September 2023, the GRIDS Programme convened the third international expert group meeting on expanding INCB lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate use and novel approaches for their identification in falsified or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals in Vienna. The event brought together representatives from Governments and international organizations, including from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay. Special attention was given to the efforts and outcomes of INCB Operation Knockout to stop trafficking of new psychoactive substances used to facilitate sexual assault.

631. A total of 338 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of all 12 countries in South America, namely, Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. There are now five e-modules developed by INCB Learning, which cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. E-modules are available upon registration through INCB Learning to officials of competent national authorities at no cost.

632. UNODC provided training on the safe handling and disposal of seized drugs and precursor chemicals for authorities in Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru. Though the Regional Programme for the Secure Management and Disposal of Seized Drugs and Chemical Precursors (STAND), UNODC also delivered national and regional training on the control and inspection of precursor users and promoted information exchange at the subregional level to identify emerging trends and *modi operandi* of precursor diversion.

### 3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

633. The three international drug control treaties require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor

the licit activity of internationally controlled substances and assess the level of availability of these substances for licit medical and scientific purposes.

634. In South America, as in other regions, it is difficult to establish adequate levels of opioid analgesics without the reliable measurement of medical needs related to palliative care and other health conditions. According to data reported to the Board by Member States, the consumption of opioid analgesics in South America, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants, has almost tripled in the last 20 years, from 6,239 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2002 to 16,824 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2021. In 2021, Chile was the country reporting the highest consumption (2,224 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), followed by Colombia (1,780 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Argentina (1,672 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Uruguay (962 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Brazil (704 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Peru (397 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Paraguay (392 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Ecuador (302 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and Suriname (230 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>). The remaining countries reported S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> below 200: the Plurinational State of Bolivia reported 173 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, while the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Guyana reported the lowest consumption in the region, with 25 and 0 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, respectively. Among the various opioids, fentanyl was the most consumed in 2021 (14,456 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), followed by morphine (1,009 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), hydrocodone (981 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and oxycodone (193 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>). The availability levels of narcotic drugs, excluding those listed in Schedule III of the 1961 Convention as amended, expressed in S-DDD, are calculated by dividing annual availability by 365 days. The result obtained is divided by the population, in millions (S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), of the country or territory during the year in question, and then by the defined daily dose.

635. In recent years, countries in South America have demonstrated varying levels of commitment to submitting their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances as required by the 1971 Convention. While there have been years with full compliance or near full compliance, some years have seen a slight decline in the number of submissions. The region continues to strive for consistent reporting from all its members. Determining the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in South America poses challenges because only between half and three quarters of the countries in the region have provided consumption data on any psychotropic substance over the past five years. Efforts to determine availability are also hampered by the significant proportion of countries in the region failing to regularly provide their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances.

636. **The Board recalls that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in some countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to**

**internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. The Board recognizes the efforts of countries in the region to increase availability in their territories, as evidenced by their increased consumption, and encourages further measures, with special attention to availability in non-urban areas and for vulnerable populations.**

637. With regard to precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants in the context of resolution 49/3 of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means. In the last five years, all countries in South America except Paraguay provided at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, ephedrine preparations, pseudoephedrine or pseudoephedrine preparations to the Board and have regularly updated their estimates for those substances, which contributes to preventing their oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes. Suriname provided annual legitimate requirements to the Board for the first time in the last five years in 2019.

#### 4. National legislation, policy and action

638. On 13 December 2022, Ministry of Security of Argentina approved new “Intervention Guidelines for Police and Security Forces in situations involving people with mental health crises and/or problematic consumption in public space” through resolution No. 843/2022. According to the guidelines, the ultimate goal of an intervention is risk reduction until the arrival of health services, preserving the safety of the people involved and the security forces on the ground, facilitating access to health and social services.

639. On 8 November 2022, through resolution No. 760/2022, the Ministry of Security of Argentina created the national precursor chemicals observatory to support the Implementation Authority of the National Registry of Chemical Precursors, created by Law No. 26.045. The observatory will centralize, process, systematize, analyse and monitor available information on precursor chemicals, with the goal of strengthening the State’s capacity to prevent and investigate illicit trafficking in precursor chemicals by strengthening the linkages between the various

governmental agencies as well as with private sector entities involved in the control of the use of precursor chemicals.

640. In 2023, UNODC launched a programme to counter synthetic drugs and the diversion of chemical precursors in Argentina. The programme focuses on strengthening interdiction of illicit drugs, with an emphasis on synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances, including synthetic opioids, and also focuses on the control of chemical substances, criminal justice responses to drug trafficking on the Internet, and criminal justice responses to corruption associated with drug trafficking. The programme is being implemented in three provinces of Argentina: the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires Province and Santa Fe Province. UNODC also supported Argentina in the drafting of a code of good conduct for chemical precursors operators, which constitutes a useful tool for promoting the joint control of chemical precursors in the public and the private sectors. The code highlights the importance of consensus between both sectors with respect to good practices in the use of chemical precursors to prevent their diversion to illicit markets.

641. Between March and July 2023, UNODC conducted several technical workshops and training sessions to increase the capacity of police officers, prosecutors and judges at the national and subnational levels in Argentina in the following areas: (a) identifying illicit mechanisms for obtaining chemical substances and precursors by organized crime; (b) the strategic criminal investigation and prosecution of drug trafficking cases and associated corruption; (c) the production of narcotic drugs (including synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances) and the chemical substances and precursors used for their illicit manufacture; (d) the introduction to synthetic drugs, synthetic opioids and chemical substances in the illicit production of drugs; and (e) the inspection and safe handling, transportation and temporary storage of chemicals and precursors.

642. On 18 April 2023 an Early Warning System for New Psychoactive Substances was created by joint resolution No. 1/2023 of the Argentine Ministry of Security, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation and the Secretariat for Comprehensive Drug Policies (SEDRONAR). The Early Warning System collects, produces, systematizes and communicates reliable information on new psychoactive substances, emerging drugs and new modalities of consumption and commercialization in Argentine territory, in order to prevent and reduce possible negative effects on people and for public health, on the basis of early detection, risk assessment, communication and the development of timely responses.

643. On 30 December 2022, the Plurinational State of Bolivia approved the National Plan for Drug Demand Reduction for the period 2023–2025 through ministerial resolution No. 0765. The Plan has a community and public health focus, giving special attention to vulnerable populations. It includes a plan of action along the following lines: prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, reintegration and multisectoral coordination. The institutional actors that will be involved in the implementation of the Plan are the Ministry of Health and Sports, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Government, the autonomous departmental governments and the autonomous municipal governments.

644. On 29 August 2023, the Minister of Interior of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and UNODC signed an agreement for a project entitled “Support in the fight against corruption in the Special Force to Fight Drug Trafficking (FELCN)”. The project will strengthen good governance by developing risk management, promoting ethics and integrity and strengthening the capacities of the counter-narcotics police.

645. In Brazil, SENAD has been restructured by decree No. 11.348, of 1 January 2023. The decree restores the institution’s mandate as related to drug demand and prevention and creates a General Coordination of Special Projects on Drugs and Racial Justice. SENAD is divided into three directorates: prevention and social reintegration; research, evaluation and information management; and asset management and justice. On 6 April 2023, SENAD restructured the National Council for Drug Policy through presidential decree No. 11.480. The main changes refer to the establishment of social participation, with an equal composition between representatives of the Federal Government and civil society, and the introduction of an electoral process. SENAD plans to carry out its activities through five cross-cutting strategic pillars, with a special focus on vulnerable groups: (a) the national strategy for access to rights for women in drug policy; (b) the strategy for mitigation and reparation of the impacts of drug trafficking on indigenous populations and ethnoterritories; (c) the national strategy for racial justice in drug policy; (d) the strategy for attention to children and adolescents in drug policy; and (e) the inter-institutional articulation strategy for homeless people in drug policy. The first two strategies targeting women and Indigenous Peoples have been launched in 2023 and are under implementation.

646. The Early Warning System on Drugs of Brazil, which aims to rapidly identify the emergence of new psychoactive substances through cooperation between different Brazilian institutions, published three reports in 2022 that presented data and analysis on new psychoactive substances. In November 2022, it published its third thematic bulletin on

the diagnosis of forensic chemistry and toxicology laboratories of scientific policies in Brazil. The report contained recommendations, including to establish a minimum number of experts needed according to the volume and level of demand for analysis in each laboratory, to provide continuous training for the experts and to establish parameters for prioritizing equipment purchases. In 2023, the Early Warning System on Drugs published one report on fentanyl and one on synthetic cannabinoids. The report on fentanyl alerts the public to the global threat posed by the substance and reports modalities of intoxication observed in Brazil, as victims have unknowingly ingested fentanyl-laced synthetic cannabinoids and LSD. The report contains recommendations that naloxone be made available for emergency services and that monitoring of the situation be strengthened. With respect to synthetic cannabinoids, the report shows an increase in seizures and cases of intoxication, especially in the south-eastern states of Brazil and recommends further monitoring by the institutions involved.

647. In September 2023, Colombia launched its National Drugs Policy for the period 2023–2033. In preparing the policy, 25 territorial consultations were conducted so that the policy would include a community perspective. The policy document contains a diagnosis of the drug problem in Colombia, including details on the relation between the National Drugs Policy and the peace agreement with FARC-EP. Furthermore, one of the policy’s objectives is to establish a regulatory framework for the adult use of cannabis with a focus on human rights, public health, social and environmental justice.

648. **The Board wishes to draw the attention of all Governments to the fact that measures permitting the non-medical use of cannabis are contrary to the provisions of the international drug control conventions, specifically article 4, paragraph (c), and article 36 of the 1961 Convention as amended, and article 3, paragraph 1 (a), of the 1988 Convention.**

649. On 18 May 2023, Ecuador launched three new security strategies: the Emerging Strategy to Prevent and Contain Criminal Violence 2023–2024, the National Strategy against Organized Crime 2023–2030 and the Specific Strategy against International Trafficking in Scheduled Substances Subject to Control 2023–2030. The latter serves as an operational instrument of national policy to counter drug trafficking in a strategic and coordinated manner within the different public security mechanisms. This strategy seeks not only to reduce the supply of drugs but also to strengthen institutional processes of intelligence, investigation and multimodal interdiction, improve international cooperation and fight corruption, money-laundering and organized crime.

650. On 26 June 2023, the Government of Uruguay announced a national plan for mental health and addictions. The estimated budget for the plan, which will start implementation on 1 January 2024, was the equivalent of \$20 million. The plan has two pillars: on prevention and promotion; and on treatment, inclusion and rehabilitation. The first pillar, on prevention, incorporates the Integral Prevention Plan for the period 2021–2025 (“Uruguay previene”), focusing on social inclusion and preventing use among adolescents and youth. The second pillar is the expansion of mental health and drug treatment services of the National Integrated Health System, including the provision of psychotherapy and the creation of new drug addiction treatment centres.

651. Regarding the control of precursor chemicals, the Plurinational State of Bolivia approved two supreme decrees on 12 April 2023 to strengthen precursor control within the country and along its borders. Decree No. 4910 strengthens mechanisms for the regulation, control, monitoring and inspection of the trade in gasoline and diesel. Decree No. 4911 improves the administrative work of the General Direction of Controlled Substances, establishes the requirements and procedure for licit activities involving controlled chemical substances and strengthens mechanisms of monitoring. The Government has also prepared draft legislation to modify law No. 913, including in its list V eight new substances to be controlled as precursor chemicals: sodium permanganate, sodium metabisulfite, sodium bisulfite, jet fuel, ethyl acetate, butyl acetate, isopropyl alcohol and calcium chloride. This is in addition to the 42 other precursor chemicals already under control in the country. The draft legislation is currently being examined by the country’s Plurinational Legislative Assembly.

## 5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

652. Coca bush, cocaine and cannabis continue to be the main controlled crops and substances to be illicitly cultivated, produced or manufactured and trafficked in and from South America. Coca leaves are illicitly cultivated mostly in Colombia and Peru, and to some extent in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, while cannabis is illicitly grown in several countries in the region, including Brazil, Chile and Paraguay. The diversification of some traditional drug trafficking routes and modalities has been observed, including in the Amazon region, which may be linked to recent restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

653. In June 2023, Peru reported a record level of 95,008 ha of illicit coca bush cultivation in 2022, an 18 per cent increase from 2021 and which took place most notably in

the Peruvian Amazon. The most significant increase in illicit cultivation from 2021 to 2022 occurred in the departments of Ucayali (from 10,151 ha to 14,531 ha), Loreto (from 10,348 ha to 13,844 ha) Cusco (from 13,642 ha to 16,009 ha) and Junín (from 6,701 ha to 8,063 ha). The valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro rivers continued to account for the largest share of the illicit cultivation in 2022: 37.6 per cent. From another perspective, 19 per cent (18,076 ha) of the total area of cultivation was in territories of Indigenous or original communities and 16 per cent (14,865 ha) in natural protected areas and bordering areas. The country also reported increased levels of crop eradication, reaching 21,628 ha in 2022. Although the area of eradicated crop cultivation is still below the amounts achieved in 2018 and 2019 (25,107 ha and 25,565 ha, respectively), it is well above the amounts reported for 2020 and 2021 (6,237 ha and 5,557 ha, respectively).

654. The Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia reported to the Board that, from 2021 to June 2023, the country implemented 24,961 interdiction operations, resulting in the seizure of 52 tons of cocaine, 515 tons of cannabis herb, 1,643 tons of solid chemicals, 1,753 litres of liquid chemicals and 837 tons of coca leaf, as well as the destruction of 135 crystallization and recycling laboratories and 1,737 factories. The operations have led to the arrest of 8,193 people. The Plurinational State of Bolivia also reported the eradication of 24,537 ha of surplus coca crops from 2021 to July 2023.

655. On 28 February 2023, the Bolivian Minister of Government and UNODC presented the main findings of the report on the validation of information on the destruction of illegal drugs seized in 2022 in the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The projected goal of 80 per cent annual validation has been surpassed, reaching 87 per cent. In 2022, counter-narcotics police seized and destroyed 19.3 tons of cocaine and 11.1 tons of cannabis. UNODC participated in 88.5 per cent of cocaine destruction (17.1 tons), 84 per cent of marijuana destruction (9.4 tons) and final disposal of 17,489 MDMA tablets, 645 grams of MDMA in bulk and 527 doses of LSD.

656. During the reporting period, UNODC released its 2022 coca cultivation survey for the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The document reported a decrease of 2 per cent in the area under illicit cultivation in the country, from 30,500 ha in 2021 to 29,900 ha in 2022. Out of the total area cultivated, 61 per cent was concentrated in the Los Yungas de La Paz region; 38 per cent in Cochabamba; and 1 per cent in Norte de La Paz. Furthermore, UNODC also reported seizures of 331 tons of coca leaves in the Plurinational State of Bolivia for 2022, a 12 per cent increase in relation to 2021. The report estimated a potential production of coca

leaves of between 44,400 and 55,700 tons, with an estimated value between \$229 million and \$279 million. Furthermore, coca paste seizures decreased 15 per cent from the previous year, to 10.13 tons in 2022, while cocaine seizures increased 31 per cent to 10.21 tons.

657. In September 2023, UNODC in cooperation with the Government of Colombia published its annual report on coca cultivation. For a second consecutive year, Colombia saw a record high in the area of illicit coca cultivation, with an expansion by 13 per cent to 230,000 ha (in parallel with a decline of 33 per cent in the areas eradicated, falling to 69,000 ha) and an increase of 24 per cent in the potential quantity of cocaine manufactured, reaching 1,738 tons, which is the highest level for that metric ever reported for the country. The area of illicit cultivation rose, compared with 2021, by 21.5 per cent in national natural parks, 18 per cent in Indigenous protected territories, 4 per cent in land of black communities and 2 per cent in forest reserves. In parallel, between 2021 and 2022, the number of dismantled laboratories fell by 18 per cent to 4,707. Cocaine seizures and manual eradication have also decreased since 2021, by 1.5 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively.

658. The largest increases in the area under coca cultivation in Colombia in 2022 were reported from the Putumayo-Caquetá region (88 per cent), located in the south of the country, close to the border with Ecuador. Of concern was that 50 per cent of the increase is within 10 km of the border. Meanwhile, the report shows an increase in drugs seizures in Ecuador, to 201 tons in 2021, 90 per cent of which was cocaine, from 128 tons in 2020 and 82 tons in 2019. Other border areas with high concentration of illicit coca cultivation include Nariño, at the border with Ecuador, Norte de Santander, at the border with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and, to a lesser extent, Chocó, at the border with Panama.

659. Peru previously worked with UNODC to conduct periodic surveys of the area of illicit crop cultivation and area of illicit crop eradication. The country issued joint crop monitoring reports with UNODC from 2002 to 2018, and from 2019 to 2022 the country has produced data on illicit crops independently. UNODC is currently working with the Government of Peru and technical experts with a view to issuing a joint report in 2024 on the basis of data for 2023.

**660. The Board reiterates its recommendation that Peru resumes the studies and monitoring reports on territories affected by illicit crops that are prepared in cooperation with and fully certified by UNODC. This, in addition to ensuring support for the efforts of the Government of Peru in the fight against drug trafficking, will allow adequate comparative monitoring among the three Andean countries most affected by illicit crops. Moreover, reports certified by**

**UNODC will introduce stronger, evidence-based data to enable the development of more effective crop reduction strategies. In this connection, the Board notes with appreciation the surveys undertaken by Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Colombia with UNODC support.**

661. While cannabis herb seizures decreased in the region in 2021, largely due to decreases in Brazil and Paraguay, according to the OAS/CICAD *Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2022*, transnational cannabis trafficking in South and Central America is on the rise. This trend could reflect increased trafficking of cannabis from regional producers, more effective interdiction by the security forces and/or a greater focus by law enforcement agencies on cannabis. CICAD highlighted that several countries reported an increased prevalence of a more potent strain of cannabis originating in Colombia called “creepy”. The presence of this strain in domestic markets was reported by Chile and Peru to the extent that, in some cases, it displaced the longstanding domination of cannabis from Paraguay. According to the report, Guyana also noted the appearance of “poppy”, another name for “creepy”, from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which became popular in the local market. The presence of “creepy” in other parts of the Caribbean was also reported by the Bahamas.

662. In the annual report of the Drugs Early Warning System of Uruguay, issued in July 2023, the National Drug Board reported the issuance of two alerts in 2022. The first, issued in August 2022, related to “pink cocaine”, “tuci” or “tucibi”, and its dangerous composition which includes the combination of ketamine with different psychoactive substances. In an emblematic case, the Drugs Early Warning System was notified of a drug sample that included ketamine, methamphetamine, MDMA, tramadol and caffeine. “Pink cocaine” was first detected in Uruguay in 2020, and its presence in the country has increased since then. The second alert was issued in November 2022 on the dangers of ingesting pills with an “EA Sport” logo. Based on reports from the Toxicology Information and Support Centre (CIAT), the analysis of the laboratory of the Technical Forensic Institute identified 74 mg of MDA in the pills. MDA is methamphetamine, a psychoactive substance of the phenylethylamine family, derived from amphetamine and is an analogue of MDMA (“ecstasy”), and produces similar effects in the body.

663. In Uruguay, the most seized drug continues to be cannabis, which made up 38.2 per cent of the total of drug seizures in 2022. Cannabis was followed by cocaine base paste (36.1 per cent) and cocaine (16.8 per cent) for that year. Synthetic drugs accounted for the fourth highest amount of seizures, at 3 per cent. Although percentage shares of the total varied throughout the years, this ranking

of most seized drugs by number of seizures has remained constant since 2018. However, the percentage related to cannabis has been decreasing (from 47.5 per cent in 2018), while the percentage of cocaine base paste has been increasing (from 26.6 per cent in 2018). Moreover, the number of seizures of synthetic drugs has had the sharpest increase, from 62 in 2018 to 169 in 2022, followed by cocaine base paste, from 789 in 2018 to 2,056 in 2022. The most seized synthetic drugs in 2022 were MDA, MDMA, methamphetamine, 2C-B-NBOH (25B-NBOH), LSD, “pink cocaine” and ketamine, by number of seizures.

664. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the most seized drug in 2022 was cocaine, at 32.67 tons, followed by cannabis, at 14.54 tons. Most drug seizures took place in the states of Apure, Bolívar, Falcón and Zulia. Of 8,223 operations, the largest number of operations were linked to cannabis herb seizures (6,379), followed by cocaine and derivatives (1,636), ketamine (11), heroin (8), “ecstasy” (8), “poppers” (4), amphetamines and methamphetamines (3), alprazolam (2) and LSD (1). Security forces destroyed 58 crystallization laboratories close to the western border with Colombia, neutralized 45 aircrafts and destroyed 57 illegal air strips. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela also reported the eradication of 40 ha of illicit coca bush cultivation along the border with Colombia in 2022. The main countries of destination for seized drugs were the United States, Spain, Australia, Guinea, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Italy and South Africa, in order of significance. In 2022, the country recovered 341 vehicles, 25 boats, 44 buildings, two aircraft and 437 miscellaneous objects.

665. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reported the implementation of joint counter-narcotics operations with law enforcement officials of France in Caribbean international waters. On 11 December 2022, an operation in Martinique interdicted a vessel containing 1.5 tons of cannabis, leading to the arrest of 11 Venezuelan citizens. On 25 January 2023, another Venezuelan vessel was intercepted in the same area, resulting in the seizure of 324 kg of cannabis and the arrest of 10 Venezuelans and 1 Colombian. On 6 March 2023, this collaboration led to the interception of a vessel 250 miles east of Barbados, with the seizure of 1.8 tons of cocaine and the arrest of 8 Venezuelan citizens.

## 6. Prevention and treatment

666. According to the latest data published by UNODC, cannabis has the highest regional past-year prevalence in South America (3.58 per cent), followed by cocaine (1.62 per cent), amphetamines and prescription stimulants (0.88 per cent), opioids (opiates and prescription opioids) (0.30 per cent), and “ecstasy” (0.24 per cent).

667. Ecuador is implementing a project for the development of a strategy for a comprehensive approach to the socioeconomic phenomenon of drugs and the strengthening of mental health for the period 2022–2025. The following surveys and studies are planned as part of that project: a national survey on drug use and mental health problems (2023–2024); a national survey on drug use and consumption among students of ninth year of basic education and first and third year of baccalaureate (2024); a survey on use and consumption among university students (2024); research in treatment centres (2023–2024); 24 provincial situational diagnoses (2024–2025); and research on violence associated with drug use or sales (2024). The most recent official national surveys of drug use among the general population date from 2016, those surveys on use among people in higher education date from 2015, and 2014 for those in secondary education. Official national surveys on treatment issues will be carried out for the first time in the country. The Ministry of Public Health of Ecuador registered 70,062 visits for mental and behavioural disorders due to the consumption of psychoactive substances classified according to ICD10 (F10–F19) during 2022. **The Board welcomes the efforts of Ecuador in the implementation of surveys and data collection in the area of mental health, drug use and treatment.**

668. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reported preliminary results of its national drug survey entitled “Study of perception, risk, consumption and ease of access to drugs 2022”. The survey was conducted in 2022 and interviewed 12,160 persons between 12 and 65 years old. Cannabis herb was the most consumed controlled substance among the population, with a past-year prevalence of 1.41 per cent, followed by cocaine (0.82 per cent) and “crack” cocaine (0.72 per cent). Similarly, the statistical bulletin from the National Public System for Addiction Attention and Treatment reported that out of the 2,382 persons who received treatment for drug dependence in 2022, 89.3 per cent consumed cannabis herb, 1.6 per cent consumed “crack” cocaine, and 0.6 per cent consumed cocaine.

669. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reported 9,631 drug prevention activities in the first half of 2023, providing support to 1,094,325 beneficiaries. The country also implemented the “Safe school” programme in primary and secondary level educational centres, in order to expose and address, from a preventive and awareness-raising approach, the risks of drug use and micro-trafficking. This initiative has been relaunched together with the “School for parents” programme, based on co-responsibility in the care and supervision of their children in the face of the risks of drug use and crime.

670. In 2023, UNODC supported the national seminar on prevention research held by SENAD in Brazil, at which



was launched the virtual platform of the project to support the implementation of the national system for prevention of alcohol and other drug use. The event aimed to promote prevention strategies in Brazil and had the participation of government representatives as well as researchers in the prevention area. The project is a partnership between SENAD, UNDP and UNODC. It seeks to integrate a comprehensive set of interventions and evidence-based strategies to systematize, at the national, state, and municipal levels, access to information, initiatives in prevention and management of policies, actions and to strengthen programmes to prevent the use of alcohol and other drugs.

671. In July 2023, Chile launched the first activities for the establishment of a social innovation laboratory to tackle the issue of drug use among minors under the custody of the State. The initiative is supported by COPOLAD programme and the Agirre Lehendakaria Centre, a social innovation laboratory associated with the University of the Basque Country. Authorities and institutions such as the Ministry of Health, the National Specialized Protection Service for Children and Adolescents and UNICEF participated in the initiative, together with relevant community groups.

672. **The Board wishes to encourage Member States to improve the collection of data on drug use patterns and, whenever possible, to implement periodic drug use surveys.**

## D. Asia

### East and South-East Asia

The illicit cultivation of opium poppy and manufacture of methamphetamine are among the most significant drug challenges facing East and South-East Asia.

The prevalence of drug use in East and South-East Asia has remained significant, with cannabis being the most used drug, followed by methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type substances.

Several countries and territories in the region have introduced regulatory changes related to cannabis.

Malaysia formally removed mandatory death sentences and life imprisonment for drug-related offences.

Illicit manufacture of and trafficking in ketamine, a substance not under international control, continues to be an issue of concern in the region. Seizures of ketamine nearly tripled in 2022 compared with 2021, and there has been a proliferation of clandestine laboratories for the illicit manufacture of the substance.

### 1. Major developments

673. The epicentre for the illicit production of opium and manufacture of methamphetamine and, increasingly, of ketamine in the region remains Shan State in Myanmar, owing to continued political instability in the country. The illicit cultivation of opium poppy and trafficking in opium is also centred in Shan State. Between 2021 and 2022, the cultivation of opium poppy in the country rose by 33 per cent and the production of opium by 88 per cent. Approximately 790 tons of opium were estimated to have been produced in 2022 in Myanmar.

674. Seizures of methamphetamine in Myanmar totalled 38.9 tons in 2022, up 22 per cent from the year before. Countries in the region as well as in neighbouring regions of South Asia and Oceania report that most seized methamphetamine originates in Myanmar. As is the case with opium, methamphetamine is trafficked across East and South-East Asia and continues to pose a major challenge for countries in the region.

675. In June 2023, Malaysia amended part of its penal code and drug control legislation formally removing mandatory death sentences for various criminal offences, including drug-related offences. Transitional measures were also introduced to allow the country's courts to review existing death penalty sentences and possibly commute them to life imprisonment.

676. The prevalence of drug use in East and South-East Asia has remained significant. The most used drug in 2021 was cannabis. Methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type substances, which are heavily trafficked in the region, were the second most used group of substances. There is also an established market for the non-medical use of ketamine in the region.

677. Several countries and territories in the region have introduced regulatory changes related to the scheduling and use of cannabis. Hong Kong, China, included CBD under the strictest levels of control in the territory, with trafficking in and the illicit manufacture, possession and consumption of CBD being liable to severe prison sentences, including life imprisonment, and high monetary fines. The Lao People's Democratic Republic has regulated the cultivation and use

of cannabis for medical purposes, with a licensing scheme for medical products containing CBD with not more than 1 per cent THC by weight or 0.2 per cent for raw and processed products, and for the registered sale of cosmetics, beverages and aromatic oils containing CBD.

## 2. Regional cooperation

678. Indonesia established an early warning system for synthetic drugs, which currently does not exist anywhere in South-East Asia, and Malaysia and Thailand are in the process of establishing a similar system. National-level consultative dialogues were held in each country, with the support of UNODC, from December 2022 through March 2023. These dialogues brought together experts from the forensic, health, law enforcement, regulatory and academic sectors to discuss the necessary initial steps for creating early warning systems for synthetic drugs in their respective countries. In September 2023, UNODC organized a national consultative dialogue on early warning systems with the Philippines, which is also in the process of establishing such a system.

679. In September 2023, ministers and senior officials from Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam and from UNODC gathered in Beijing for the 14th Ministerial Meeting of the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control. This year's Ministerial Meeting endorsed the Beijing Declaration, which recognizes the extent of the drug challenges in the Mekong area and supported a regional action plan outlining practical actions that countries and the United Nations would take to address the drug problem. The Ministerial Meeting was followed by a meeting of its Senior Officials Committee. The senior officials agreed on a new plan of action that envisages greater focus on strengthening prevention and treatment initiatives, enhancing law enforcement cooperation, strengthening international judicial cooperation and promoting sustainable alternative development programmes.

680. To respond to the ongoing challenges and the evolution of the regional synthetic drug market, the UNODC SMART programme held a regional meeting in August 2023 that gathered law enforcement, public health and drug forensics experts from member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and East Asia, including China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, as well as the WCO Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Asia and the Pacific. Participants shared the latest developments and discussed strategies to address the drug situation in the region. The Programme will provide science-led capacity-building in such areas as drug detection, analysis, early warning and chemical disposal, as well as enable more

rapid communication on emerging global and regional drug-related threats.

681. In July 2023, law enforcement and regulatory authorities of Malaysia and the Philippines participated in bilateral meetings with UNODC to coordinate improvements in precursor control, share information and discuss methods to disrupt the trafficking of precursor chemicals used for the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs. While authorities in the region have pointed to the growing use of non-controlled chemicals in illicit drug production, it was noted that the current understanding of many of these substances remains limited. The discussions with Malaysia focused on sharing information regarding regulatory updates and the evolution of substances being leveraged by organized criminal groups in the region together with the latest trafficking trends, while the discussions with the Philippines focused primarily on domestic precursor control challenges relating to inter-agency coordination as well as the growing importance of strengthening both regional and inter-agency collaboration.

682. In July 2023, Myanmar hosted the 44th ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Drug Matters, which also included participants from China, India, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation as well as UNODC. The Meeting's five working groups on preventive education, treatment and rehabilitation, law enforcement, research and alternative development also met. The meetings focused on the preparation of an ASEAN ministerial meeting on drugs and other international forums on drug policy to be held in the future.

683. A total of 168 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 15 countries in East and South-East Asia, namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. INCB Learning has developed five e-learning modules that cover regulatory and policy issues related to narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursor chemicals, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. The modules are available at no cost to officials of competent national authorities by contacting INCB Learning.

684. During the reporting period, the INCB GRIDS Programme engaged in an extensive number of workshops, seminars and other capacity-building activities for countries in East and South-East Asia in order to address the proliferation of and trafficking in new psychoactive substances and other non-controlled substances.

685. From 7 to 11 November 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme carried out a second twinning mission in South-East Asia for 15 front-line officers from customs and regulatory agencies in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam. The event developed networking, communication and practical skills for international operational cooperation in conjunction with capacity-building workshops to increase use of the Board's IONICS secure communication platform and the INCB GRIDS Programme. Officers also received practical training from the INCB GRIDS Regional Technical Officer for East and South-East Asia and the Pacific in opioids identification, safe handling and interdiction approaches using personal protective equipment and presumptive field testing for opioids.

686. On 15 and 16 November 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized a training event to raise awareness and develop communication capacity utilizing INCB IONICS and INCB GRIDS targeting tools in Vung Tau, Viet Nam, for 19 officers from the Counter-Narcotics Police Department and the Anti-smuggling and Investigations Customs Department.

687. The INCB GRIDS Programme conducted an interregional workshop on public-private partnerships between Governments and logistics companies operating in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries from 28 to 30 November 2022. The workshop was held in Istanbul, Türkiye, and brought together 42 participants; it built upon the success of previous meetings held by INCB since 2018 related to the prevention and misuse of logistics services for trafficking in dangerous substances and promoting cooperation between Governments and logistics companies.

688. On 6 and 7 December 2022, two case meetings between the Narcotics Control Department of Japan and the Counter-Narcotics Police Department and General Department of Viet Nam Customs were organized by the INCB GRIDS Programme to discuss cases related to trafficking in ketamine, new psychoactive substances and synthetic opioids following the arrest of traffickers from Viet Nam in Japan.

689. From December 2022 to January 2023, China, Indonesia, Japan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam participated in the Board's Operation Knockout. The operation focused on the exchange of intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical carisoprodol, 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through the international post, express mail, courier services and related modalities.

690. The INCB GRIDS Programme organized an online stakeholder consultation on voluntary cooperation between Governments and freight forwarding services for the prevention of trafficking in dangerous substances from 21 to 23 February 2023. The event was attended by 44 representatives from 10 Governments, three international organizations and six industry associations, including five participants from China and Singapore. Participants exchanged best practices and shared examples related to the exploitation of legitimate ancillary logistics services and discussed the next steps for promoting voluntary cooperation between Governments and their private sector partners.

691. In March 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme conducted a series of training events in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and neighbouring countries for 85 officers from drug law enforcement and regulatory agencies from each country. The training aimed to enhance reporting and interdiction activities across South-East Asia to address the growing global challenge posed by synthetic drugs using INCB intelligence tools, such as IONICS and INCB GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools. Participants also received practical instruction on opioids identification in the field, safe handling and interdiction approaches using personal protective equipment and presumptive field testing for opioids.

692. In May 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized two train-the-trainer workshops for 30 officers from the Viet Nam Customs School, the People's Police Academy and the Counter-Narcotics Police Department. The training focused on utilization of the INCB GRIDS Programme's IONICS platform and INCB GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools, awareness-raising and safe interdiction approaches for synthetic opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances.

693. On 23 May 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme convened a national expert group meeting in Bangkok on ways for freight forwarders and third-party logistics providers to prevent trafficking in dangerous non-scheduled substances. Stakeholders discussed current regional trafficking trends alongside challenges confronting logistics providers and exchanged promising practices to prevent future exploitation by traffickers. Thirty representatives from government agencies, international organizations and private sector companies participated in the event.

694. On 24 May 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme hosted a training event for 20 law enforcement officers from Thailand. The training focused on enhancing knowledge and skills to identify and safely interdict dangerous substances. Participants also received instruction on the use

of the IONICS platform and INCB GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools to improve cross-border intelligence-sharing.

695. From 12 to 15 June 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized a joint twinning event between the West Africa and the South-East Asia regions in Lagos, Nigeria, for 13 drug law enforcement and regulatory officers from Ghana, Nigeria, Thailand and Viet Nam. The event provided an opportunity to further enhance participants' capacity to use the INCB IONICS platform and the INCB GRIDS Intelligence tools and to develop networks and skills for international operational cooperation related to new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids.

696. On 25 and 26 July 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme hosted a national training event in Da Nang, Viet Nam, for 21 customs officers. This event included awareness-building on opioids, fentanyl substances and new psychoactive substances as well as safe interdiction modules. Additionally, training was conducted on basic targeting and intelligence-gathering using the IONICS and INCB GRIDS Intelligence high-definition platforms to enhance counter-trafficking efforts in the region.

697. On 1 and 2 August 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized a national-level workshop in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, on public-private partnerships for the prevention of trafficking in dangerous substances through express courier, mail and postal services. Participants discussed current trends and challenges that they were facing to protect their areas of operation from being exploited by traffickers. More than 25 representatives from Government agencies, international organizations and the private sector participated in the event.

698. The INCB GRIDS Programme organized the sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 11 to 15 September 2023. The event brought together over 100 officers from over 30 Governments, private sector partners and international and regional organizations, including from China, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

699. The INCB GRIDS Programme convened the third international expert group meeting on expanding INCB lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate use and novel approaches for their identification in falsified or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals, held in Vienna from 18 to 22 September 2023. The event brought together over 40 representatives from over 20 Governments and international organizations, and the private sectors, including from China, Singapore and Thailand. Participants discussed

the latest intelligence on dangerous substances with no known legitimate use, and demonstrated state-of-the-art approaches for the rapid detection of suspicious packaging and falsified and illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals.

700. From 30 October to 3 November 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized two training events for 30 officers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic. These events included modules on awareness and safe interdiction of opioids, fentanyl and new psychoactive substances as well as basic targeting and intelligence training using the INCB IONICS and INCB GRIDS Intelligence high-definition platforms to enhance counter-trafficking in the region.

### 3. Availability of internationally controlled substances (including reporting to the Board)

701. The three international drug control treaties require the States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis and in some cases on a quarterly basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor licit activity involving internationally controlled substances as well as ensure the availability of these substances for licit medical and scientific purposes. Among the countries and territories of East and South-East Asia, reporting performance has generally been fully compliant for the narcotic drugs controlled under the 1961 Single Convention, as amended, and the psychotropic substances controlled under the 1971 Convention, and most countries and territories provided the required reports for the last five years. A few countries have not provided any of the required reports for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the last five years.

**702. The Board encourages the countries and territories of East and South-East Asia that have not provided the reports as required under the international drug control conventions to do so as soon as possible and to take the necessary measures to ensure that their respective competent national authorities have sufficient resources to prepare the reports in a timely manner. In this regard, INCB offers the possibility of training, including through its INCB Learning programme, to support capacity-building in the area of reporting.**

703. East and South-East Asia is among the regions that are of particular concern with regard to ensuring and monitoring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. In particular, on the basis of the reported consumption of narcotic drugs, the region is among those with the lowest availability of the most widely used opioid analgesics.

704. In 2002, East and South-East Asia countries reported a total consumption of opioid analgesics of 1,281 S-DDD per million inhabitants. Twenty years later, in 2021, the region reported consumption at 5,281 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, with a peak of 6,225 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> being reported in 2017. The Republic of Korea reported the highest level (1,976 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) in the region, followed by Japan (892 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Brunei Darussalam (432 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and Singapore (419 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>). The rest of the countries in the region reported consumption below 300 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>. Fentanyl was the dominant opioid consumed (3,738 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), followed by morphine (670 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and oxycodone (600 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>).

705. Determining the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in East and South-East Asia remains challenging because fewer than half of the region's countries and territories have provided the Board with consumption data on any psychotropic substance for the past five years. The Board will continue monitoring the situation in this area and communicating to Governments the importance of furnishing data on psychotropic substances.

**706. The Board stresses its concern that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in many countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.**

707. As regards precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide – in the context of resolution 49/3 of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs – their estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. Among other substances, the estimated annual legitimate requirement is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means.

708. As at 1 November 2023, all countries in the East and South-East Asia region had provided the Board with at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations, and they had regularly updated their estimates for those substances, which contributes to preventing their oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes. Two countries in East and South-East Asia, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam, have provided annual legitimate requirements to the Board for the first time in the last five years.

709. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention. In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board's website.

#### 4. National legislation, policy and action

710. In December 2022, the Lao People's Democratic Republic amended its legislation to permit the cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes and regulations have been established to authorize persons and businesses to engage in those activities. The country also put into place a licensing system for medical products containing CBD with not more than 1 per cent THC by weight or 0.2 per cent for raw and processed products. Additionally, the sale of cosmetics, beverages and aromatic oils that contain CBD and are registered with the Laotian Food and Drug Department is permitted in the country.

711. In January 2023, Hong Kong, China, included CBD in Schedule I of its Dangerous Drugs Ordinance, which places the substance under the strictest levels of control in the territory. According to the Narcotics Division of the Hong Kong, China, Security Bureau, trafficking in and illicit manufacture of CBD and related products are liable to a maximum sentence of life imprisonment and a fine the equivalent of \$640,000. Possession and consumption of CBD is subject to a maximum penalty of seven years in prison and a fine the equivalent of \$125,000.

712. On 26 January 2023, Pre-Trial Chamber I of the International Criminal Court granted the request of the Court's Prosecutor to resume the investigation of alleged crimes against humanity on the territory of the Philippines between 1 November 2011 and 16 March 2019 in the context of the so-called “war on drugs” of the Government of the Philippines. The Government of the Philippines had earlier requested a deferral on the grounds that national authorities were investigating the alleged murders being investigated by the Court. According to the Chamber, the permission to resume the investigation was given because it had concluded that the various domestic initiatives and proceedings relied on by the Philippines did not amount to tangible, concrete and progressive investigative steps being

carried out with a view to conducting criminal proceedings in a way that would sufficiently mirror the Court's investigation as authorized in its decision pursuant to article 15 of the Rome Statute.

**713. The Board reiterates its appeal to Governments to take all measures necessary to prevent the extrajudicial targeting of persons suspected of involvement in drug-related offences. The Board also reiterates in the strongest possible terms that extrajudicial responses to drug-related criminality are in violation of the drug control conventions and fundamental human rights, which require that drug-related crimes be addressed through formal processes adhering to due process of law. Governments are called upon to investigate and prosecute all instances of extrajudicial action purportedly taken in the name of drug control.**

714. In March 2023, the Parliament of Singapore passed the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill 2023, and certain provisions of that law entered into effect in June of that year. Among those provisions are the introducing of more stringent penalties, including caning, for the possession of certain drugs (morphine, diamorphine, opium, cocaine, cannabis, cannabis resin, cannabis mixture and methamphetamine) in quantities above defined weight thresholds. The bill also introduced a new legislative framework that will apply as from 2024 whereby substances will be controlled based on their capacity to produce a psychoactive effect, rather than their specific chemical formula.

715. According to the 2022 annual report of the Central Narcotics Bureau of Singapore, of the 2,826 persons arrested for drug use in 2022, 1,451 had used methamphetamine and 994 had used heroin. A total of 236 persons were arrested for cannabis use, and there were a few dozen arrests related to other drugs. The number of users of methamphetamine was down slightly from the year before, when 1,595 persons had been arrested for use of the drug. Arrests related to heroin use were higher in 2022 in comparison with 2021, when 778 persons had been arrested. Cannabis arrests were up in 2022, from 138 in 2021.

716. In April 2023, the Republic of Korea established a special investigative unit for drug-related crimes comprising 840 officials, including prosecutors, police and customs officials. The unit will investigate any drug-related crimes in the country, with a special focus on Internet-facilitated drug smuggling and distribution.

717. In June 2023, the Abolition of the Mandatory Death Penalty Act 2023 and the Revision of the Sentence of Death and Imprisonment for Natural Life (Temporary

Jurisdiction of the Federal Court) Act 2023 received royal assent in Malaysia and entered into force in the country. The Abolition of the Mandatory Death Penalty Act 2023 amends the country's penal code and drug legislation by removing the mandatory death penalty and life imprisonment for several offences, including drug-related offences. The Revision of the Sentence of Death and Imprisonment for Natural Life (Temporary Jurisdiction of the Federal Court) Act 2023 additionally allows the country's courts to review death and life sentences already imposed, including those for drug-related offences, and instead apply sentences of 20 to 40 years of imprisonment.

**718. The Board notes as a positive development the legislative changes in Malaysia removing the mandatory death penalty and life imprisonment for drug-related offences, and encourages other countries in the region to follow suit.**

**719. While recalling that, according to the international drug control conventions, the determination of penalties applicable to drug-related behaviours remains the exclusive prerogative of States parties, the Board encourages all States that retain the death penalty for drug-related offences to consider abolishing the death penalty for drug-related offences and to commute death sentences that have already been handed down, in view of the relevant international conventions and protocols and relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other United Nations bodies on the application of the death penalty for the category of drug-related offences.**

720. In its reporting of annual estimates for narcotic drugs, Thailand's competent national authority informed the Board of policy measures and tools in the country related to the control of cannabis. Namely, Thailand has introduced a mobile application for notifications about the cultivation of cannabis, and a dedicated website, managed by the Food and Drug Administration. The Ministry of Public Health provides a cannabis use disorder monitoring programme through a digital platform, has developed clinical guidelines for the treatment of cannabis poisoning in the emergency room, collects and monitors data on drug addiction treatment and rehabilitation including cannabis use, and has developed a monitoring and reporting system for cannabis acute poisoning events. The Ministry also leads public awareness campaigns and guidelines on the medical use of cannabis. The Ministry ensures full control and licensing of cannabis cultivation, trade and imports, except in the case of what it defines as "herbal products for medical use by government agencies and for the benefit of clinical studies", which are licensed by the Food and Drug Administration.

721. Earlier, Thailand had also reported that, under the country's legislation, CBD is not considered a controlled substance pursuant to the 1961 Convention as amended or the 1971 Convention, and its use in non-medical and non-scientific industries, such as cosmetics and food, will not be reported to the Board. The Board reiterates that the 1961 Convention as amended limits the cultivation of cannabis, from which CBD is extracted, to medical and scientific purposes. The Board remains in contact with the authorities of Thailand on this matter and continues to monitor relevant developments.

722. China has put into place special measures to ensure the safe trade of non-controlled and internationally controlled precursor chemicals. The country now issues special permits for the export of precursor chemicals to countries it has identified as vulnerable to the illicit manufacture of drugs, in particular, Afghanistan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar.

## 5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

723. The illicit cultivation of opium poppy, illicit production of opium and illicit manufacture of methamphetamine are among the most significant drug challenges facing East and South-East Asia. Trafficking is centred around northern Myanmar, though illicit production and manufacture of these drugs also occurs in other countries across the region. Seizures of these drugs increased substantially from 2021 to 2022, and regions neighbouring East and South-East Asia report seizures of methamphetamine and opium originating in the region.

724. The area of illicit cultivation of opium poppy in Myanmar is estimated to have increased by 33 per cent from 2021 to 2022 for a total area of 41,000 ha, predominately in Shan State. This reverses the trend of a consistent decline in the area under opium poppy cultivation noted in the country since 2014. Opium yields also increased from 2021 to 2022, by 41 per cent, to 19.8 kilograms per hectare. As a result, the estimated production of opium rose by 88 per cent, from 420 tons in 2021 to 790 tons in 2022. Seizures of raw opium and heroin in Myanmar were lower in the period between January and end of October 2022 at 1 ton and 1.2 tons, respectively, which was approximately half the quantity seized the year before.<sup>152</sup>

<sup>152</sup>UNODC, Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific, *Myanmar Opium Survey 2022: Cultivation, Production and Implications* (Bangkok, 2023).

725. As with opium poppy, Shan State in Myanmar continues to be the main source of illicitly manufactured methamphetamine trafficked across East and South-East Asia as well as Southern Asia and Oceania. Approximately 38.9 tons of the substance was seized in 2022 in Myanmar, which was up 22 per cent from the previous year. Approximately 58.4 tons of methamphetamine were seized in Thailand, a drop of 22 per cent from the previous year. The seizures were mostly in areas along the border with Myanmar. The illicit manufacture of methamphetamine, particularly in Indonesia, has also expanded, with the number of laboratories detected in the country increasing from 1 in 2021 to 22 in 2022. Overall seizures of methamphetamine tablets in East and South-East Asia were down slightly in 2022, at approximately 900 million from approximately 1 billion in 2021. Similarly, seizures of crystal methamphetamine in the region stood at approximately 65 tons in 2022, a drop from approximately 79 tons in 2021.<sup>153</sup>

726. According to information published by the Office of the National Narcotics Control Commission of China in June 2023, most drugs used in the country originated outside the country; illicit domestically produced drugs account for a small proportion of what is trafficked in the country. In 2022, a total of 11.7 tons of drugs – mainly heroin, methamphetamine and ketamine – were seized, which represented a decrease of 32 per cent from the previous year. Nearly all the heroin seized (1.29 tons) originated in northern Myanmar, with only a few dozen kilograms trafficked from other regions. Similarly, nearly all of the methamphetamine seized (9.1 tons) originated in northern Myanmar. According to Chinese authorities, the majority of cannabis seized in 2022 (200.6 kg) originated in North America. The Office of National Narcotics Control Commission of China further stated that the diversion of precursor chemicals overall was on the decline, with 660.2 tons seized in 2022, representing a decrease of nearly 50 per cent from 2021.

727. In March 2023, Japan made its second-largest single drug seizure ever in the port of Tokyo, confiscating over 700 kg of methamphetamine powder from a container ship in a joint operation with Dubai Customs of the United Arab Emirates.

728. Seizures of ketamine, a substance not under international control, rose drastically in 2022, with nearly 27 tons of the substance having been seized across the region; this was up sharply from the approximately 10 tons seized in 2021. The huge increase was driven by seizures in Cambodia of approximately 13.5 tons, which accounted for 60 per cent

<sup>153</sup>UNODC, Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific, *Synthetic Drugs in East and South-East Asia: Latest Developments and Challenges* (Bangkok, 2023), map 2.

of all ketamine seizures in South-East Asia. According to UNODC, the proliferation of clandestine labs in the country enables the illicit manufacturing of ketamine on an industrial scale. This coincided with the Cambodian authorities having seized in 2022 over 500 tons of various precursor and pre-precursor chemicals used for the illicit manufacture of ketamine. Beyond Cambodia, seizures of ketamine are also on the rise in Shan State, Myanmar, where the substance is increasingly being illicitly manufactured. Nearly 2.4 tons were seized in 2022, more than three times the 760 kg seized in 2021. Similarly, illicit production of ketamine is also on the rise in Malaysia, with authorities reporting the dismantling of five clandestine ketamine labs and seizures of 2.9 tons of the substance in 2022, up from approximately 475 kg the year before.<sup>154</sup>

## 6. Prevention and treatment

729. Many countries in the region continue to lack mechanisms for gathering information on the scope and nature of drug use and treatment demand. **The Board encourages the countries of the region to prioritize the collection of data on drug use trends and treatment demand to inform the development of evidence-based approaches in the area of prevention and treatment and encourages bilateral partners and regional and international organizations to provide support to that end.**

730. The prevalence of drug use in East and South-East Asia has remained significant according to data presented in the UNODC *World Drug Report 2023*. Across multiple drug categories, the annual prevalence of drug use in the region was largely unchanged from 2020 to 2021. The most used drug in 2021 was cannabis, with 1.21 per cent of the population aged 15–64 using the drug, or approximately 19.2 million people. Methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type substances were the second most used group of substances, with a prevalence rate of 0.61 per cent, or 9.8 million people. The prevalence rate for the use of other drug categories stood at or below 0.23 per cent.<sup>155</sup>

731. According to the official summary of the recently published 2019 Drug Survey in the Philippines, the Government’s policies in reducing drug use have been successful and a trend reversal has been observed by the Government in this respect. The summary underscores that the annual user prevalence rate for 2019 in the Philippines was 2.05 per cent, notably lower than the 2018 global estimate of 5.3 per cent published in the UNODC *World Drug*

*Report 2020*. The most used drugs in the Philippines are cannabis and methamphetamine.

732. The 2022 Health and Lifestyle Survey, conducted by the Singapore Institute for Mental Health, found that the overall prevalence of drug use in the last 12 months among respondents stood at 0.7 per cent. Furthermore, 41.8 per cent of respondents that had consumed drugs did so before the age of 18, with a mean age of onset of 15.9 years old.

733. According to the Office of the National Narcotics Control Commission of China, its drug prevention education efforts, including the “Care for drug users” campaign, resulted in a further decline of 24.3 per cent of registered people who use drugs in the country, from 1.49 million people in 2021 to 1.12 million by the end of 2022. Among those registered in 2022, 588,000 were using methamphetamine, 416,000 were using heroin and 32,000 were using ketamine.

## South Asia

There are increasing signs that South Asia is being targeted by traffickers smuggling methamphetamine manufactured in Afghanistan into markets in Europe and Oceania.

Investigations in the region have shown that proceeds of drug trafficking are being used to fund terrorism, provide support to armed groups and fuel political violence in the region, and instances of the joint trafficking of drugs and weapons have been reported.

### 1. Major developments

734. South Asia, located between the two largest opiate production areas in the world, South-West Asia and South-East Asia, is the largest consumer market for opiates worldwide. The proportion of the total number of opiate users worldwide who reside in South Asia increased from about 20 per cent in 2002 to about 39 per cent, equivalent to 12 million people, in 2021. Other regions with significantly large numbers of opiate users are the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia, which together accounted for 19 per cent of the global total, followed by Europe, which accounted for about 10 per cent.

735. Narco-terrorism appears to be an increasing problem in the region, and investigations have indicated that

<sup>154</sup>UNODC, Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific, *Synthetic Drugs in East and South-East Asia*.

<sup>155</sup> *World Drug Report 2023*, Statistical annex.



proceeds of drug trafficking are increasingly being used to fund terrorism, support armed groups and instigate political violence. Five instances of the joint trafficking of drugs and weapons were reported in the reporting period, two by Bangladesh and one each by India, Malaysia and Myanmar.

736. In 2021, the prevalence of opiate use among those aged 16–64 in South Asia was estimated at 1.1 per cent, almost double the estimated global average (0.6 per cent). Most opiates found in South Asia originate in South-West Asia and the largest opiate market in South Asia is India, which was projected to become the world's most populous country in 2023. In 2021, with an estimated 11 million opiate users, India accounted for nearly 90 per cent of the estimated number of opiate users in South Asia, equivalent to 34 per cent of the total number of opiate users worldwide. India also accounted for the largest share (two thirds) of the heroin seized in South Asia in the period 2017–2021, followed by Sri Lanka, at 23 per cent, and Bangladesh, at 7 per cent. Seizures of heroin in South Asia have seen an overall increase in the past decade.

737. The production of opium for the licit pharmaceutical industry in India declined for two decades and, since 2018, has stabilized at between 200 and 300 tons per year. As reported to authorities by licensed opium farmers, the overall average quantity of opium produced per hectare increased from an average of 47 kg per ha in 1995 to about 64 kg per ha in 2021. The authorities in India reported that most of the opium seized in the country had not been sourced from licit sources.

738. Opium continues to be illicitly cultivated in India, primarily in the north-east of the country. In the period 2020–2021, authorities in India reported the eradication of about 4,400 ha of illicitly cultivated opium poppy, which was an area of almost the same size as the total area under licit opium poppy cultivation in the country in 2020 (4,941 ha) and in 2021 (5,406 ha). Most of the heroin found in South Asia in recent years appears to have originated primarily in South-West Asia, having been manufactured from opium produced in Afghanistan, the world's largest producer of the substance. UNODC has reported that traffickers from Myanmar, which accounted for some 6 per cent of global illicit opium production in 2021, regularly supply some of the north-eastern states of India with heroin.

739. The average annual seizures of heroin in South Asia along the southern route have increased to the extent that the total quantities of heroin and morphine originating in Afghanistan that are seized along that route are now larger than those seized along the northern route, which mainly supplies markets in the Russian Federation, via Central Asia.

740. In South Asia, methamphetamine manufactured in Afghanistan reaches both India and Sri Lanka. Most users of amphetamine-type stimulants (mainly methamphetamine) in India are found in the country's western states, while the prevalence of methamphetamine use is highest in its eastern states, close to Myanmar. As individual seizures suggest, India is increasingly being exposed to the expansion of methamphetamine trafficking from both South-West and South-East Asia (mainly originating in Myanmar), which poses a high risk of significantly increasing the availability and use of the drug in the country.

## 2. Regional cooperation

741. A total of 49 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of all six countries in South Asia, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. There are now five e-modules, covering narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. The e-modules are available upon registration through INCB Learning to officials of competent national authorities at no cost.

742. In November 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme conducted an interregional workshop on public-private partnerships between Governments and logistics companies operating in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. The workshop was held in Istanbul, Türkiye, and brought together 42 participants from around the world, including four from India and Pakistan. The workshop built upon the success of previous meetings held by INCB since 2018 related to the prevention and misuse of logistics services for the trafficking of dangerous substances and to promoting cooperation between Governments and logistics companies.

743. In December 2022, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka participated in the INCB Operation Knockout and exchanged intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical 1,4-butanediol, carisoprodol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through international post, express mail and courier services and related modalities.

744. In February 2023, the GRIDS Programme organized an online stakeholder consultation on voluntary cooperation between Governments and freight forwarding services for the prevention of dangerous substance trafficking. The event was attended by more than 44 representatives from

10 Governments, three international organizations and six industry associations, including six participants from India. Participants exchanged best practices and shared respective case examples related to the exploitation of legitimate ancillary logistics services and discussed the next steps for promoting voluntary cooperation between Governments and their private sector partners.

745. In Vienna in September 2023, the GRIDS Programme convened the sixth annual operational meeting on counteracting trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services. The event brought together 100 officers, experts and industry leaders from over 30 Governments, private sector partners and international and regional organizations, including participants from India and the Maldives. Several participating Governments also engaged in bilateral and multilateral case meetings to enhance cooperation across borders.

746. The GRIDS Programme convened the third international expert group meeting on expanding the INCB lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate uses and on novel approaches for their identification in falsified or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals, held in Vienna from 18 to 22 September 2023. The event brought together 45 representatives from over 20 Governments and international organizations, including participants from India. Participants discussed the latest trends, threats and approaches for the rapid detection of suspicious packaging of falsified substances.

747. To better understand the threat posed by opiate trafficking in South Asia, UNODC held a two-day expert working group meeting on opiate trafficking along the southern route, in New Delhi on 10 and 11 May 2023. The meeting gathered representatives from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Mozambique, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The participants held intensive deliberations on a range of issues, including key trends in Afghan opiate trafficking, and country-focused situational analysis, and conducted a review of the supply of and demand for opiates in the region. The need for collective regional efforts to strengthen law enforcement and health responses was emphasized during the discussions.

748. In July 2023, a five-day training event on drug law enforcement was held in Faridabad, India, for senior officials from Antigua and Barbuda, Bhutan, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Maldives, Seychelles and Tanzania (United Republic of). The event was co-organized by the Government of India and UNODC. Aimed at South-South capacity-building, it provided a further platform for countries to foster cooperation and share insights on combating drug trafficking. The training included presentations on the impact of

cryptocurrency on drug trafficking and emphasized the significance of technological advancements for law enforcement agencies involved in the disruption of drug smuggling operations.

749. In October 2023, the Forty-fifth Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and the Pacific, was held in Bali, Indonesia. The Meeting adopted a set of recommendations to increase international and regional cooperation with the aim of preventing and dismantling supply chains for precursor chemicals, reducing the illicit cultivation and production of drugs and their trafficking, dismantling clandestine laboratories and promoting best practices in alternative development.

750. The Global Conference on Cooperation in Enforcement Matters, organized by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence of the Ministry of Finance of India, was held from 30 October to 1 November 2023 in New Delhi, under the overarching theme “It takes a network to fight a network”. The objective of the conference was to promote cooperation and the exchange of information between national and international law enforcement agencies for the purpose of combating transnational crime, including drug trafficking.

751. On 30 November 2022, the Government of India informed INCB that a memorandum of understanding on public-private partnership with the chemical industry in India had been signed between the Central Bureau of Narcotics of India and the Indian Chemical Council. The memorandum is intended to prevent the diversion of chemicals from licit distribution channels and includes a voluntary code of conduct to ensure coordination within the Council.

752. The seventh meeting of the subgroup on the prevention of illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation was held in Chiang Rai, Thailand, from 7 to 9 December 2022 and involved the participation of representatives from all the Bay of Bengal Initiative member States. Progress achieved during the meeting included steps towards developing the Bay of Bengal Initiative Plan of Action on Drug Control.

753. In 2023, the UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme continued to deliver regional training programmes for maritime law enforcement officers in Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka. Among the topics covered in the training was visit, board, search and seizure tactics, the discussion of which provided participants with an opportunity to acquire and share knowledge on best practices in performing maritime interdictions.

### 3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

754. The three international drug control treaties require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. Those reports enable the Board to monitor the licit movement of internationally controlled substances and ensure the availability of those substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes. Most countries in South Asia regularly provide their required statistical reports on narcotic drugs controlled under the 1961 Convention as amended. A few countries in the region have not provided all the required reports regarding narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the past five years. **The Board encourages Governments in the region to prioritize the submission of accurate and timely reports, as doing so will have a significant impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the international drug control system.**

755. South Asia continues to be the region with the lowest levels of consumption of opioid analgesics worldwide. In 2021, the level of consumption of opioid analgesics in the region, expressed in S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> per million inhabitants, stood at 181 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, which was higher than the level in 2002 (43 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) but lower than the level in 2020 (202 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>). Bhutan was the country with highest consumption in the region in 2021 (47 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), followed by Sri Lanka (35 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Nepal (31 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), India (27 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Maldives (26 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and Bangladesh (16 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>). Morphine was the most consumed opioid in the region (86 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), followed by fentanyl (73 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and pethidine (22 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>).

756. Determining the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in South Asia remains challenging because the countries in the region have failed to consistently provide the Board with consumption data on psychotropic substances for the past five years. The Board will continue to monitor the situation and will continue its dialogue with the Governments of the region, emphasizing the importance of regularly furnishing data on the consumption of psychotropic substances.

757. **The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.**

758. With regard to precursor chemicals, in the context of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual

legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means.

759. As at 1 November 2023, all six countries in South Asia had provided the Board with at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations, and all six have regularly updated their estimates for those substances, which contributes to preventing their oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes.

760. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,<sup>156</sup> psychotropic substances<sup>157</sup> and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.<sup>158</sup> In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

### 4. National legislation, policy and action

761. In November 2022, the Parliament of Sri Lanka enacted the Poisons, Opium and Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Act, No. 41 of 2022. The Act provides amendments to the schedules of controlled substances to include narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals recently added to the schedules and tables of the international drug control treaties. The Act, amending the Poisons, Opium and Dangerous Drugs Ordinance, includes further legal provisions for monitoring and addressing emerging trends in methamphetamine misuse in Sri Lanka, as well as legal provisions to refer persons who are alleged to have committed an offence under the Act for voluntary admission to medical treatment for addiction and to rehabilitation.

<sup>156</sup> E/INCB/2023/2.

<sup>157</sup> E/INCB/2023/3.

<sup>158</sup> E/INCB/2023/4.

762. In late 2022, the Government of Bangladesh approved the Drug and Cosmetics Act 2022. The new law follows the guidelines of WHO related to the legitimate manufacture of medicines and provides for heavier monetary penalties and imprisonment terms of up to a lifetime sentence for manufacturing and commercializing adulterated and fake medicines.

763. In May 2023, officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka gathered in New Delhi for the second meeting of the steering committee of the UNODC regional programme for South Asia for the period 2023–2027. The regional programme provides a strategic roadmap for focused national and regional cooperation in building capacities and promoting effective policies to promote justice and health and prevent and counter drug trafficking, organized crime, corruption and terrorism in the six countries of South Asia. The steering committee, established on 1 February 2023, serves as the governing body for the regional programme. Its responsibilities include reviewing the Office's annual work plans for the region, assessing successes and challenges in the Office's operations, providing guidance and advice, and facilitating communication with national Governments.

## 5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

764. South Asia remains an important transit area for traffickers smuggling illicitly produced opiates from Afghanistan to Europe and North America. In addition, the four coastal States in South Asia, namely, Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka, as well as Pakistan, are exposed to trafficking because of maritime trafficking routes that cross the Indian Ocean. India, in particular, has noted an intensification of trafficking in opiates originating in Afghanistan and trafficked eastward, along the southern route.

765. Data on seizures effected on the southern route suggest that trafficking in Afghan opiates has increased markedly towards South Asia and Africa, to the extent that the total quantities of Afghanistan-related heroin and morphine seized on that route are now larger than those seized along the northern route, which mainly supplies markets in the Russian Federation, via Central Asia. Traffickers from Myanmar, which accounted for some 6 per cent of global illicit opium production in 2021, regularly supply some of the north-eastern states of India with heroin.

766. In 2021, about one third of the heroin and morphine seized on the southern route was seized in Africa, while two thirds were seized in South Asia. Although most of the heroin shipped to Africa has been for domestic consumption

or re-export to Europe, some of it is now being trafficked to South Asia, reversing the traditional trafficking route, which involves the transport of heroin from South-West Asia to Africa, via India. African countries that have been identified as major transit points for heroin consignments to India include Kenya, South Africa and Uganda. The trafficking has mostly been carried out by human couriers, as well as through parcel post. The diversification of this route is possibly due to an increase in heroin trafficking from the Islamic Republic of Iran detected by Indian authorities in 2021.

767. Countries in South Asia continued to report seizures of methamphetamine, in both tablet and crystalline form, originating in both South-East and South-West Asia, which suggests that there has been a further integration of the methamphetamine trafficking networks of the two regions.

768. In 2022, drug-related crimes accounted for almost 20 per cent of all criminal activity in Bhutan, with substance misuse making up an estimated 78 per cent of all drug crime, followed by trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, at 15 per cent. The total number of drug crimes recorded in the country in 2022 was 761, showing a significant increase of 162 per cent compared with 2021, when 291 drug crimes were reported. These findings demonstrate a concerning rise in drug-related offences, highlighting the need for effective measures to address and combat drug misuse and trafficking in Bhutan.

769. According to a report published by the Royal University of Bhutan, for people in Bhutan, the porous border with India has emerged as a major gateway to obtaining marijuana and prescription drugs, with respondents to a survey conducted by the Royal University citing proximity and affordability as key drivers for obtaining drugs in India. Additionally, the availability of drugs through social networks, such as friends and neighbours, has further facilitated access.

770. In Bangladesh, in 2022, a total of more than 43.7 million methamphetamine tablets ("yaba") were seized. A major trafficking route running from Myanmar to Bangladesh across their shared border has been identified. Apart from the influx of drugs via land routes, maritime routes also pose a significant threat, as evidenced by multiple seizures of a range of drugs from boats in the vicinity of Cox's Bazar. According to the data available, cannabis remains the most prevalent drug type in Bangladesh. Among the districts identified by the Department of Narcotics Control of Bangladesh as the most drug-prone in the country are Dhaka, Cox's Bazar, Chottogram, Comilla and Brahmanbaria. Several sources have noted a rise in drug trafficking activities in the country in recent years, associated with the influx of Rohingya refugees.

771. The Narcotics Control Bureau of India shared real-time actionable information generated during its Operation Samudragupt with the authorities of Maldives and Sri Lanka. The information resulted in seizures of 286 kg of heroin and 128 kg of methamphetamine and the arrest of 19 drug traffickers in two operations conducted by Sri Lankan Navy, and further seizures of 4 kg of heroin and the arrest of five drug traffickers by the Maldives Police Service.

772. It appears that the domestic cocaine market in India is usually supplied by small shipments. While amounts of cocaine seized in South Asia are typically small, a change in the methods of cocaine trafficking has been observed. In 2019, seizures of cocaine consignments destined for India, amounting to 33 kg in total, were mainly effected along air and land routes, with none reported along sea routes. In 2020, the restrictions on international air travel may have spurred an increase in the use of mail services, which accounted for more than one third of inbound cocaine consignments by weight. In 2021, sea transport was the predominant mode of transport used to traffic cocaine into India, accounting for 95 per cent of inbound cocaine seizures in terms of weight.

773. As part of the “Drugs Free India” campaign of the Narcotics Control Bureau of India, which continued during 2022, more than 1,300 kg of heroin were seized in operations in the State of Gujarat and the cities of Delhi and Kolkata, and more than 75,000 kg of drugs were destroyed.

774. In July 2022, law enforcement authorities in Nigeria seized about 22 million tramadol tablets from shipping containers originating in India. Preliminary investigations indicated that the consignments had been ordered from online pharmacies apparently operating from India. The operators were believed to be supplying narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, including substances not under international control, such as tramadol and tapentadol.

775. Customs authorities in Maldives reported the seizure of over 118 kg of drugs in 2022, which was a notable increase from the 50 kg seized in 2021. The seizures indicate that the trafficking of drugs into Maldives is mostly carried out through mail or courier services. During the first quarter of 2023, the Maldives Police Service recorded seizures of various drugs, including more than 8 kg of cannabis, more than 3 kg of cocaine and more than 2 kg of heroin. In the same period, 314 Maldivian nationals and 17 foreign nationals were detained for drug-related offences.

776. Heroin and cannabis oil are the most commonly used illicit drugs in Maldives, but LSD, MDMA (commonly known as “ecstasy”) and other synthetic drugs have also been seized in recent years.

777. Sri Lanka reported that most of the heroin arriving on its territory in 2019 and 2020 had transited through the Islamic Republic of Iran (68 per cent in 2019) and that a much smaller quantity had transited through Pakistan (11 per cent in 2019). Sri Lankan sea routes are increasingly being used by local and international narcotics traffickers. In 2021, Sri Lankan authorities reported seizures of 1,594 kg of heroin and more than 348 kg of synthetic drugs. Maritime seizures were effected more often on the open sea than in ports, and the drugs were mostly found on small vessels, such as untraceable fishing boats.

778. In Bangladesh, it was reported that a small proportion of the heroin seized in 2019 had originated in Myanmar (5 per cent), while the vast majority had entered the country through India (95 per cent).

779. The illicit manufacture of ketamine, a substance not under international control but used as an anaesthetic in medicinal practice in many countries, has diversified geographically. Trafficking in the substance has spread beyond countries in East and South-East Asia and its non-medical use has recently increased in a few countries in South Asia. Traffickers have begun exploring new ways to promote ketamine on the illicit market, with mixtures containing ketamine and other ingredients that are often unknown to users appearing in marketed products.

## 6. Prevention and treatment

780. In South Asia, opioids are the most frequently reported primary drug of use among people in drug treatment, and their misuse remains the leading cause of fatal overdoses both in the region and globally; in 2019, their misuse accounted for nearly 70 per cent of the 128,000 deaths attributed to drug use disorders worldwide.

781. In Bangladesh, UNODC developed a training module on drugs, crime and HIV/AIDS in collaboration with the Bangladesh Police Academy, delivered at Dhaka, which provided training for 50 police officers of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police. This follows the implementation by UNODC of a pilot intervention on HIV/AIDS and mental health in 2022 in collaboration with the Bangladesh prison authority, together with the Dhaka Ahsania Mission, a non-governmental organization.

782. At about 2.1 per cent, India had the highest prevalence of opioid use in South Asia in 2018, according to the country’s latest national household survey of drug use, conducted across India in 2018. Opioid use in the country is still mainly a male phenomenon, with more than 95 per cent of all opioid users in India being male.

783. A detailed analysis of opioid use in India, based on the same national household survey of drug use, reveals that rates of opioid use vary widely within the country. Among the population aged 10–75, overall rates of opioid use range between 0.2 and 25.2 per cent, and rates of opioid use disorders range between 0.1 and 6.9 per cent. The highest prevalence of people with opioid use disorders is found in the eastern parts of the country, while the largest numbers of people with opioid use disorders are found in states in north-western India (Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana), as well as in some of the central-western states (Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh). Traditionally, the prevalence of opiate use has been high in the country's north-eastern and north-western states. However, the high level now also found in Maharashtra seems to be linked to the increasing quantities of opiates being trafficked to India from South-West Asia.

784. According to the same household survey, the estimated annual prevalence of cocaine use among the general population is 0.11 per cent. Although that estimated prevalence is well below the global average, as the same study points out, it nevertheless represents 1.1 million past-year users, or 5 per cent of the global number of cocaine users.

785. In Sri Lanka, UNODC conducted training for policymakers on the nature, prevention and treatment of drug use disorders, as part of its support for Sri Lanka's efforts to create humane, effective and evidence-based drug use prevention and drug dependence treatment and care services. In 2022, Sri Lanka completed three assessment reports: (a) a review of the national legal framework relating to the control of drugs in Sri Lanka; (b) a situational and needs assessment report on drug use, treatment and rehabilitation and the status of drug prevention; and (c) the mapping of drug demand reduction initiatives.

786. In 2023, UNODC conducted in India training on HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for people who use stimulant drugs, with the participation of over 40 government, civil society and health representatives from across India. In June 2023, training was also delivered on establishing and administering opioid substitution agonist therapy.

787. UNODC, in collaboration with the Academy of Prisons and Correctional Administration of India, organized a three-day regional consultation on health rights in prisons with over 75 high-level prison and health officials, as well as non-governmental organizations, participating.

788. **INCB encourages countries in the region to improve the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes, prevent and address drug trafficking and provide evidence-based prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services.**

## West Asia

A significant drop in the 2023 opium harvest in Afghanistan was reported, which was due to a reduction in opium poppy cultivation following the strict application of a ban on illicit drug cultivation that had been announced by the country's de facto authorities in April 2022. As affected farmers in Afghanistan may not have alternative sources of income, support needs to be provided for alternative development solutions.

Methamphetamine manufacture in Afghanistan has been increasing over recent years, and methamphetamine originating in Afghanistan now reaches markets in South-West Asia, East and South-East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, Africa, Europe and Oceania. South-West Asia also observed an increase in methamphetamine use.

The illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and misuse of synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances and pharmaceutical drugs, continue to pose a significant challenge to countries in West Asia, in particular in the Central Asia subregion.

The Middle East continues to be seriously affected by trafficking in and the use of falsified "captagon", a challenge that is further exacerbated by political instability and ongoing conflicts in some parts of that subregion.

### 1. Major developments

789. The *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2023*, released by UNODC on 5 November 2023, reported a dramatic decline in opium poppy cultivation across Afghanistan. The area under cultivation declined by 95 per cent, from 233,000 ha in 2022 to a total of just 10,800 ha in 2023, with opium production seeing a similar 95 per cent decline, from 6,200 tons in 2022 to just 333 tons in 2023. In terms of the supply of heroin from Afghanistan to global illicit markets, this translates into a reduction of export quality heroin (with 50–70 per cent purity) from 350–580 tons in 2022 to 24–38 tons in 2023. The international community will need to monitor the situation closely to determine how illicit markets around the world will respond to this development.

790. This significant drop in opium production in Afghanistan is due to a reduction in opium poppy cultivation following the strict application of the ban on illicit drug cultivation that had been announced by the country's de

facto authorities in April 2022. At the same time, the ban will have a significant impact on portions of the rural population in Afghanistan who have relied on opium poppy cultivation for their livelihoods and do not have alternative sources of income, and whose situation is being further exacerbated by the overall economic downturn and humanitarian crisis in the country.

791. In terms of global illicit opium poppy cultivation, this reduction places Afghanistan behind Myanmar, where, it was reported by UNODC, 40,100 ha were cultivated in 2022.

792. While illicit opium and heroin production declined in Afghanistan, trafficking from the country continued, possibly owing to the sale of opium inventories stockpiled from past record harvests. The Balkan route remained the main path for trafficking in opiates originating in Afghanistan and headed to markets in Central and Eastern Europe. A noticeable increase in trafficking in opiates via the southern route was also observed, with volumes appearing to have surpassed those trafficked via the northern route, which supplies markets in the Russian Federation.

793. The increase in illicit methamphetamine manufacture in Afghanistan is also of serious concern to the Board, as this substance now reaches markets not only in South-West Asia but also in East and South-East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, Africa, Europe and even Oceania. Afghanistan itself observed an increase in methamphetamine misuse, as did other countries in South-West Asia.

794. The illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances and pharmaceutical drugs, continue to pose a significant challenge to public health and law enforcement in countries in West Asia, in particular in the Central Asia subregion.

795. The Middle East continues to be seriously affected by trafficking in and use of falsified “captagon”,<sup>159</sup> as this region remains vulnerable to trafficking in this substance due to political instability and ongoing conflicts in some parts of the subregion. Seizures of this substance reached a record high in the subregion in 2021, almost double the amount recorded in 2020. In addition, the subregion is witnessing the development of a methamphetamine market as seen from a rise in seizures of that substance.

<sup>159</sup> Captagon was originally the official trade name for a pharmaceutical preparation containing the substance fenethylamine, a synthetic stimulant. As encountered in seizures across West Asia today and referred to in the present report, “captagon” is a falsified drug compressed into pills or tablets that are similar in appearance but distinct from the earlier pharmaceutical preparation Captagon. The active ingredient in falsified “captagon” is amphetamine, which is typically cut with multiple adulterants, such as caffeine.

## 2. Regional cooperation

796. The sixteenth Policy Consultative Group meeting of the Paris Pact Initiative was organized by UNODC in Vienna on 5 and 6 December 2022; it was attended by 135 participants representing 37 countries and 13 international and regional organizations. The meeting discussed current and emerging drug trafficking patterns and trends, recent operational developments in Afghanistan, the progress made by the Paris Pact programme, and the UNODC regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. The operational priority recommendations stemming from the expert meetings held in 2022 in relation to the four pillars of the Vienna Declaration were reviewed and endorsed by the Group.

797. In accordance with the 2022 action plan of the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC), the regional anti-drug law enforcement operation “Reflex-2022” was carried out by CARICC member States from 3 to 22 December 2022. As a result of the operation, various amounts of new psychoactive substances and other synthetic narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances were seized, and several clandestine drug laboratories were dismantled.

798. From December 2022 to January 2023, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates participated in the Board’s Operation Knockout, during which they exchanged intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical carisoprodol, 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through post, express mail and courier services.

799. On 15 February 2023, India chaired a virtual meeting of the Expert Working Group on Law Enforcement and Drug-Related Crimes of the Meeting of the Heads of the Competent Authorities for Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Participants shared experiences in carrying out activities to implement the Organization’s Anti-Drug Strategy 2018–2023 and discussed the challenges and successes in addressing drug trafficking in the region.

800. On 27 April 2023, the 37th meeting of the Working Group on Afghanistan at the Ministerial Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was held. The event was attended by delegations from CSTO member States (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan), the CSTO Deputy Secretary General, the Chargé d’affaires of Afghanistan in the Russian Federation, representatives of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central

Asia, the Commonwealth of Independent States Anti-Terrorism Centre, the Coordination Service of the Council of Commanders of Border Troops of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Participants discussed the situation in Afghanistan, including the humanitarian, economic, security and drug trafficking challenges faced by the country.

801. A meeting of the Foreign Ministers Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization took place on 4 and 5 May 2023, in Panaji, India, chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of India. At the meeting, the ministers of foreign affairs of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the Secretary-General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Director of the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, agreed to deepen cooperation on security matters and to step up their combined efforts to fight terrorism, extremism, separatism, drug trafficking and cybercrime. Special attention was accorded to Afghanistan and ways in which the Organization could assist the country in its efforts to stabilize and rebuild its economy. Memorandums granting Kuwait, Maldives, Myanmar and the United Arab Emirates dialogue partner status with the Organization were signed during the meeting.

802. On 26 May 2023, in Yerevan, the Chair of the Coordinating Council of the Heads of the Competent Authorities for Countering Illicit Drug Trafficking of the CSTO member States, the Deputy Minister of Interior of the Russian Federation and the Minister of Interior of Armenia discussed preliminary results of the CSTO sub-regional anti-drug operation “Channel-Arax”. The operation, which involved CSTO member States, as well as observers from China, the Syrian Arab Republic, CARICC, UNODC, the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, and the Council of Financial Intelligence Heads, was conducted from 22 to 26 May 2023 on the territory of CSTO member States with the aim of disrupting illicit channels supplying controlled drugs and new psychoactive substances. As a result of the operation, which included a number of international controlled deliveries, large amounts of controlled substances were seized, including cannabis, cannabis resin, heroin, mephedrone and MDMA, and three clandestine drug laboratories were dismantled.

803. On 8 and 9 June 2023, INCB Learning held a two-day virtual workshop focused on raising awareness about the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes as part of the Board’s ongoing efforts to support Member States in ensuring that essential medicines are available while preventing their diversion and misuse. The

event brought together officials from the competent national authorities of seven Russian-speaking countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – and a diverse group of stakeholders which included representatives from palliative care associations, experts in drug control and public health, and members of the international community. Throughout the two days, participants discussed various themes related to improving access to controlled substances for medical purposes, including regulatory frameworks, barriers to access and the importance of national and international cooperation.

804. A total of 38 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 14 countries in West Asia, namely, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, have registered to use INCB learning e-modules.

805. The Paris Pact Expert Working Group meeting on the diversion of precursor chemicals, linked to the third pillar of the Vienna Declaration, was held on 13 and 14 June 2023 in Sofia in hybrid format. The meeting, which was attended by over 140 participants representing 34 countries and 10 international and regional organizations, reviewed the latest trends, existing gaps and challenges, and shared their recent operational actions in tackling trafficking in controlled substances and their precursors along the main drug trafficking routes from Afghanistan. Delegates also noted with concern the increase in trafficking in methamphetamine originating in Afghanistan and the trafficking flows of related precursors. The meeting proposed 10 priority operational recommendations to be further reviewed and endorsed at the 17th Policy Consultative Group Meeting, which was scheduled to be held in Vienna on 11 and 12 December 2023.

### 3. Availability of internationally controlled substances (including reporting to the Board)

806. The three international drug control treaties require the States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor licit activity involving internationally controlled substances as well as ensure the availability of these substances for licit medical, scientific and industrial purposes.

807. Since 2002, the level of consumption of opioid analgesics in West Asia, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants, has been steadily increasing and reached a total of 23,884 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2021. This represents a considerable



increase compared with the level of 2,985 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2002. The highest consumption in 2021 was reported by Israel (18,340 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), which was followed at a distance by Bahrain (2,007 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Türkiye (711 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Qatar (531 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Kuwait (477 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Saudi Arabia (342 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and Oman (312 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>). Almost no consumption was reported by the remaining countries, with Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan reporting nil or 1 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>. Consumption was greatest for fentanyl (19,004 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), followed by oxycodone (4,023 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), morphine (574 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and pethidine (178 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>).

808. Among the countries and territories of West Asia, reporting performance has generally been good for the psychotropic substances controlled under the 1971 Convention; nearly all countries have provided the required reports for the last five years.

809. Despite satisfactory submission of reports, West Asia is among the regions that are of particular concern with regard to ensuring and monitoring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. It remains challenging to determine the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in West Asia as approximately half of the countries in the region have not provided to the Board consumption data on any psychotropic substance for the past five years.

810. **The Board notes that, while the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances has been improving in some countries in the region, there remains an urgent need to address this matter and ensure that licit requirements for medical and scientific purposes are met.**

811. Out of the 25 countries in West Asia, 22 have regularly provided the Board with updated annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations. This information is essential for preventing the oversupply and diversion into illicit channels of such substances, as well as for ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes.

812. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,<sup>160</sup> psychotropic substances<sup>161</sup> and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.<sup>162</sup> In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO

for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

#### 4. National regulation, policy and action

813. Within the framework of the INCB GRIDS Programme, INCB and partner organizations conducted an interregional workshop from 28 to 30 November 2022 on public-private partnerships between Governments and logistics companies operating in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. The workshop was held in Istanbul, Türkiye, and brought together 42 participants from around the world, including eight private sector participants from Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Kazakhstan. This workshop built upon the success of previous meetings held by INCB since 2018 related to the prevention and misuse of logistics services for trafficking in dangerous substances and promoting cooperation between Governments and logistics companies.

814. In January 2023, the Head of State of Oman approved the National Strategy for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances for 2023–2028, which identified policies, programmes and organizational activities to address trafficking in and the use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, including through youth-centred initiatives as well as targeted specialized programmes for treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration.

815. On 10 January 2023, with a view to addressing the increased threat to public health posed by the misuse of pharmaceutical preparations containing controlled substances, the President of Turkmenistan adopted a decree adding new preparations to the national list of controlled substances, including pregabalin, zopiclone and tapentadol.

816. In February 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme delivered two back-to-back awareness-raising and capacity-building workshops on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids and related chemicals for 10 front-line officers in Armenia and 17 customs and regulatory officers in Georgia. The training emphasized capacity-building to enhance communications by authorities of both countries concerning safe handling and interdiction approaches for dangerous substances.

817. On 8 March 2023, the de facto authorities of Afghanistan issued a decree banning cannabis cultivation in Afghanistan and stating that, in case of a violation, the

<sup>160</sup>E/INCB/2023/2.

<sup>161</sup>E/INCB/2023/3.

<sup>162</sup>E/INCB/2023/4.

plants would be destroyed and violators would be punished according to sharia laws. This decree, as well as the earlier decree of 3 April 2022, which banned illicit drug cultivation, including opium poppy, comprise a series of legislative acts adopted by the de facto authorities aimed at eradicating illicit drug cultivation and production in the country.

818. In March 2023, Türkiye adopted the “7th Justice Package” containing several changes to national legislation, including the Penal Code, the Criminal Procedures Act and the Control of Narcotic Substances Act. The changes introduced by this legislative package include such measures as pretrial destruction of drugs, modification of penalties applicable to drug-related offences, strengthening of procedures for release and probation, and improvement of the drug-treatment referral system within the criminal justice process.

819. On 29 June 2023, the Government of Kazakhstan approved the Comprehensive Plan to Combat Drug Addiction and Drug Trafficking for the period 2023–2025. The plan consists of a series of activities aimed at addressing drug use and criminality, with particular attention accorded to the illicit production of synthetic substances, the misuse of prescription drugs, cannabis trafficking and the issue of opiates. The activities include equipping border checkpoints with inspection equipment to detect drugs, precursors and equipment for drug laboratories, strengthening forensic examination bodies for the accelerated study of new synthetic drugs, introducing screening to identify drug addiction at an early stage and analysing the drug situation together with the development of adequate drug prevention measures.

820. The Board notes with concern the public reports over the continued use of capital punishment for drug-related offences in some countries of the region. **In this regard, the Board wishes to reiterate its position that, although the determination of sanctions applicable to drug-related crime remains the prerogative of the States parties to the conventions, the Board encourages States that have abolished capital punishment for drug-related offences not to reintroduce it, and it encourages those States that retain capital punishment for that category of offence to commute death sentences that have already been handed down and to consider abolishing the death penalty for drug-related offences.**

821. In June 2023, the Council of Ministers of the United Arab Emirates approved the formation of the Anti-Drug Council. The Council will develop an integrated national strategy for drug control, including drug use prevention, awareness of forms of harm associated with drugs, and promotion of early detection of drug use. The Council is

also responsible for following up on the implementation of plans to combat trafficking in drugs through its ports, land borders and coasts.

822. The INCB GRIDS Programme organized the sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 11 to 15 September 2023. The event brought together over 100 officers from 30 Governments and international organizations, including 10 participants from Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates. Several participating Governments also conducted bilateral and multilateral case meetings – facilitated by INCB – to enhance cooperation across borders.

823. The INCB GRIDS Programme convened the third international expert group meeting on expanding the Board’s lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate use and novel approaches for their identification in falsified or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals, held in Vienna from 18 to 22 September 2023. The event brought together 45 representatives from over 20 Governments and international organizations and the private sector, including four participants from Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates.

824. The INCB GRIDS Programme and the Precursors Control Section jointly organized training on GRIDS Intelligence tools and chemical precursors for officers from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in Vienna from 2 to 5 October 2023. The training was attended by 14 participants from four member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council: Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

## 5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

825. The area under illicit opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan declined by 95 per cent, from 233,000 ha in 2022 to a total of just 10,800 ha in 2023. A similar 95 per cent decline was observed for illicit opium production, which fell from 6,200 tons in 2022 to just 333 tons in 2023.

826. The impact on global drug markets of the ban announced in April 2022 by the de facto authorities of Afghanistan on the cultivation of opium poppy and other types of narcotic drugs, as well as the more recent ban on the cultivation of cannabis issued in March 2023, remains to be seen.

827. In the areas visited by its field teams, UNODC observed that the opium poppy ban was being strictly enforced. For example, land cultivated with opium poppy

was ploughed under at the farmers' cost, with the farmers paying for the fuel and providing labour as punishment. Some farmers were trying to clandestinely grow poppy on private premises, in greenhouses, in vineyards or in remote areas, but when the de facto authorities discovered such instances, the plants were destroyed and in some cases the farmers were arrested.

828. The farm-gate price of illicit opium dramatically increased from late 2022 into 2023, with the average price in August 2023 being \$408, which was nearly five times the price in the 24-month period prior to the takeover by the Taliban.

829. In 2022, the Balkan route, which passes through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Türkiye and the Balkan countries, continued to be the main route for trafficking in opiates from Afghanistan to destination markets in Central and Western Europe. According to recent seizure data, trafficking in Afghan opiates has increased markedly along the southern route, which runs through the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan and then by sea or air to Europe, either directly or through South Asia, Africa or the Gulf. In fact, the total quantities of Afghanistan-related heroin and morphine seized along the southern route are now larger than those seized along the northern route, which passes through Central Asia and primarily supplies markets in the Russian Federation.

830. The total volume of opiates seized by CARICC member States, most of which are located along the northern route, decreased by 16 per cent in 2022 (6.4 tons) as compared with 2021 (7.6 tons). In particular, the volume of heroin seized by these States decreased 30 per cent, from 5.5 tons in 2021 to 3.9 tons in 2022, while seizures of opium increased slightly by about 6 per cent, from 1.7 tons in 2021 to 1.8 tons in 2022.

831. Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Türkiye, which are both located at the forefront of the Balkan route, with the former serving also as one of the entry points for the southern route, reported a significant decrease in the amount of heroin seized in 2022 compared with previous years. Türkiye seized 7.9 tons of heroin in 2022, the lowest recorded seizures in the past five years and representing a 64 per cent decrease compared with 2021 when 22.2 tons of heroin were seized. Similarly, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the amount of heroin seized decreased by 32 per cent (17.2 tons seized in 2022) compared with the previous year (25.4 tons seized in 2021). The authorities of both countries explain that this decrease could be due to strengthened law enforcement activities at the borders as well as efforts by traffickers to seek alternative routes, including use of maritime trafficking over the southern route.

832. The Islamic Republic of Iran also observed a 36 per cent decrease in opium seizures in 2022 (536 tons) as compared with 2021 (835 tons) and an almost threefold reduction in morphine seizures in 2022 (12.5 tons) compared with 2021 (36.5 tons).

833. The manufacture of and trafficking in synthetic drugs continue to pose significant challenges to the countries in West Asia, in particular in the Central Asian subregion, which has seen an increase in the number of drug-related offences involving these substances. CARICC member States observed a 24 per cent increase in the number of clandestine laboratories detected and dismantled that had been used for the manufacture of synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances such as synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic cathinones and phenethylamines, on their territories: 323 laboratories detected in 2022 compared with 260 in 2021. Kazakhstan dismantled 70 such laboratories in 2022 compared with 37 in 2021, and Kyrgyzstan dismantled 11 laboratories in 2022 compared with 3 in 2021.

834. Some contributing factors to the increase in the manufacture of and trafficking in synthetic drugs appear to be the relative simplicity and low cost of manufacturing these substances, the lack of effective regulation and the ease of access to the latest information on manufacturing techniques for these substances, as well as the active use of information technologies, including the Internet and social media platforms, for open and closed marketing and trade in those substances. Frequent use of postal services for the dispatch of synthetic drugs has also been reported by Central Asian States.

835. In this regard, the Board noted that a very low number of countries in Central Asia are making active use of the IONICS and PICS online platforms for communicating incidents involving illicit drugs and new psychoactive substances and their precursors. **The Board would like to encourage all countries concerned to strengthen the active use of these tools developed by INCB for the development and exchange of both strategic and operational intelligence related to latest trafficking trends and modi operandi used by traffickers involved in the illicit manufacture of and trafficking in these substances.**

836. Central Asian States also expressed concern regarding the threat of trafficking in pharmaceutical preparations containing controlled substances affecting their territories, such as tramadol, zopiclone, pregabalin, zaleplon and other substances.

837. Central Asian States and Azerbaijan reported an overall increase in seizures of psychotropic substances in 2022 compared with 2021. In particular, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan

and Uzbekistan reported some increases in amphetamine seizures. Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan observed an increase in methamphetamine seizures, while Kazakhstan also reported an increase in MDMA seizures.

838. A significant reduction in opium cultivation in Afghanistan could shift traffickers towards synthetic drug manufacture as the country is already becoming a major producer of methamphetamines in the region. According to UNODC, it appears that methamphetamine in Afghanistan is produced from the ephedra plant, which grows wild in the country; from pharmaceutical ephedrine extracted from over-the-counter cold medications; and, potentially, from ephedrine trafficked into the country. With a view to developing effective responses to the threat posed by the manufacturing of methamphetamine in Afghanistan, the Board wishes to encourage UNODC and other partners working in the region to support efforts to conduct detailed chemical analysis of methamphetamine samples in order to identify manufacturing methods and the nature of the chemicals used in that process.

839. Illicit methamphetamine manufacture in Afghanistan has increased and trafficking in that substance from Afghanistan now reaches markets beyond South-West Asia, namely East and South-East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, as well as in Africa, Europe and Oceania.<sup>163</sup> In May 2023, an estimated record amount of 2.5 tons of methamphetamine, worth approximately \$1.45 billion on the illicit market, was seized in Indian territorial waters jointly by the Indian Narcotics Control Board and the Indian Navy as part of an operation targeting maritime trafficking in drugs originating from Afghanistan.

840. South-West Asia saw a marked increase in methamphetamine seizures in 2022. In particular, the Islamic Republic of Iran has continued to record substantial increases in methamphetamine (crystalline) seizures in recent years. In 2022, it seized 30.4 tons of that substance, compared with 25.1 tons in 2021, for an increase of 21 per cent. Pakistan saw a large increase in methamphetamine seizures in 2022 (4.4 tons seized in 2022, compared with 1.7 tons in 2021).

841. Türkiye has observed considerable increases in seizures of methamphetamine since 2019, with the highest ever annual seizure recorded in 2022, when 77.7 tons were seized, representing a more than twofold increase since 2019. This may be linked to the ongoing smuggling of methamphetamine (potentially of Afghan origin) into the country from or through the neighbouring Islamic Republic of Iran. While the drug may be transiting through on its way to markets in

East and South-East Asia, Central Asia, Europe and North Africa, some of it may also end up in the domestic market in Türkiye. While methamphetamine in crystal form is frequently seized in the country, significant amounts of liquid methamphetamine are also seen in Türkiye. The Turkish authorities have expressed concern that criminal groups are venturing into trafficking in liquid methamphetamine as it could provide more opportunities for concealment from law enforcement detection. In some provinces, especially in Istanbul, facilities have been identified where liquid methamphetamine is converted into crystalline form.

842. Türkiye also reported that synthetic cannabinoids, used in the form of cigarettes, and more recently electronic cigarettes, continue to be the largest new psychoactive substances category detected in the country, despite control measures including generic classification approaches taken at the global and national scale. However, their seizures decreased in Türkiye by 53 per cent in 2022 (about 1 ton) compared with 2021 (about 2.2 tons).

843. The manufacture of and trafficking in falsified “captagon” continued to seriously endanger public health and security in countries in the Middle East, a subregion that remains vulnerable to trafficking in this substance due to continued political instability, economic challenges, ongoing conflicts and established demand for the substance. Seizures of this substance reached a record high in the subregion in 2021 (86 tons), almost doubling the seizure figures recorded in 2020. Significant seizures during the reporting period were reported by Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Individual seizures also indicate increased use of the territory of Iraq and Jordan for trafficking the drug from the Syrian Arab Republic.

844. In general, “captagon” tablets manufactured in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic continue to supply large consumer markets in countries in the Gulf by means of smuggling directly by land or sea or indirectly with shipments through other regions, such as Southern Europe. Seizure data suggest that there appear to be new destinations for this substance in North and West Africa. In addition, Türkiye reported continued significant increases in “captagon” seizure incidents and quantities in 2022 (almost 24 million tablets), when seizures of that substance increased by 73.6 per cent compared with 2021 (almost 14 million tablets) and almost tenfold compared with 2020 (2.8 million tablets).

845. UNODC notes that, in parallel to “captagon” trafficking, a methamphetamine market seems to be developing in the Middle East, as shown by a rise in seizures of that drug. In 2020, total seizures of methamphetamine

<sup>163</sup> *World Drug Report 2023*.

reported in the subregion amounted to 25.67 tons, while the total in 2021 amounted to 34.2 tons.

846. South-West Asia remains one of the major production and trafficking subregions for cannabis resin, accounting for 35 per cent of total global seizures in the period 2017–2021. The Middle East appears to be affected less significantly by trafficking in this substance, accounting for 2 per cent of global seizures during that period. There has been an overall decline in cannabis resin seizures in both subregions in 2021, the trend being mainly affected by a major decline in Afghanistan (from 422 tons in 2020 to 159 tons in 2021) and Pakistan (from 354 tons in 2020 to 165 tons in 2021). Although the Islamic Republic of Iran saw an increase of 15 per cent from 2020 (108 tons) to 2021 (124 tons), in 2022 there was drastic decline in seizures of cannabis resin in that country (77 tons seized, representing a 46 per cent decrease from 2021).

847. Within West Asia, Afghanistan remained the country where most of cannabis resin was seized in 2020 and 2021, followed by Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Türkiye and Lebanon. Cannabis resin originating in Afghanistan is trafficked through Central Asia, mainly to destinations within the subregion and the Russian Federation. Cannabis resin produced in Lebanon is trafficked to other countries in the Middle East and Europe.

848. Although it is challenging to have an accurate estimate of illicit cannabis cultivation due to the lack of systematic data collection in most countries, the limited data available during the period 2011–2021 suggest that there is sizeable illicit cannabis cultivation in West Asia, in particular in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon and Uzbekistan.

849. Central Asian countries continued to take measures to address illicit cannabis cultivation and conduct yearly eradication campaigns. Cannabis produced in Central Asia is mainly destined for domestic markets, with limited amounts being trafficked to the Russian Federation and sometimes to Europe. Kazakhstan continued to observe an increase in the cultivation of cannabis in 2022, with 276 instances of illicit cannabis cultivation being detected for an increase of 16 per cent from the previous year. Increases in cannabis cultivation were also identified in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, while Uzbekistan observed some decline.

850. Countries in West Asia, South-West Asia and the Middle East reported combined seizures of 62 tons of cannabis in 2021 compared with 15 tons in 2011, indicating an overall increase in trafficking over that period. On the other hand, Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus combined

witnessed a decline, with seizures totalling 14 tons of cannabis in 2021 compared with 34 tons in 2011. In the Middle East, Israel and Lebanon were the two countries most frequently mentioned by countries responding to the UNODC annual report questionnaire as being the countries of origin, departure and transit of cannabis seizures during the period 2017–2021, while in South-West Asia, Afghanistan was mentioned most frequently, and in Central Asia, it was Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan that were mentioned most frequently.

851. In CARICC member States, drugs of the cannabis group (cannabis and cannabis resin) continued to maintain a prevailing share (almost 53 per cent, or 28.8 tons) in the total amount of drugs seized in 2022 (55 tons). In 2022, 21.6 tons of cannabis were seized in CARICC member States, which was 30 per cent less than in 2021 (30.4 tons); a decrease was observed in Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan, while Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan witnessed some increase. In 2022, 7.2 tons of cannabis resin were seized in CARICC member States, which is 2.6 per cent more than in 2021 (7 tons). Seizures of cannabis increased in Kyrgyzstan by 14.1 per cent, in Tajikistan by 20.3 per cent and in Uzbekistan by 25 per cent; in other States, there was a decrease in the range of 11–33 per cent.

852. Trafficking in “skunk”, a highly potent form of cannabis, represents a challenge in Türkiye. The country reported that while there had been a decrease in the overall amount of cannabis seizures in the period 2020–2022, “skunk” seizures saw significant increases during that period. In particular, the total amount of cannabis seized in 2022 was 63.3 tons and represented a decrease of 28 per cent compared with 2020. At the same time, “skunk” seizures reached 8.6 tons in 2022, representing an increase of 56 per cent compared with the previous year.

853. Yemen, a country that has endured extreme conflict in the past several years, continued to see widespread cultivation and use of khat (*Catha edulis*), a plant-based substance not under international control. It appears that farmers in Yemen cultivate khat mainly for domestic consumption, although some of it is smuggled to Saudi Arabia. Continued conflict appears to have further contributed to increases in the cultivation and use of khat as people are attempting to sustain their livelihoods. Consumption of the substance appears to have remained stable despite the conflict. At the same time, since khat is a water-intensive crop, increased cultivation might further contribute to overall water scarcity in the country. Limited information available suggests that Yemen is also affected by trafficking in other drugs, including cannabis resin, methamphetamine, “captagon”, heroin, cocaine and mephedrone.

854. Türkiye is increasingly being used as a transit country for cocaine arriving from Latin America or transiting through Western Africa towards destination markets in Europe via the Balkan route. Since 2014, the amount of the drug seized in the country has increased sevenfold to a record 2.8 tons in 2021. Some cocaine transiting Türkiye is also destined for markets in the Middle East. In 2022, Türkiye seized 2.3 tons of cocaine, representing an 18 per cent decrease from 2021. On 24 March 2023, the Peruvian authorities reported that they had seized 2.3 tons of cocaine disguised as ceramic tiles destined for Türkiye via an expanding maritime trafficking route; they believed this was the first-ever instance of cocaine departing from a Peruvian port with a destination of Türkiye. Another major incident involving cocaine trafficking was the seizure by Dutch customs of 1.1 tons of cocaine from a container that arrived from Türkiye on 16 May 2023 at the port of Rotterdam.

855. Israel and Lebanon appear to be the most prominent domestic markets for cocaine in West Asia region. Israel identified Egypt, Libya and Lebanon (in that order) as the main transit countries for cocaine entering its territory. Since 2019, Brazil, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Panama, Paraguay and Ukraine have identified Israel as the destination for certain cocaine consignments seized in those countries.

## 6. Prevention and treatment

856. Most countries in the region continued to carry out a wide range of drug treatment and prevention measures in 2022, including policy, institutional and capacity-building work to improve health-care services, and public campaigns to raise awareness on drug use involving the governmental and non-governmental sectors, media and local communities. However, many countries directly affected by conflict in the region continue to face challenges with financial and human resources in order to carry out effective monitoring and reporting on the prevalence of drug use to ensure the development of evidence-based drug policies for their populations.

857. Out of an estimated 60 million people who used opioids for non-medical purposes in 2021, representing 1.2 per cent of the global adult population, half lived in South Asia or South-West Asia. The Middle East and South-West Asia remained the subregions with some of the highest levels of prevalence of opioid use in 2021 (3.19 per cent vis-à-vis a global average of 1.2 per cent). The main drugs of concern in South-West Asia are opiates, namely opium and heroin, while the non-medical use of tramadol continues to pose a major threat to public health in the Middle East.

858. Central Asia continued to be the subregion with high prevalence of opiate use (0.9 per cent, compared with a global average of 0.6 per cent).

859. South-West Asia had the highest prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs (29.3 per cent, or 225,000 people, compared with the global average of 11.9 per cent).

860. In 2022, a downward trend in the number of people registered with drug treatment facilities was observed in Kazakhstan (18,136 compared with 18,782 in 2021), Kyrgyzstan (7,672 compared with 8,226 in 2021) and Tajikistan (4,381 compared with 4,749 in 2021). A slight increase in that number was seen in Azerbaijan (35,097 compared with 34,602 in 2021) and Uzbekistan (5,365 compared with 5,035 in 2021).

861. The non-medical use of synthetic drugs, including prescription drugs and new psychoactive substances, is becoming of increasing concern in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus. Uzbekistan reported that in 2022, 40.5 per cent of those who received in-patient treatment were synthetic drug users, including pharmaceutical preparations with psychoactive effects, while cannabinoid users were the second most common (17.8 per cent), followed by polydrug (16.8 per cent) and heroin users (15.5 per cent).

862. According to a recent study conducted in Türkiye among persons who had been investigated for drug-related offences during 2022, cannabis remained the most commonly used drug (49.2 per cent), followed by methamphetamine (24.9 per cent), heroin (6.8 per cent), synthetic pharmaceuticals (5.9 per cent) and synthetic cannabinoid (also locally called *bonzai*, accounting for 4.3 per cent). Türkiye also reported that among the total number of patients who received treatment in health facilities in 2022 (a total of 302,911 outpatient and 18,187 in-patient applicants), 37.4 per cent were treated for heroin use (representing a reduction from 43 per cent in 2021), 37.8 per cent were treated for methamphetamine use (significant increase from 25.6 per cent in 2021), 7 per cent were treated for cannabis use (down from 11.6 per cent in 2021), 1.3 per cent were treated for synthetic cannabinoids use (reduction from 5.8 per cent in 2021), 7 per cent were treated for opiates use (increase from 4.2 per cent in 2021), 2.9 per cent were treated for cocaine use (2.7 per cent in 2021) and the rest were treated for “ecstasy” and other drug types.

863. Even though it continues to be a challenge to obtain accurate data on the prevalence of “captagon” use in the Middle East, record seizures of this drug in 2021 and various qualitative data suggest that this substance remained among the most prevalent drugs used in that subregion.

864. There has also been an increase in methamphetamine use in Afghanistan and in the wider South-West Asia region in general in recent years.

865. Türkiye continued to face an increasing threat from methamphetamine use to its population's health, as trafficking in this substance has increased over the past years and record seizures of this substance were recorded in 2022. The share of methamphetamine-related deaths out of all deaths caused by drugs in Türkiye continued to increase over the past several years from 6.2 per cent (41 out of 657 substance-related death cases) in 2018, to 31.2 per cent (98 out of 314 cases) in 2020, to 46.3 per cent (125 out of 270 cases) in 2021 and finally to 56.9 per cent (140 of 246 cases) in 2022. To address this threat, various drug use prevention programmes were carried out in 2022, including a project to increase awareness on harm and deaths caused by methamphetamine as well as the implementation of training modules for law enforcement in addressing the methamphetamine threat in the context of the Methamphetamine Action Plan launched on 2 August 2022.

## E. Europe

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The quantity and variety of substances available in illicit drug markets in Europe pose a considerable public health concern and create new challenges to law enforcement, regulation, and the provision of treatment and services to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use.

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Several European countries have continued to establish regulated markets for cannabis for non-medical purposes. These programmes do not appear to be consistent with the drug control conventions.

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Several European countries have experienced an increase in the non-medical use of ketamine, which has led to an increase in the number of individuals seeking treatment. This emphasizes the need for close monitoring of ketamine and continued international collaboration to counter its illicit distribution.

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### 1. Major developments

866. Countries in Europe continue to face growing health risks and concerns because of the rapid emergence of a wider range of substances and an increasingly complex pattern of

drug use. Limited knowledge about the health risks of new synthetic drugs, particularly the more novel ones when used in mixtures, has posed significant challenges to the provision of treatment and services aimed at reducing the negative health and social consequences of use of such drugs. Greater support should be provided to law enforcement and health authorities in monitoring the situation and educating users on the health risks of polydrug use.

867. The increasing availability and consumption of a diverse range of cannabis-based products in Europe poses significant regulatory challenges to authorities in the region. While most countries have instituted medical cannabis programmes, some continue to take steps to establish regulated markets for cannabis for non-medical purposes. Malta has adopted the National Drug Policy 2023–2033 and hosted the second ministerial conference with four other European countries to discuss regulations on the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes. Luxembourg has passed a bill allowing the home cultivation of cannabis for recreational use, and Germany has provided further details of their pilot legislative projects for the limited cultivation and distribution of cannabis for non-medical purposes. The Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands has initiated the start-up phase of its “cannabis experiment” and further pilot trials have been conducted in Switzerland.

868. In 2021, States members of the European Union encountered an alarming escalation in illicit drug trafficking and interdictions. The aggregate seizures of cocaine soared to an unprecedented level, totalling 303 tons. This marked increase was particularly evident at smaller European ports. Additionally, seizures of new psychoactive substances reached 8.5 tons, with the substances seized being predominantly synthetic cannabinoids and new synthetic opioids. This notable upsurge in both the volume and diversity of illicit drugs represents a significant and evolving challenge for drug control within the European Union.

869. EMCDDA and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have noted an increase in the non-medical use of ketamine across Europe, which has prompted concerns over potential severe health implications. Belgium, France, Italy and Spain have reported an increase in the number of individuals seeking treatment for such use of the substance, underscoring the need for close monitoring of both usage and its impact on public health. In 2022, EMCDDA published data on ketamine detected in wastewater, the highest amounts being found in cities in Denmark, Italy, Portugal and Spain. From December 2022 to January 2023, several European countries participated in INCB Operation Knockout, the aim of which was to combat illicit manufacturing and distribution of several substances, including ketamine, which was being trafficked via various postal and courier services.

## 2. Regional cooperation

870. From December 2022 to January 2023, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom participated in INCB Operation Knockout. The operation focused on the exchange of intelligence with the aim of identifying and dismantling illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical carisoprodol, 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through the international post, express mail, courier services and related modalities.

871. In January 2023, EMCDDA updated its memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Health of Ukraine. The new arrangement will enable enhanced cooperation in the collection, processing, summarizing and analysis of information on the drug and alcohol situation and will facilitate comparability between the drug data of the European Union and those of Ukraine.

872. In February 2023, 20 suspected money-launderers and drug traffickers were arrested in Spain as a result of a joint investigation supported by Europol. The operation involved units of the Civil Guard of Spain and the Central Directorate for Anti-Drug Services of Italy and resulted in the seizure of more than €5.5 million in criminal assets and over 2 tons of drugs.

873. In June 2023, INCB Learning held a two-day virtual workshop focused on raising awareness about the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes as part of the Board's ongoing efforts to support Member States in ensuring that essential medicines are available while preventing their diversion and abuse. The event brought together officials from the competent national authorities of seven countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – and a diverse group of stakeholders, which included representatives of palliative care associations, experts in drug control and public health and members of the international community. Over the course of the two days, participants discussed various themes related to improving access to controlled substances for medical purposes, including regulatory frameworks, barriers to access, and the importance of national and international cooperation.

874. A total of 171 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of 35 countries in Europe have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. INCB Learning has now developed five e-modules, which cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the

international drug control framework and how to ensure the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. E-modules are available upon registration through INCB Learning to officials of competent national authorities at no cost.

875. In June 2023, the Paris Pact expert working group on precursors was held in Sofia. Participants from 34 countries and 10 international and regional bodies joined the event. A total of 10 recommendations were formulated for review and endorsement at the seventeenth Policy Consultative Group meeting to be convened in Vienna on 11 and 12 December 2023.

876. In May 2023, Serbia, in cooperation with Europol and Belgium, France and Netherlands (Kingdom of the), dismantled one of the biggest drug trafficking organizations in the Balkan region. During the operation, a total of 23 individuals were arrested, including the three leaders of the organization, who were considered high-value targets by Europol. A total of 15 vehicles and €3 million were seized.

877. In June 2023, Eurojust and Europol supported law enforcement authorities in Germany, Italy and Netherlands (Kingdom of the) in the dismantling of an international drug traffickers' network. During the operation, 35 suspects were arrested and €1 million was seized.

878. In June 2023, Europol supported Bosnia and Herzegovina in identifying and dismantling a large-scale criminal network involved in the trafficking of drugs and weapons, money-laundering and corruption. The investigation focused on the activities of a criminal network involved mainly in the production and trafficking of drugs in the Western Balkans, the European Union and South America. During the operation, 38 suspects were arrested and over 300 kg of cannabis, together with real estate and cash, with a total combined value of more than €6 million, were seized.

879. In June 2023, the European Council approved the creation of a new European Union drugs agency. The new agency, the European Union Drugs Agency, will replace EMCDDA. The agency's mandate will be strengthened and will include such tasks as developing security threat assessments, enhancing cooperation with national focal points and developing evidence-based interventions.

880. In July 2023, the INCB Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme participated in capacity-building training in Budapest for law enforcement officers from police, customs administration and postal security agencies. The training event was organized by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration and focused on enhancing the knowledge and skills



needed to identify and safely interdict dangerous substances. Participants received instruction on IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence HD targeting tools to improve global intelligence-sharing.

### 3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

881. The three international drug control treaties require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor licit activities involving internationally controlled substances and assess the level of availability of those substances for licit medical and scientific purposes.

882. There has been a considerable increase in the availability of opioid analgesics in Europe over the past 20 years, the level of consumption of opioid analgesics rising from 73,944 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> per million inhabitants in 2002 to 221,959 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2021. However, the pattern is slightly different in various parts of the region. Western Europe accounted for most of the consumption in 2021 (212,696 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, or 95 per cent of the total). Austria, Belgium, Germany, Gibraltar, Iceland, Spain, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Switzerland all reported consumption above 10,000 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>. Consumption in South-Eastern Europe increased from 2,056 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2002 to 8,410 in 2021. Croatia, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia reported a consumption level of 1,000 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>. Eastern Europe also experienced an increase, albeit a smaller one (from 344 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2002 to 851 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> in 2021). Among the various opioids, fentanyl was the most commonly consumed in 2021 (156,159 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), followed by oxycodone (26,478 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and morphine (21,372 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>).

883. Adopted in 2011, Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 54/6 encourages Member States to report consumption of psychotropic substances to the Board. Although some European countries have consistently reported such consumption over the past 10 years, the proportion of European countries doing so decreased from 41 per cent in 2011 to 32.5 per cent in 2021.

884. As regards precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants in the context of resolution 49/3 of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal

uses, and, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means. As at 1 November 2023, of the 45 countries on the European continent, 40 (89 per cent) had provided at least one estimate of annual legitimate requirements for the import of ephedrine, ephedrine preparations, pseudoephedrine or pseudoephedrine preparations to the Board. However, two (or approximately 5 per cent) of them have not updated their estimates in the past 10 years, which undermines the potential of annual legitimate requirements as a tool to guide exporting countries on the legitimate requirements of importing countries and thus prevent the oversupply and diversion of such substances into illicit channels, as well as ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes.

885. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,<sup>164</sup> psychotropic substances<sup>165</sup> and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.<sup>166</sup> In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

### 4. National legislation, policy and action

886. In December 2022, the Pompidou Group adopted a new work programme for 2023–2025, establishing four priorities, namely: (i) promoting sustainable drug and addiction policies in conformity with human rights principles; (ii) safeguarding democratic societies by addressing addictions that impact human autonomy; (iii) protecting the rights of persons belonging to vulnerable and risk groups with drug use and addiction problems; and (iv) reducing the availability of illicit drugs and preventing the diversion of precursors. The new programme sets out relevant action items relating to each priority, and the expected results are to be delivered and acted on according to set timelines for each activity.

887. Several European countries have placed the cannabinoid hexahydrocannabinol (HHC) and its derivatives under national control owing to its increasing availability

<sup>164</sup>E/INCB/2023/2.

<sup>165</sup>E/INCB/2023/3.

<sup>166</sup>E/INCB/2023/4.

in Western Europe and the severe health impact associated with its use. Since 13 June 2023, the production, sale and use of HHC, HHC-acetate (HHCO) and hexahydrocannabinophorol (HHCP) have been prohibited in France. Similar measures have been implemented in other countries, including Belgium, Cyprus and Sweden.

888. Albania adopted a law to regulate the production of cannabis for medicinal and industrial purposes in July 2023. Under the proposed legislation, all cultivation and production of, and trade in, cannabis for medicinal and industrial purposes would be for export only, and a national agency for the control and monitoring of those activities would be established. There would be no limit on the THC content of cannabis for medicinal purposes, while the maximum permitted THC content of cannabis for industrial purposes would be 0.8 per cent.

889. In June 2023, Malta adopted the National Drug Policy 2023–2033, aimed at reducing the demand and the supply of illicit drugs in the country. In September 2023, the country also hosted its second ministerial conference with four other European countries (Czechia, Germany, Luxembourg and Netherlands (Kingdom of the)) to discuss developments related to regulations and laws regarding the use of cannabis for non-medical or non-scientific purpose.

890. The Government of Luxembourg passed a bill allowing the home cultivation and possession of cannabis for non-medical purposes in June 2023. Under the new law, adults will be allowed to grow up to four cannabis plants per household for private non-medical use provided that the cultivation is not visible from the outside.

891. In April 2023, the Government of Czechia approved the Addiction Policy Action Plan for 2023–2025. The action plan establishes five priority areas: prevention and treatment of addiction; regulated market for substances with addictive potential; tax collection according to the level of risk of products with addictive potential; promotion of a balanced addiction policy; and minimization of the impact of the crisis in Ukraine on the national addiction situation. One of the specific activities to be carried out under this plan is to develop a model for the regulated market of cannabis for non-medical use and submit it for discussion in the country.

892. Following an announcement in 2022 relating to the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes in Germany, the Government of that country approved a draft law regulating the availability of the substance in August 2023. The law will be implemented on the basis of two pillars, the first of which enables private cultivation by adults for their own consumption, as well as communal, non-commercial cultivation by

non-profit associations, or “social clubs”, of up to 500 members. Private cultivation will be limited to three plants and individuals may have less than 25 grams in their possession in public. The second pillar will allow the distribution of cannabis in specialist shops in specific regions for a limited duration. The effects of a commercial cannabis supply chain on health and youth protection in the relevant pilot projects will be investigated and evaluated. The draft law on the first pillar is expected to enter into force at the end of 2023.

893. In February 2023, the Kingdom of the Netherlands announced its decision to initiate the start-up phase of its “cannabis experiment” following its enactment of the Controlled Cannabis Supply Chain Experiment Bill in July 2020 and the subsequent preparatory phase of the experiment. During the start-up phase, which is expected to begin in December 2023, cannabis growers in the municipalities of Tilburg and Breda will be able to deliver cannabis to coffee shops on a small scale. The start-up phase is restricted to participating municipalities, a trading stock of 500 grams of regulated products and a maximum duration of six months.

894. Pilot trials involving the controlled distribution of cannabis for non-medical purposes have been authorized in Switzerland following the amendment of the country’s drug legislation in 2021. The trials are being conducted by the cantonal and communal authorities, not at the federal level, and the non-medical use of cannabis other than for the purposes of the pilot trials remains prohibited by the Narcotics Act. As at June 2023, pilot trials in five major cities (Basel, Bern, Geneva, Lausanne and Zurich) had been authorized and cannabis for non-medical purposes was to be distributed in pharmacies, cannabis social clubs and non-profit stores and through other channels. The evaluation results of the pilot trials are not expected until 2024.

**895. The Board wishes to remind all parties to the 1961 Convention as amended that, under article 4, paragraph (c), thereof, the parties are required to take such legislative and administrative measures as may be necessary, subject to the provisions of the Convention, to limit exclusively to medical and scientific purposes the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution of, trade in, use and possession of drugs.**

896. Switzerland amended its regulations concerning the prescription of diacetylmorphine in April 2023, taking into account the special needs of older, less mobile patients with comorbidities. The amendment provided for the possibility of delegating the administration of diacetylmorphine to appropriate external institutions such as pharmacies, and of providing patients with several take-home doses for treatment in specific, strictly supervised cases.

897. The Kingdom of the Netherlands amended its Opium Act to put nitrous oxide under national control, in response to the adverse health impact associated with its use and as recommended by the Coordination Centre for Assessment and Monitoring of New Drugs. Since 1 January 2023, the production and possession of and trade in nitrous oxide has been restricted for the food industry and for medical purposes.

898. In February 2023, the Parliament of Croatia adopted a new national strategy on addiction policies. The new strategy defines priorities, special goals and measures with respect to addictions and behavioural addictions (to alcohol, tobacco, drugs, gambling or betting and use of the Internet and social networks), and is aimed at reducing demand for and the availability of illegal substances in the country by 2023. The strategy will be implemented through two operational action plans.

899. In March 2023, France adopted an interministerial strategy for mobilization against addictive behaviour for the period 2023–2027, which is aimed at treating all addictive behaviour as an overarching problem. Under that framework, prevention and education are a priority in providing everyone with the scientific knowledge and psychosocial skills to avoid drugs and other addictive behaviour. Measures to prevent addictive behaviours in different social establishments will be stepped up and integrated into service projects.

900. In May 2023, the Parliament of Lithuania adopted a national agenda on drug, tobacco and alcohol control, consumption prevention and harm reduction. Aimed at establishing the objectives, areas of focus and impact indicators of a long-term policy, the national agenda focuses on reducing demand for and supply of drugs, tobacco and alcohol and harm to the individual, society and the State.

901. Slovakia is currently rolling out a new drug strategy for the period up to 2030. One of the pillars of the strategy is increased national and international cooperation. Several ministries will be cooperating to achieve common goals, while the Slovak Police Force will focus on the detection of organized groups at both national and international levels. The detection of laboratories manufacturing new psychoactive substances, the detection of cross-border crime and prioritization of the protection of entry points into the country will be key tasks for the police force.

902. In December 2022, Montenegro enacted a rule book on methods of drug disposal and keeping records of drugs that have been seized and disposed of. The rule book was published in the Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 132/2022 of 5 December 2022, and entered into force on 13 December 2022.

## 5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

903. According to the EMCDDA European Drug Report for 2023, the scale of complexity of illicit drug manufacture in Europe continues to grow. In 2021, a total of 434 synthetic drug manufacturing laboratories were dismantled in the European Union. Some of those production sites were large-scale facilities. Capacity for synthetic drug production is high in general, and production processes are increasingly diversified, as evidenced by the recent seizure of preprecursors used to manufacture the precursor chemicals needed to produce amphetamine, methamphetamine and MDMA, thus circumventing existing controls.

904. In October 2023 the Spanish National Police and the Tax Agency reported dismantling in Barcelona a clandestine laboratory that had been producing dangerous new psychoactive substances, using information provided through the INCB GRIDS programme. Three people have been arrested, and materials for the production of more than 7,500,000 doses of new psychoactive substances, such as the stimulant known as “monkey powder”, the synthetic cannabinoid ADB-BUTINACA and the synthetic cathinone *alpha*-PiHP, have been seized. These synthetic drugs were shipped worldwide, including to Europe, North America and Oceania by parcel post.

905. In 2021, the number of dismantled clandestine laboratories producing cocaine and methamphetamine increased in European Union countries. Illicit manufacture of amphetamine remained stable, while the detection of MDMA manufacturing sites decreased by a quarter, most likely reflecting the shift to the production of other substances.

906. A total of 12 European Union member States reported the dismantling of a total of 261 methamphetamine laboratories in 2021 – an increase of 23 per cent in comparison with 2020 (when 213 laboratories were dismantled). Those laboratories included various medium- and large-scale facilities in the Kingdom of the Netherlands (15) and Belgium (9). Small- to medium-scale methamphetamine manufacturing sites were dismantled in Czechia (188).

907. A total of 723 kg of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine (tablets and powder) were seized in 15 European Union countries. In comparison, 955 kg were seized in 2021 (a decrease of 24 per cent compared with 2020) in 12 countries (an increase of 25 per cent, compared with the 8 countries where such seizures were effected in 2020). Additionally, 5,100 litres of BMK, 9.7 tons of MAPA (used to make P-2-P) and 4.5 tons of MAMDP (used to make 3,4-MDP-2-P) were seized in the European Union in 2021.

908. A record amount of 303 tons of cocaine was seized by European Union member States over the course of 2021. Belgium (96 tons), Netherlands (Kingdom of the) (72 tons) and Spain (49 tons) accounted for three quarters of all the cocaine seized. Seizures in the second-biggest European port (Antwerp) rose from 91 tons in 2021 to 110 tons in 2022. The recent trend is that increasingly smaller ports throughout Europe are being targeted. In the United Kingdom, cocaine seizures by police and border forces increased by 68 per cent, from 11,141 kg in the year ending March 2021 to 18,767 kg in the latest year (fiscal year ending March 2022), the highest seized quantities on record. This was due to an increase in the number of seizures of 100 kg or more by the United Kingdom Border Force.

909. The unprecedented expansion of the global cocaine market has followed significant changes in both source and destination markets. Around 2012, the increasing involvement of groups from the Balkan region, which directly procure cocaine from Latin America, increased competition among traffickers supplying markets in Western and Central Europe, the second largest destination market for the drug, triggering improvements in the efficiency of the supply chain, increasing purity and lowering prices and paving the way for a steady increase in consumption.

910. Cannabis remained the most frequently seized drug in European Union member States in 2021. Member States of the European Union recorded a total of 202,000 seizures comprising 816 tons of cannabis resin, marking an increase from 588 tons in 2020. Concurrently, there were 240,000 incidents involving the confiscation of cannabis herb, the total amount of which was 256 tons, in contrast to 157 tons in the previous year. Separately, Türkiye accounted for 9,800 seizures (33 tons) of cannabis resin and 52,500 seizures (31 tons) of cannabis herb.

911. According to Italian authorities, since 2020, Italian ports, mainly the southern port of Gioia Tauro, have been increasingly used as trans-shipment points for cocaine being trafficked eastward to ports on the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea. At those ports, large shipments of cocaine from South America are received by Balkan criminal groups, who ensure its wholesale distribution and transportation to markets and stockpiling areas in Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and (prior to the armed conflict) Ukraine. Significant developments have also been observed in Türkiye, where seizures almost quadrupled between 2014 and 2017 (from 393 kg to 1,485 kg), and Romania, where the number of cocaine seizures – likely reflecting the domestic retail market – began to increase in 2015, a similar increase in Bulgaria beginning two years later.

912. In May 2022, EMCDDA released its annual wastewater analysis publication. The publication included data from 104 cities and pointed at distinct geographical patterns of use across different European cities. Usage of cocaine remains high in cities located in western and southern Europe, in particular Belgium, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Portugal and Spain. Detection of amphetamine in wastewater showed that that substance was found at a much lower level in cities in the south of Europe, although an increase was observed. At the same time, the highest quantities were detected in northern European countries (Belgium, Finland, Germany, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Sweden). Methamphetamine traces were more concentrated in regions where the substance has been previously encountered (Belgium, Czechia, eastern Germany, Slovakia, Spain and Türkiye). While the presence of methamphetamine remains very low in other regions, an increase in southern and central European countries has been observed. The highest occurrences of MDMA were found in Belgium, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Spain and Portugal. For the first time ever, data related to ketamine were published and the highest occurrences were observed in cities in Denmark, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

913. In July 2023, the police of Germany seized around 300 kg of amphetamine and dismantled the biggest drug laboratory for the manufacture of counterfeit “captagon” tablets in German history. In addition to 300 kg of the active ingredient, 2.5 tons of cutting agents, a tablet-making machine and several pairs of punches with the “captagon” logo were seized. In a joint report, the police of Germany and EMCDDA examined the role of Europe in “captagon” trafficking. The report highlighted that while the overall quantity of amphetamine seized in the European Union was relatively stable, large amounts of “captagon” tablets were seized in the European Union in transit to the Arabian Peninsula. Türkiye seized more amphetamine than the entire European Union in 2017 and 2018 as a result of large seizures of “captagon” tablets (6.6 tons and 5.7 tons, respectively). According to the report, there may be a connection between the decrease in seizures in Türkiye and the increase in seizures in the European Union, probably owing to a change in trafficking routes.

914. In 2021, a record 8.5 tons of new psychoactive substances were seized by European Union member States. The substances reported include synthetic cannabinoids, hexahydrocannabinol, synthetic cathinones, new synthetic opioids and benzimidazole opioids. Half of the substances reported by the European Union early warning system were synthetic cannabinoids (24), representing an increase of 60 per cent compared with 2020, when 15 new synthetic cannabinoids were detected. The increased diversity is likely owed to illicit drug producers’ attempts to circumvent the

2021 class-wide ban on synthetic cannabinoids imposed by China. National estimates of the use of new psychoactive substances (excluding ketamine) among young adults (aged 15 to 34) range from 0.1 per cent in Latvia to 5.1 per cent in Romania. At the end of 2022, EMCDDA was monitoring a total of 930 new psychoactive substances, 41 of which were reported for the first time in Europe in 2022.

915. Since 2009, 74 new opioids have been identified on the European drug market. However, in 2022 only one new opioid was identified. Preliminary data for 2023 suggest that benzimidazole opioids are increasingly being detected in Latvia, while Estonian police also reported seizing multiple mixtures containing metonitazene mixed with bromazolam and the animal tranquillizer xylazine. Metonitazene has been added to Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended, while bromazolam and xylazine are not currently under international control.

916. Cyprus reported that in 2022, a total of 1,017 cases relating to illegal addictive substances – involving 1,084 people – had been recorded, including 136 instances involving cannabis plants, 166 instances involving MDMA pills, and the seizure of approximately 348 kg of cannabis herb, 39 kg of cannabis resin, 38 kg of cocaine, 1.5 kg of synthetic drugs, 3.5 kg of MDMA and 4.4 kg of methamphetamine.

917. Estonia reported that the number of drug-related fatalities related to fentanyl-like synthetic opioids or benzimidazoles rose sharply in 2022. While those substances are still trafficked mainly by land using vehicles, including trucks, or by post, in some instances trafficking using drones was observed. Large-scale trafficking in Estonia seems to be linked to the sale by vendors of multiple substances, using legal business structures, and money-laundering networks. Encrypted social media platforms are increasingly being used for the sale of such substances.

918. The Russian Federation reported that in 2022, law enforcement agencies recorded over 177,000 crimes related to illegal drugs. Of that total, 110,895 crimes were related to the trafficking of those substances and 829 involved seizures related to the manufacture of drugs. Additionally, 82,800 websites and links to resources containing information on drug trafficking were blocked.

## 6. Prevention and treatment

919. While most European countries have rigorous systems for the collection of the latest prevalence and treatment data, the increasing number of new substances, together with increasingly complex patterns of polydrug use, has posed significant challenges to authorities in terms of the provision

of prevention, drug identification and treatment services. According to EMCDDA, coverage of and access to treatment and services to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use remain uneven both within and between countries, and in some cases fall short of countries' needs.

920. An increasingly complex pattern of polydrug use, together with the expanded availability of synthetic opioids and synthetic stimulants, emphasizes the need to review the distribution and administration of the opioid antagonist naloxone and to develop more effective responses to reduce drug overdose deaths and drug-related poisonings.

921. According to the European Drug Report 2023, cannabis remains the most commonly used substance in Europe, some 22.6 million adults (8 per cent of adults) reporting its use in 2021. The second most commonly used substance is cocaine, approximately 3.7 million adults (1.3 per cent of adults) reporting its use in the past year. Heroin use remained stable, around 1 million people (0.3 per cent of adults) reporting use of the substance in 2021.

922. Data from the 2022 Crime Survey for England and Wales suggest a similar drug use pattern, cannabis being reported as the most commonly used drug in England and Wales. In 2022, about 7 per cent of adults reported having used cannabis in the past year, a further 2 per cent reporting having used powder cocaine. Prevalence of "ecstasy" use dropped to its lowest level (0.7 per cent) in 2022, which may be the result of government restrictions on social contact during the COVID-19 pandemic.

923. The Russian Federation reported that as at 1 January 2023, the number of patients receiving treatment for drug use disorders remained at the same level as the previous year (229,700), of the 391,700 patients registered in specialized medical institutions of the Ministry of Health. The number of people who use drugs who registered in such institutions for the first time totalled 14,000.

924. Similarly, the World Drug Report 2023 suggests that opioids are the most common primary drugs of misuse among people in drug treatment in most of Europe. Among the different subregions, Eastern Europe continues to have the highest estimated prevalence rate of people who inject drugs (1.3 per cent of the adult population) and the highest prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs in Europe (25.4 per cent).

925. According to UNODC, Ukraine is among the countries with the highest prevalence rates of people who inject drugs and are living with HIV. During the period 2018–2020, there were around 350,000 people who inject drugs in the country (1.17 per cent of the adult population). The opioids

injected include heroin and methadone sourced from illicit markets. An estimated 20.3 per cent of people who inject drugs are living with HIV and more than half are living with hepatitis C. Disruption of basic services in the country since the beginning of the current crisis in 2022 suggests that challenges are faced by people who use drugs in receiving timely HIV diagnosis and uninterrupted antiretroviral treatment.

926. While all European Union member States and Norway have needle and syringe programmes, coverage and access to those programmes remains a challenge. Only 5 of the 17 countries with available data reached WHO service provision targets in 2021. Opioid agonist treatment is implemented in all European countries and has been recognized as crucial in mitigating overdose deaths. Methadone is the most widely used agonist, 56 per cent of clients receiving that substance, while 35 per cent receive buprenorphine-based medications. In view of the health risks caused by an increasing number of illicit drugs, a considerable number of countries also reported the implementation of drug identification services, take-home naloxone programmes and supervised drug consumption rooms.

927. The latest data available to EMCDDA suggests that cannabis use was the main reason for first-time specialized treatment. An estimated 55,000 cannabis users received their first treatment in 2021, accounting for 45 per cent of new cases. Most cannabis users receiving treatment were male, with an average age of 26. While the total number of first-time treatment recipients decreased slightly when compared with the level before the COVID-19 pandemic, a recent EMCDDA review revealed an increase in the availability of treatment options, some of which are delivered through telemedicine or digital applications.

928. With an estimated 25,000 first-time treatment recipients in 2021, cocaine was the second main drug of use among first-time treatment recipients within the European Union. Available mostly as cocaine powder, but sometimes also as “crack” cocaine, it accounted for 27 per cent of acute poisoning cases in hospital emergency room incidents and was the substance most commonly associated with such conditions. Most cocaine users receiving treatment were male users with an average age of 33. An estimated 7,500 “crack” users began treatment in 2021, which indicates the expansion of the use of that substance within marginalized groups.

929. The number of drug-induced deaths in the European Union increased slightly in 2021, reaching more than 6,000 (around 5,800 in 2020), mainly because of new data reported by Germany. While opioids, including heroin and its metabolites, often used in combination with other substances, are associated mainly with overdose deaths, an increasing number of deaths in the Baltic countries were

due to polydrug use involving synthetic opioids such as benzimidazoles and fentanyl derivatives. Furthermore, a considerable increase in overdose deaths has also been observed among older drug users (50 to 64-year-olds). The growing emergence of new synthetic opioids and their adverse health impact call for more targeted prevention and treatment services.

930. Both UNODC and EMCDDA have highlighted an increase in the non-medical use of ketamine in Europe in recent years. Ketamine is included in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines. It is used in human and veterinary medicine mainly as an anaesthetic but also for the treatment of short-term, acute pain. However, it is also commonly misused, either by snorting or by injection. Sometimes it is also found added to other drugs. The long-term use of ketamine can cause severe health problems. Since some European countries (Belgium, France, Italy and Spain) have reported a recent increase in the number of people receiving treatment for the non-medical use of ketamine, its use and health impact should be closely monitored.

931. A special report released by EMCDDA draws attention to the use of nitrous oxide as a growing concern for Europe, especially among young people. As the substance has become more accessible and cheaper over the past few years, its popularity has grown, partly also because of a general perception that the health risks associated with its use are low. Cases of poisonings, burns and lung injuries have been reported in some countries, and prolonged use of the substance can result in nerve damage. Much greater attention should thus be given to this substance in drug prevention and treatment programmes.

932. A growing interest in the therapeutical potential of psychedelic drugs and the potential risks in their unregulated use has also been noted. While clinical studies on the use of psychedelics are conducted in some countries, most of the health, wellness and tourism businesses involving the use of psychedelics have been operating without much regulatory oversight. Unsupervised and experimental use of those substances, even in microdoses as self-medication, may put some vulnerable populations at risk.

933. The latest national reports on health behaviour in school-aged children provide updates on drug use patterns among young people in some European countries (Austria, Greece, Greenland, Finland, Italy and Scotland). Cannabis remained the most popular drug among 15-year-olds in 2021 and 2022; Sweden reported increasing cannabis use among boys, and Austria recorded increasing use among girls.

934. In the United Kingdom, recent surveys among secondary school pupils reveal a decrease in the prevalence

of lifetime and recent illicit drug use, the proportion of pupils who reported taking any drug falling from 24 per cent (2018) to 18 per cent (2021). There was a similar trend among those who reported taking any drug in the past year, the proportion of such individuals decreasing from 17 per cent (2018) to 12 per cent (2021).

935. In Estonia, studies on syringe residues from used syringes have been conducted since 2021 as part of the provision of treatment and services to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use, enabling a better understanding of the use of injectable drugs in different regions and locations where treatment and services are provided. In 2022, more than half of the syringes contained amphetamine (66 per cent), followed by methamphetamine (28 per cent) and other substances. Isotonitazene and other synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, furanylfentanyl and carfentanil were also found.

## F. Oceania

Pacific island States have confirmed the transformation of their countries from solely transit sites along drug trafficking routes to destination markets for synthetic drugs, posing significant challenges to communities and their public health systems. Law enforcement and customs agencies of these countries reported multiple drug seizures, particularly of cannabis and methamphetamine. Transnational organized crime, especially drug trafficking, has been recognized as one of the most challenging issues facing the Pacific region.

Transnational organized criminal groups were attempting to traffic unprecedented amounts of cocaine to Australia, although the methamphetamine market remained the predominant illicit drug market. Law enforcement authorities highlighted the need to address organized crime and violence related to trafficking in large quantities of drugs to the region.

### 1. Major developments

936. The Pacific Islands Forum “Pacific security outlook report 2022–2023” highlights transnational organized crime as one of the region’s priority focus areas. The report noted that transnational organized criminal groups had adapted to COVID-19-related border closures, resulting in increased channels and platforms for illicit activity, with a surge in

transnational criminal activity expected with the reopening of borders across the region. The import, trans-shipment, sale and possession of drugs, together with precursor trafficking, were the most prevalent transnational criminal activities in the region. While Pacific island States had mainly been affected as transit points in the past, domestic illicit drug markets had grown across the region over the past 10 years, leading to increases in drug use disorders and mental health issues. Some countries also reported increases in crimes related to drug trafficking, such as burglary, violence, intimidation and extortion, and, in larger countries, increasing use of firearms. In countries such as Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand and Tonga, non-medical drug use had been observed to harm families, with an increased risk of sexual violence, child neglect, and poor health, educational and employment outcomes. The report also noted that a causal relationship between illicit drug use and child labour had been identified in Kiribati.

937. The Pacific Islands Forum *Second Quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2022* noted that only four<sup>167</sup> of the Forum’s member States were party to all three international drug control conventions and that, as a result, drug-related legislation across some Pacific island States was outdated and ill-equipped to address emerging issues. The region faced rising levels of crime and drug misuse and, despite commitments made by Pacific island States to address trafficking and transnational crime, there continued to be a lack of information on drug trafficking. However, efforts were under way among regional customs and law enforcement bodies, such as the Oceania Customs Organization and the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, to enhance data collection on and analysis of transnational crime.

938. In previous reports, the Board has highlighted that non-parties to the international drug control conventions are concentrated in Oceania, which remains highly vulnerable to drug and precursor trafficking in view of its extensive maritime borders. **INCB reiterates its call upon non-parties to take steps towards accession to, and full implementation of, the international drug control conventions to facilitate action against the drug problem in all its forms. The Board also encourages regional and bilateral partners to support countries in the region to this end, with a view to ensuring that these States can benefit from the implementation of the conventions, in particular in improving the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes, preventing and addressing drug trafficking, strengthening international cooperation in criminal matters and providing evidence-based prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services.**

<sup>167</sup> Fiji, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of) and Tonga.

939. Although the methamphetamine market remained the largest illicit stimulant market in Australia, transnational organized criminal groups were attempting to traffic unprecedented amounts of cocaine to Australia. Wastewater analysis found that over the 12-month period from September 2021 to August 2022, at least 3.3 tons of cocaine were consumed in Australia; less than the 5.6 tons consumed in the 12-month period ending in August 2020. In 2022 and 2023, large seizures of cocaine were made in Oceania.

940. In 2023, UNODC launched a new transnational organized crime programme based in Fiji and aimed at supporting Pacific island States in addressing cybercrime, money-laundering, environmental crime and trafficking.

## 2. Regional cooperation

941. Security leaders from 25 countries attended the fourth meeting of the Joint Heads of Pacific Security in Nadi, Fiji, in November 2022. The participants agreed to establish a partnership for the sharing of information to enhance regional maritime security, with a view to mitigating the security issues faced by Pacific island States as a result of climate change, illegal fishing, drug trafficking and other threats.

942. In November 2022, a UNODC regional workshop on synthetic drugs was held in Nadi with the participation of law enforcement, public health and forensic experts from Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. At the workshop, participants confirmed that their countries had become destinations for synthetic drugs, in addition to being points of transit for drug trafficking between East and South-East Asia and the Americas. Cannabis remained a major concern in the region, but several countries, including Fiji, Samoa and Tonga, reported that methamphetamine had now become the primary drug of concern and was causing a strain on public health systems. The lack of drug-related data within the region and its implications were acknowledged by participants, as was limited forensic testing capacity.

943. From 28 November to 9 December 2022, the Oceania Customs Organization, in partnership with INCB, the Universal Postal Union, the Australian Border Force and the United States Postal Inspection Service, held a two-week training activity in Hagatna, Guam, for the Northern Pacific subregion. The first week of training focused on the use of the Oceania Customs Organization Pacific Small Craft mobile application and All Partners Access Network technology, which provide a secure platform for the exchange of information. The second week focused on the detection and interdiction of suspicious parcels arriving through air freight, courier and post, focusing on new psychoactive substances, opioids and fentanyl-type substances, as well as controlled

drugs. The GRIDS Programme delivered an awareness-raising and capacity-building workshop on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids and related chemicals and on the interregional and intraregional exchange of intelligence and cross-border cooperation for 19 senior customs and postal security officers. The training focused on capacity-building to enhance communications among the authorities of the Northern Pacific subregion concerning safe handling and interdiction approaches for dangerous substances.

944. From December 2022 to January 2023, the authorities of Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, Micronesia (Federated States of), New Zealand, the Northern Mariana Islands, Solomon Islands and Tonga participated in the GRIDS Programme's Operation Knockout, aimed at identifying and dismantling illicit manufacturing and distribution points for non-medical carisoprodol, 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, GBL and ketamine trafficked through the international post, express mail, courier services and related modalities.

945. From 20 to 31 March 2023, the Oceania Customs Organization held a two-week workshop in Tonga, with the support of INCB, the Universal Postal Union, the Australian Border Force and the United States Postal Inspection Service. Customs officers from the Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu attended the workshop, which focused on small craft intelligence, including the use of the Oceania Customs Organization Pacific Small Craft mobile application. The application was now used by more than 300 officials, who had recorded over 2,000 movements leading to the apprehension of 1,200 vessels. During the second week of the workshop, training on postal inspection and the use of intelligence-gathering tools was led by the GRIDS Programme for 32 enforcement officers from police, customs and postal security authorities from 14 countries and territories in the South Pacific subregion. Subsequent training was held by the GRIDS Programme for the authorities of Samoa on 4 April 2023. Both INCB training activities followed a practical curriculum covering the safe identification and interdiction of dangerous substances. Participants also received instruction on the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools to improve cross-border intelligence-sharing.

946. In March 2023, UNODC held regional multi-agency training on cryptocurrencies and darknet investigations in Nadi. The training focused on the new Internet-based technologies being exploited to facilitate trafficking in opioids and synthetic drugs.

947. In May 2023, the UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme, in partnership with the United States Navy, held a one-week training activity on maritime crime scene



management for the Maritime Police, Navy and Customs Enforcement Division of Fiji in Suva. Building upon virtual training conducted in 2021 and 2022 for participants from Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu, the activity was aimed at creating a more secure maritime environment by countering illicit activities such as drug trafficking, human trafficking and illegal fishing.

948. The first Transnational Serious Organized Crime Global Summit was held in Sydney in June 2023 and was attended by senior law enforcement officers from 46 countries. The event focused on partnerships for disrupting the illicit drug trade and addressing transnational crime.

949. The GRIDS Programme organized the sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held in Vienna from 11 to 15 September 2023. The event brought together over 100 officers from 30 Governments and international organizations, including three participants from Fiji and the Oceania Customs Organization. Several participating Governments also conducted bilateral and multilateral case meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

950. From 18 to 22 September 2023, the GRIDS Programme held a twinning event in Nadi for Pacific island States on regional law enforcement cooperation, trust-building, relationship development and active networking, awareness of opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances, and access to and training on intelligence development (GRIDS Intelligence high-definition) and secure real-time trafficking communications (IONICS).

951. Customs and law enforcement officers of the region completed training on the detection and prevention of transnational crimes in the Pacific by the Australia Pacific Security College in Nadi in May 2023. Oceania Customs Organization participants were from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Micronesia (Federated States of), Samoa and Solomon Islands. In 2023, the Australian Federal Police provided forensic and crime scene training for members of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force on, inter alia, drug seizure and preliminary drug testing.

952. A total of 26 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of nine countries in Oceania, namely, Australia, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. There are now five e-modules developed by INCB Learning, which cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. The e-modules are available upon

registration through INCB Learning to officials of competent national authorities at no cost. At the global level, as at 1 November 2023, 1,462 officials from the competent national authorities of 154 countries and territories had been granted access to INCB Learning e-modules.

### 3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

953. The three international drug control treaties require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor the licit movement of internationally controlled substances, as well as ensure the availability of these substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes. Most of the countries and territories of Oceania provided the required reports for narcotics drugs controlled under the 1961 Convention as amended for 2021. For psychotropic substances controlled under the 1971 Convention, approximately three quarters of the countries and territories provided the required reports for the last five years, including most of the required information. A few countries have not provided any of the required reports regarding narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the last five years.

954. In 2002, the level of consumption of opioid analgesics in Oceania, expressed in S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> per million inhabitants, stood at 14,974 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>. It had doubled by 2021, reaching 29,167 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>. The largest amounts in 2021 were consumed in Australia (7,675 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and New Zealand (6,508 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>). However, a number of small territories also reported high levels of S-DDD<sub>pm</sub> (Norfolk Island, 7,565 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>; New Caledonia, 3,176 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>; and French Polynesia, 1,946 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) owing to the fact that the amounts of opioid analgesics reported is standardized in daily dose per capita and therefore, given the limited populations, small actual amounts of opioids translate into a high level of S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>. Wallis and Futuna Islands reported 721 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>, followed by Palau (463 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Christmas Island (459 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), Samoa (209 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and Fiji (170 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>). Other countries in the region reported smaller or no amounts. The majority of the consumption in Oceania was of fentanyl (16,893 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), followed by morphine (5,850 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), oxycodone (5,518 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>), pethidine (225 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>) and hydromorphone (159 S-DDD<sub>pm</sub>).

955. It remains challenging to determine the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in Oceania, because fewer than half of the region's countries and territories have provided to the Board consumption data on any psychotropic substance for the past five years.

956. **The Board encourages the countries and territories of Oceania that have not provided the reports under the international drug control conventions, in particular on consumption of psychotropic substances, to do so as soon as possible and to take the necessary measures to ensure that their respective competent national authorities have sufficient resources and training to prepare the reports in a timely manner. This will significantly improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the operation of the international drug control system. The Board encourages bilateral partners to provide support, including technical assistance, in this area.**

957. **The Board stresses that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in some countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.**

958. With regard to precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants in the context of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3. The provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for, among other substances, ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means.

959. Out of the 16 countries in Oceania, eight (50 per cent) provided to the Board at least one estimate of annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, ephedrine preparations, pseudoephedrine or pseudoephedrine preparations. However, three, or 38 per cent, of those eight countries have not updated their estimates in the past 10 years, which undermines the potential of annual legitimate requirements to act as a tool to guide exporting countries with regard to the legitimate requirements of importing countries, thus preventing oversupply and diversion into illicit channels, as well as ensuring the availability of those substances for legitimate purposes. Two countries in Oceania, namely, the Marshall Islands and Micronesia (Federated States of), have provided annual legitimate requirements to the Board for the first time in the last five years.

960. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,<sup>168</sup> psychotropic substances<sup>169</sup> and the implementation of article 12 of

the 1988 Convention.<sup>170</sup> In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

#### 4. National legislation, policy and action

961. In November 2022, nine detector dog teams graduated from the New Zealand Police and New Zealand Customs Pacific Detector Dog Programme. The teams were from law enforcement and customs authorities of Fiji, French Polynesia, New Zealand, Samoa and Tonga.

962. The Australian National Advisory Council on Alcohol and Other Drugs published its first communiqué in June 2023, outlining discussions that covered, inter alia, options for addressing addiction medicine workforce shortages, the potential benefits of developing a national research agenda on alcohol and other drugs, and implementation of the National Quality Framework for Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services, an update of which had been published in April 2023.

963. In July 2023, the police force of the Australian State of New South Wales announced the creation of a new task force to coordinate investigations and operations related to recent shootings that had taken place in public places in Sydney and that were believed to be related to organized crime and illicit drug supply. The task force was also to take a proactive approach to hindering potential future activity, with a view to restoring a sense of safety in the community. Organized crime-related homicides increased in New South Wales during the 2021/22 reporting period, and the significant decline in sea and air freight to Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic was accompanied by increased competition between organized criminal groups over drug trafficking networks. The near doubling of the price of cocaine compared to pre-pandemic prices also provided a substantial financial incentive for organized criminal groups.

964. From 1 July 2023, medicines containing psilocybin and MDMA could be prescribed by authorized psychiatrists in Australia for the treatment of, respectively, treatment-resistant depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. For these specific purposes, the substances will be listed as Schedule 8 (Controlled Drugs) medicines in the Poisons Standard. For all other purposes, the substances will remain in Schedule 9 (Prohibited Substances), which limits

<sup>168</sup> E/INCB/2023/2.

<sup>169</sup> E/INCB/2023/3.

<sup>170</sup> E/INCB/2023/4.

their use to clinical trials. In order to prescribe MDMA or psilocybin for the aforementioned conditions, psychiatrists must be registered under the Authorised Prescriber Scheme and must obtain approval from a human research ethics committee. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists released guidance for psychiatrists to help prevent adverse outcomes for patients prescribed these substances. The advertising of psilocybin and MDMA to Australian consumers remained illegal. In 2023, the Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration announced that it was prioritizing action to stop the unlawful advertising of these substances, as well as medicinal cannabis, through measures including education, intelligence-gathering and use and compliance action.

965. The Australian Capital Territory Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Act 2022 came into effect on 28 October 2023. Under the amendment, people found with small quantities of specific drugs may be issued with a simple drug offence notice, which can be discharged by paying a fine of 100 Australian dollars or participating in an illicit drug diversion programme assessment and harm reduction session, instead of facing a potential prison sentence. The amendment defines small quantities of amphetamine, cocaine and methamphetamine as 1.5 g, and of other substances as follows: 1.5 g of MDMA; 50 g of dried cannabis; 150 g of harvested cannabis; 1 g of heroin; 0.001 g of lysergic acid or LSD; and 1.5 g of psilocybin.

966. Raising awareness about drugs in schools and tertiary institutions was highlighted as a priority for policing in Fiji, with activities held in schools in July 2023. In April 2023, a proactive narcotics workshop was held by the Narcotics Bureau in Labasa, Fiji, for police officers.

967. In December 2022, temporary class drug orders under the New Zealand Misuse of Drugs Act 1975 were issued for one-year periods for the benzodiazepine derivative bromazolam and the synthetic cannabinoids ADB-5Br-INACA, MDMB-5Br-INACA and MDMB-INACA as Class C1 controlled drugs. These substances are currently not under international control.

968. Amendments to the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1977 that came into effect in December 2022 expanded the New Zealand ePrescription Service so that prescribers could issue signature-exempt prescriptions for medicines containing controlled drugs. This was aimed at reducing the administrative burden for prescribers and pharmacists, as there was previously a requirement for the prescriber to provide a signed hard copy of any prescription for a medicine containing a controlled drug. The ultimate goal of the amendments was to improve access to Class B controlled drugs for people in palliative care or with chronic conditions

such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and cancer. The amendments would also allow prescriptions for Class B controlled drugs to cover a period of up to three months when issued through the system, which was expected to improve access for patients. Subsequently, a Cabinet decision was taken in July 2023 to reduce the maximum limit for opioid prescriptions from three months to one, to apply to both Class B and Class C opioids, bringing the prescribing limit for Class C opioids (such as codeine) into line with that for Class B opioids. The changes were made to reduce the risk of harm associated with opioid prescribing while ensuring regular clinical review and continued access to these medicines. The changes were planned to come into effect in late 2023. In addition, a number of interim safeguard measures were implemented to manage risks associated with opioid prescribing, including regulations setting out who could prescribe opioid medicines, monitoring of prescribing practices, clinical guidance, professional sanctions in cases of inappropriate prescribing and the Pharmac Pharmaceutical Schedule, which provides criteria limiting the amount of Class B opioids that may be prescribed and dispensed.

969. In 2022, Palau released its National Security Strategy, comprising six pillars, one of which was transnational crime. The Government noted that although illicit drug markets in the country were fairly limited, they continued to operate counter to the laws, culture and values of the country. The Strategy outlined the negative impact of illicit drug abuse on public health and the national health-care system, and highlighted the significant negative socioeconomic impacts of methamphetamine. In February 2023, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Bureau of Public Safety, the Ministry of Justice, the Palau Bureau of Customs and Border Protection and the Ministry of Finance with a view to advancing cooperation in law enforcement and border management in the country.

970. In November 2022, the Samoa Police, Prisons and Corrections Services met with the Scientific Research Organization of Samoa to discuss future collaborative work on drug testing to support police investigations and court prosecutions.

971. In February 2023, training was held in Tonga for law enforcement officers on the operation of a drone acquired through the Illicit Drugs Response Fund.

## 5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

972. Seizures of drugs and precursors at the Australian border increased by 18.1 per cent between 1 July 2022 and 28 February 2023 compared with the period between

1 July 2021 and 28 February 2022, with cocaine being seized at unprecedented levels. Operation Tin Can, conducted from 14 November to 9 December 2022, was organized by WCO, UNODC and the Australian Border Force in cooperation with members of the World Shipping Council, with the participation of enforcement agencies of 58 countries. The Operation, which focused on tackling organized crime and insider threats exploiting the container supply chain, resulted in the global seizure of 98.7 tons of cocaine and 314 kg of cannabis. On the basis of wastewater analysis, it was estimated that only up to a quarter of the drugs that reached the border were seized.

973. Methamphetamine is trafficked into Australia from the Mekong region of South-East Asia and Mexico and other countries, with around 70 per cent of the methamphetamine seized in Australia sourced from Myanmar. The amount of methamphetamine concealed in tea packages, or “tea packet methamphetamine”, seized in Australia has increased since 2019. Tea package designs have been used by criminal groups over the past decade to conceal and market methamphetamine illicitly produced in South-East Asia. In 2022, the Australian Federal Police seized more than two tons of such methamphetamine, with Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Viet Nam and Indonesia identified as the top five countries contributing to its importation. The Australian Federal Police were targeting outlaw motorcycle gangs involved in trafficking in methamphetamine from Afghanistan to Australia. Since 2021, more than 250 kg of methamphetamine produced in Afghanistan had been prevented from arriving in Australia, with the majority intercepted offshore, including in Pakistan. In 2022, the Australian Border Force seized 26 kg of methamphetamine produced in Afghanistan in 19 separate imports, primarily concealed in packages sent by international mail.

974. Preliminary data indicated that seizures of methamphetamine by New Zealand Customs increased from 844 kg in 2021 to 1,819 kg in 2022. January 2023 saw a record seizure of 713 kg of methamphetamine at the New Zealand border, concealed in a shipment of maple syrup from Canada. In March 2023, a seizure of 83 kg of methamphetamine was made at Port Napier, New Zealand, destined for the local market; it represented the first major drug seizure arriving from South Africa via sea freight. For the first time, in March 2023, New Zealand Customs seized 15.24 kg of crystal methamphetamine trafficked directly from Afghanistan by mail in three consignments.

975. A large increase was seen in cocaine trafficking to New Zealand. In January 2023, a joint police, customs and defence force operation resulted in the seizure of 3,348 kg of cocaine in the Pacific Ocean north-east of New Zealand, believed to have been destined for Australia.

976. A record seizure of 174 kg of ketamine, a substance not under international control, was made in Australia in July 2023, including 80 kg of ketamine concealed inside liquid cement shipped from Spain, together with 25 kg of MDMA. In May 2023, the Australian Border Force seized 84 kg of ketamine concealed inside new commercial vans imported to the country. In New Zealand, it was reported that the amount of ketamine seized from January to April 2023 was significantly larger than in the same period in 2022. March 2023 saw the largest monthly amount of MDMA seized in New Zealand since January 2019, primarily made up of one large seizure of almost 20 kg.

977. In February 2023, the Australian Federal Police issued a warning about synthetic drugs, in view of the import of a new synthetic stimulant, dimethylpentylone, into the country, first detected in Australia in October 2021. Forty-four consignments of the substance were detected by the Australian Border Force in 2022. Seizures by the Australian Federal Police of the substance in parcel post and air cargo ranged from around 100 g to 10 kg. In New Zealand in 2022, there was a significant increase in the detection of the new psychoactive substances dimethylpentylone and bromazolam, which had replaced eutylone and etizolam on the illicit market. In addition, the following new psychoactive substances were identified for the first time in New Zealand in 2022: deschloroetizolam, flubrotizolam, flubromazepam, etonitazepyne, metonitazene, 2-Fluorodeschloroketamine, 25B-NBOH, MDMB-5Br-INACA, MDMB-INACA, 3,4-methylenedioxy-N-tert-butylcathinone, N-cyclohexylmethylone, ADB-FUBIATA, gidazepam and fluorexetamine.

978. The use of Pacific island States to traffic drugs to Australia and New Zealand continues, as evident in a number of seizures, such as 247 kg of cocaine seized from a yacht moored in Townsville, Australia, which had sailed from Vanuatu, and methamphetamine trafficked to Australia via Fiji.

979. Seizures of cannabis, cocaine, ketamine and methamphetamine were reported by the police and customs authorities in Fiji in 2023, both in the country and at the borders. Cannabis cultivation continued in Fiji, with the law enforcement authorities reporting the eradication of over 6,000 cannabis plants on the island of Kadavu and in the Vunikoko Highlands in May and July 2023. In June 2023, the Nauru Police Force reported the seizure of 15 cannabis plants in Anibare district.

980. In March 2023, an attempt was made to traffic 52 kg of methamphetamine from Papua New Guinea to Australia on a “black flight” that had departed from and returned to central Queensland. A black flight refers to a light aircraft

for which no or false flight plans are logged, that flies at a very low altitude, or that turns off flight monitoring systems in order to avoid detection by law enforcement authorities or aviation monitoring systems.

981. The Samoa Police, Prisons and Corrections Services expressed deep concern over the growing trend in the use of electronic devices for the exchange of drugs, particularly methamphetamine. In 2023, numerous seizures of cannabis and methamphetamine were reported in the country.

982. In Tonga in April 2023, over 1 kg of methamphetamine trafficked inside a shipment from the United States was intercepted by customs officers with the assistance of Tonga Police detector dogs. Small quantities of methamphetamine and cannabis were seized domestically in the country on a regular basis.

983. Information on the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances can be found in the report of the Board for 2023 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.<sup>171</sup>

## 6. Prevention and treatment

984. There continue to be indications that Pacific island States are experiencing increased levels of drug use and treatment demand, including as a consequence of drug trafficking through the region. However, data on the drug use situation in the region are still not available. **The Board reiterates its recommendation that Pacific island States prioritize the collection of data on the extent and patterns of drug use and the demand for treatment of drug use disorders. Such data will aid the development of targeted, evidence-based drug control policies and drug prevention and treatment services. The Board also urges bilateral partners and regional and international organizations to support Pacific island States to this end.**

985. In Solomon Islands, the use of a new substance, “copen”, was becoming a serious concern in schools. The substance was made up of tobacco and other substances such as toothpaste and coral lime, and was reported to have a psychoactive effect, as well as side effects such as vomiting and headaches. It was reported to negatively affect concentration and lead to dependence. A survey of school students aged 8 to 20 found that “copen” use was highly prevalent among teenagers. In response, the Royal Solomon Island Police Force (RSIPF) and the RSIPF-Australian Federal Police Policing Partnership Programme, in cooperation with

the National Community Police Department of RSIPF, conducted a “copen” awareness-raising programme in schools in Honiara. The programme comprised interaction between facilitators and students, and informative presentations aimed at educating students about the dangers of “copen”, the identification of risks and protective factors, and how to respond to peer pressure. A reduction in the use of the substance was observed after the implementation of the programme.

986. Wastewater analysis covering about 55 per cent of the population of Australia between August and December 2022 found that consumption of heroin, oxycodone and cannabis had decreased, while consumption of methamphetamine, cocaine, MDMA, tenamfetamine (MDA), fentanyl and ketamine had increased. The increase in cocaine consumption followed a record low recorded in August 2022. Fentanyl consumption had been increasing since April 2022 and exceeded oxycodone consumption for the first time since April 2021. Record lows were seen in oxycodone consumption in December 2022 (outside capital cities) and in February 2023 (in capital cities).

987. In a sentinel group of adults residing in capital cities in Australia who had injected drugs at least once monthly in the previous six months, prevalence of use in the past six months of heroin (53 per cent), methamphetamine (81 per cent), non-prescribed morphine (14 per cent) and non-prescribed fentanyl (5 per cent) had remained stable in 2022 relative to 2021. Over the same period, the use of non-prescribed cannabis and/or cannabinoid-related products within the past six months had increased significantly, from 67 per cent in 2021, the lowest level since monitoring began, to 72 per cent in 2022. Half of the respondents who had recently used these products reported daily use, as in the previous year. A survey of people who used MDMA and other stimulants on a regular basis found that recent use of MDMA had decreased significantly, from 95 per cent in 2021 to 88 per cent in 2022, reaching the lowest level since monitoring commenced in 2003. Recent use of methamphetamine had increased significantly in 2022 (31 per cent) compared with 2021 (26 per cent). Recent use of cocaine had remained stable in 2022; however, weekly use had increased to 11 per cent (up from 7 per cent in 2021). Recent use of cannabis among the sample had declined from 84 per cent to 79 per cent over the same period.

988. In Australia, the most common type of drug for which people sought treatment continued to be amphetamines, primarily methamphetamine, followed by cannabis and heroin. However, the number of treatment episodes relating to amphetamines continued to decline in the 12-month reporting period 2021/22, after having almost tripled between the 12-month reporting periods 2012/13

<sup>171</sup>E/INCB/2023/4.

and 2019/20. The number of treatment episodes related to pharmaceutical opioids fell to 4,700 in the 12-month reporting period 2021/22, compared with a peak of 7,700 episodes in the 12-month reporting period 2013/14. The number of treatment episodes related to benzodiazepines increased to 3,200 in the 12-month reporting period 2021/22.

989. On the basis of preliminary estimates, there were 1,788 drug-induced deaths in Australia in 2021, accounting for 1 per cent of all registered deaths in the country that year. The estimated rate of overdose deaths involving opioids, which were the most commonly identified type of substance, was lower in 2021 than in 2020. The rate of overdose deaths involving amphetamine-type stimulants was lower in 2021 than in 2020, when it had reached a record high.

990. According to the New Zealand Health Survey for the period July 2021 to July 2022, 14.7 per cent of adults had used cannabis within the past 12 months, compared with 15.3 per cent in the period from July 2020 to July 2021. Weekly use of cannabis was estimated at 4.3 per cent of adults, similar to the previous year (4.5 per cent). Past-year cocaine use was estimated at 1.1 per cent of adults, a similar level to the previous year (1 per cent). Past-year “ecstasy” use among adults declined from 4.8 per cent to 4.3 per cent, while use of amphetamine-type stimulants increased from 1 per cent to 1.3 per cent of adults. Past-year non-medical use of opioids among adults had doubled over the past year to 1.2 per cent. The annual prevalence of non-medical use of sedatives and hallucinogens had also increased compared with the previous year, from 0.9 per cent to 1.2 per cent, and from 1.9 per cent to 2.5 per cent, respectively.

991. Analysis of wastewater covering about 75 per cent of the population of New Zealand found a reduction in consumption of methamphetamine and MDMA in the fourth quarter of 2022 compared with average consumption in the previous four quarters. Cocaine consumption was found to have increased compared with average consumption detected over the previous four quarters. Heroin was not detected in reportable quantities in 2022, and fentanyl was only detected at a reportable level in the third quarter in two districts.

992. Over the past year, the early warning system of New Zealand, High Alert, issued notifications about a dangerous batch of synthetic opioids linked to serious hospitalizations, the potent stimulant *alpha*-PV detected in a white powder misrepresented as MDMA, and the synthetic cannabinoid MDMB-4en-PINACA detected in a yellow powder presumed to be N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT). The service also reissued a notification about serious harm linked to metonitazene, a highly potent opioid, and fake oxycodone tablets found to contain metonitazene, possibly linked to one death and a series of serious hospitalizations. It appeared that the non-medical use of ketamine was increasing in New Zealand, and in the first half of 2023, an increase in ketamine analogues was observed in the country. In the Australian State of Queensland, an official warning was issued in April 2023 about fake Xanax tablets found to contain protonitazene, a highly potent opioid, and bromazolam, a non-medical benzodiazepine. Two deaths were linked to the use of the tablets.

# Chapter IV.

## Recommendations to Governments, the United Nations and other relevant international and national organizations

993. Following its review of the implementation of the international drug control conventions, the Board would like to present to Governments and relevant international and regional organizations its main conclusions and recommendations, which are set out below.

### The role of the Internet, including social media, and consequences for drug trafficking and use

994. The international community adopted the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 prior to the advent of the Internet, and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 shortly before the major changes in information and communication technologies became global in reach. The Internet has proved both to offer opportunities to support the aims of the conventions and to undermine those aims, as it enables communication that facilitates trade and the trafficking in and use of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals.

995. Criminals have adapted to the new informational and technological environment. The growth in online drug trafficking follows the broader trend in Internet use and Internet-facilitated trade. The role of the Internet in drug trafficking and in the sourcing of precursor chemicals and equipment for illicit drug manufacture has evolved, but has not yet dramatically changed drug supply chains. While the share of illicit transactions that occurs online is still marginal, it constitutes a larger share of the global drug market every year and there is considerable potential for

Internet-facilitated drug markets to further expand as the related technological components continue to evolve and larger shares of the global population use social media.

996. Currently, the urgent macro-level challenges to international drug control are the misuse, diversion from domestic trade and evolution of designer and pre-precursor chemicals and new psychoactive substances, including non-medical synthetic opioids, that are not under international control. At the micro level, the Internet and, in particular, social media, in combination with encryption technologies, have increased the availability of drugs on the illicit market and made law enforcement interventions more difficult.

997. Some of the key areas of concern related to the Internet and drug control include the following: easier connectedness between sellers and potential buyers of illicit commodities across the globe enabled through broad Internet access, encryption technologies and innovations helping hide users' identities, modified smartphones, "cryptophones" or "PGP" phones running specialized software, cryptomarkets and Deep Web markets, the increased availability and proliferation of social media platforms, and the misuse of legitimate e-commerce platforms and online pharmacies. The international community needs to consider these issues collectively, drawing on the expertise, across various organizations, of specialists in cybercrime and money-laundering, as well as in trafficking in drugs and firearms, counterfeiting and other forms of smuggling.

998. Meeting the challenges and opportunities afforded by the Internet is currently reliant on voluntary cooperation with social media companies. Internet-facilitated drug trafficking using conventional social media requires new and concurrent responses based on public-private partnerships.

This requires a longer-term effort to build international consensus and improve the capacity of Governments to engage with the private sector. Public-private partnerships should include key industries, academia and non-governmental organizations working with people who use drugs in the development of effective responses.

**Recommendation 1:** The Internet offers potential for both improving international drug control and preventing non-medical drug use. At the same time, it provides new opportunities for trafficking in and the non-medical use of controlled drugs. To optimize the opportunities provided by the Internet, the international community should consider using social media to conduct drug abuse prevention campaigns and to promote awareness-raising messages on drug-related risks. At the same time, to mitigate the related threats, the international community needs to consider this issue collectively, drawing on the expertise, across various organizations, of specialists in cybercrime and money-laundering, as well as in trafficking in drugs and firearms, counterfeiting and other forms of smuggling.

999. For additional recommendations and more details on proposed action, please refer to the section entitled “The role of the Internet, including social media, and consequences for drug trafficking and use”, contained in chapter I of the present report.

## Universal adherence to the international drug control conventions

1000. The three international drug control conventions represent the international consensus on requirements for the control of licit trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals that can be diverted, and on the measures needed to facilitate access to and the availability of controlled substances for legitimate medical and scientific purposes. The conventions provide a common normative framework for effective international drug control, in particular in their capacity as the legal basis for international cooperation, extradition and mutual legal assistance. As such, the Board continues to engage with States having yet to become party to one or more of the three conventions with the aim of supporting them in this pursuit and to encourage the comprehensive incorporation of the conventions into national law. By becoming parties to the conventions, States demonstrate their common and shared responsibility for meeting those minimum requirements with a view to achieving the aim of the conventions, which is the health and welfare of humankind.

**Recommendation 2:** The Board reiterates that universal ratification of the international drug control conventions is important for strengthening the international licit drug control framework and for preventing traffickers from targeting non-parties owing to actual or perceived weaknesses in the scope of control of scheduled substances. Accordingly, the Board urges those States not yet having become parties to one or more of these instruments to do so without delay and to take steps to ensure their full implementation within their national legal orders.

## Use of cannabis for non-medical purposes

1001. The Board continues to reiterate its concern regarding the legalization of the use of cannabis for non-medical and non-scientific purposes in several jurisdictions, with other jurisdictions considering similar action. The Board reiterates that the 1961 Convention as amended, the 1971 Convention and the 1988 Convention limit the use of all controlled substances to medical and scientific purposes.

1002. The developments in a few countries that have legalized or permitted the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes or that have tolerated its legalization at the subnational level are undermining the universal adherence to the three international drug control conventions and the commitment to their implementation, which was reaffirmed by Member States at the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016 and in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening Our Actions at the National, Regional and International Levels to Accelerate the Implementation of Our Joint Commitments to Address and Counter the World Drug Problem.

**Recommendation 3:** The Board wishes to recall the thematic chapter contained in its annual report for 2022, in which it addressed the trend of legalizing the use of cannabis for non-medical and non-scientific purposes, and to remind all parties to the 1961 Convention as amended that, under article 4, paragraph (c), thereof, and subject to the provisions of that Convention, the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution of, trade in, use and possession of drugs are limited exclusively to medical and scientific purposes. The apparent tension between these provisions and the trend towards legalization must be addressed by the signatories to the three drug control conventions.



## International drug control conventions and human rights

1003. The fundamental goal of the international drug control conventions, to safeguard the health and welfare of humanity, includes the full enjoyment of human rights. States' actions that violate human rights in the name of drug control policy are inconsistent with the international drug control conventions. Extrajudicial responses to suspected drug-related activities cannot be justified under international law, including under the international drug control conventions.

**Recommendation 4:** The Board reiterates its appeal to Governments to take all measures necessary to prevent the extrajudicial targeting of persons suspected of involvement in drug-related offences. The Board also reiterates in the strongest possible terms that extrajudicial responses to drug-related criminality are in violation of the drug control conventions and fundamental human rights, which require that drug-related crimes be addressed through formal processes adhering to due process of law. Governments are called upon to investigate and prosecute all instances of extrajudicial action purportedly taken in the name of drug control.

1004. The Board notes with concern public reports of the continued use of the death penalty for drug-related offences in a number of countries.

**Recommendation 5:** While recalling that, according to the international drug control conventions, the determination of penalties applicable to drug-related behaviours remains the exclusive prerogative of States parties, the Board encourages all States that retain the death penalty for drug-related offences to consider abolishing the death penalty for drug-related offences and to commute death sentences that have already been handed down, in view of the relevant international conventions and protocols and relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other United Nations bodies on the application of the death penalty for the category of drug-related offences.

1005. Owing to the limited availability of proper treatment services, an increased number of patients have been directed to compulsory treatment facilities where deteriorating conditions have been observed in some countries. Additionally, despite a call by a number of United Nations agencies in 2012, many countries throughout the world still retain compulsory systems for the treatment of persons with drug use disorders.

**Recommendation 6:** The Board calls upon those Member States that have not already done so to shift efforts from compulsory and involuntary treatment services for people who use drugs towards alternatives to imprisonment and punishment in drug treatment and rehabilitation.

## Drug treatment and rehabilitation

1006. Over the past decade, the international community has highlighted the need for the voluntary treatment of people who use drugs, adopting health- and people-centred approaches that incorporate human rights concerns. However, many countries still lack mechanisms for gathering information on the scope and nature of drug use and treatment demand. That hinders the ability to determine the scope and consequences of drug use. It also hinders Governments and the international community as they seek to respond effectively through evidence-based drug use prevention and treatment programmes.

**Recommendation 7:** The Board encourages countries to prioritize the collection of data on drug use trends and treatment demand in order to inform the development of evidence-based approaches in the area of prevention and treatment, and encourages bilateral partners and regional and international organizations to provide support to that end.

**Recommendation 8:** The Board encourages Governments to strengthen capacity-building in drug use management, data collection and data-sharing, public policies and treatment and rehabilitation services, and to continue collaborating with the international community in that respect.

**Recommendation 9:** The Board urges Governments to ensure access to voluntary, evidence-based treatment services in line with the UNODC/WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders. In doing so, Governments should address systemic disparities and ensure inclusivity in treatment services, with special attention given to vulnerable groups. The Board also encourages Member States to continue to focus on initiatives to combat stigma and discrimination in relation to people who use drugs.

**Recommendation 10:** The Board urges Member States to implement continuous review mechanisms directed at treatment services in their territories with the aim of ensuring that they are in line with the UNODC/WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders.

## Availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes

1007. Through the international drug control conventions, the international community made a commitment to ensure – and not unduly restrict – the availability of drugs considered indispensable for medical and scientific purposes. Despite that commitment, there remains a significant imbalance in the availability of controlled substances globally, an imbalance which not only goes against the aim of the international drug control conventions to promote the health and welfare of humankind but also contradicts numerous human rights instruments that contain the right to health or medical care, which also encompasses palliative care. The data available confirm the persistent disparities between regions in the consumption of opioid analgesics for the treatment of pain.

**Recommendation 11:** The Board reiterates that there is a need to improve the availability of and access to opioid analgesics and to increase their prescription and use in all countries and territories, and reiterates its calls for targeted public policies supported by Governments, health systems and health professionals, civil society, patient organizations and communities, the pharmaceutical industry and the international community.

1008. In a few regions of the world, countries have maintained high levels of availability of some controlled substances, in particular opioid analgesics, although the levels of consumption of those substances have been observed to have decreased in recent years.

**Recommendation 12:** The Board highlights the importance of ensuring that narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are available for legitimate purposes while putting in place adequate policies and practices to avoid overprescription and prevent misuse. The Board reminds Governments of the need to foster responsible prescription practices and controls on distribution to avoid diversion into illicit channels and overconsumption resulting in dependence and associated harms.

## Data collection and analysis practices of the Board

1009. The regular submission of comprehensive and reliable statistical data from Governments to the Board is vital for the overall functioning of the international drug control system and the analysis of global trends. Good-quality data provide information that is necessary not only to ensure the

adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes but also to uncover diversions of controlled substances for illicit purposes.

**Recommendation 13:** The Board encourages those countries and territories that have not provided the reports as required under the international drug control conventions to do so as soon as possible and to take the necessary measures to ensure that their respective competent national authorities have sufficient resources to prepare the reports in a timely manner. In this regard, INCB offers the possibility of training, including through its INCB Learning programme, to support capacity-building in the area of reporting.

1010. The Board makes platforms such as I2ES, PEN Online and PEN Online Light available to Governments to enable secure trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and internationally controlled and non-controlled precursor chemicals. The Board also makes available the PICS and IONICS platforms to allow drug control authorities to exchange information in real time to report incidents of trafficking in precursor chemicals and synthetic drugs.

**Recommendation 14:** The Board urges Governments to actively use the PEN Online, PEN Online Light, PICS and IONICS platforms and to participate in GRIDS Programme activities in order to prevent the diversion of and investigate trafficking incidents involving internationally controlled substances, scheduled precursors, non-scheduled chemicals, illicit drug manufacturing equipment, new psychoactive substances, non-medical synthetic opioids and related dangerous substances.

## INCB Learning

1011. The importance of capacity-building for ensuring the adequate availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing diversion and misuse was recognized by the international community in the outcome document of the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem”. That commitment was reiterated by Member States through the adoption, in March 2019, of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 62/5, entitled “Enhancing the capacity of Member States to adequately estimate and assess the need for internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes”. In that resolution, the Commission encouraged the INCB secretariat to continue implementing capacity-building and training activities for competent national authorities through the INCB Learning global programme. Accurate national

reports are essential for ensuring the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. The impact of INCB Learning training, as evidenced by available data, has resulted in improvements in the quality and timeliness of the data submitted to the Board.

1012. INCB Learning has developed five e-modules to support Governments in key areas of treaty compliance. Three e-modules focus on the following systems: (a) estimates of annual legitimate medical and scientific requirements for narcotic drugs; (b) assessments of annual legitimate medical and scientific requirements for psychotropic substances; and (c) estimates of annual legitimate requirements for imports of precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants. A further e-module focuses on the international drug control framework and the role of INCB, and the fifth e-module, which was developed and launched in 2022, supports Governments in their efforts to ensure the adequate availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. All e-modules offer interactive, self-paced training.

**Recommendation 15:** The Board invites Governments to consider actively supporting INCB Learning through participation in its activities and to consider providing the resources required to ensure the continuation of these activities.

**Recommendation 16:** The Board encourages Governments to register officials of their competent national authorities for e-modules and to provide feedback and suggestions for areas in which the development of further training is needed.

## Ensuring access to and availability of controlled substances for international humanitarian emergencies

1013. The increasing number of emergency situations caused by climate change and armed conflict have led to greater demand not only for international humanitarian assistance but also for controlled substances for the provision of essential care in humanitarian settings. Since the beginning of 2020, when an increasing number of countries were declaring national emergencies relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, the effectiveness of simplified control measures during emergency situations has been tested. INCB organized and conducted a review of and discussion on the lessons learned in the implementation of those measures among competent authorities, international humanitarian organizations and related United Nations agencies.

The outcome of that review is a document entitled “Lessons from countries and humanitarian aid organizations in facilitating the timely supply of controlled substances during emergency situations”, which identifies important actions that Governments can take to improve their emergency preparedness and sets out procedures that they can follow during emergency situations.

**Recommendation 17:** The Board strongly encourages Governments to review existing national legislation on controlled substances and make amendments and/or adopt new provisions that allow for greater flexibility in the import and export of such substances during emergency situations. This includes permitting their export and import without the corresponding import authorizations and/or estimates and setting out clear specifications of the conditions under which such flexibility can be exercised.

## Free trade zones and trafficking in drugs and precursors

1014. Free trade zones, also known as free zones or free ports, have played a pivotal role in promoting international trade and economic development across the globe. These designated areas, often exempt from many of the usual customs, import and export regulations, facilitate the movement of goods, foster foreign investment and create employment opportunities. However, they are susceptible to misuse for illicit activities. The limited supervision, if any, exercised by customs authorities over shipments of goods from abroad into free trade zones, or from such zones to foreign countries, provides for the faster movement of goods, thereby lowering transaction costs. However, it also allows contraband to move undetected through those zones. In general, softened customs controls in free trade zones have made such zones increasingly vulnerable to a wide range of abuses by criminal actors.

**Recommendation 18:** The Board reiterates that States parties to the international drug control conventions are required to apply drug control measures in free ports and free zones that are no less stringent than those applied in other parts of their territories, and have the option of applying more stringent measures as outlined in the conventions.<sup>172</sup> Ensuring that drug control measures are upheld in free ports and free zones is imperative to preventing trafficking in internationally controlled narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals.

<sup>172</sup>Article 31, paragraph 2, of the 1961 Convention, article 12, paragraph 3 (a) of the 1971 Convention, and article 18 of the 1988 Convention.

## Drug-related crime and the environment

1015. The impact of illicit drug-related activities on the environment takes different forms around the globe, including deforestation, contamination of rivers and soil, and animal and human poisoning. Indirectly, the illicit production, manufacture and trafficking of drugs can also be linked to other environmentally damaging activities, such as illicit mining. The impact of those activities often affects local communities most adversely, as it may destroy livelihoods and introduce violence and drug use to populations in remote areas. While the connection between illicit drug-related activities and environmental consequences still requires further research, there is growing evidence showing that there are significant linkages at play.

**Recommendation 19:** The Board calls on Governments, with the support of the international community, to take urgent action to address such threats, prioritizing the safety and well-being of local, native and vulnerable populations, as well as the protection of the environment. Furthermore, the Board urges Governments to collaborate with the international community and with the United Nations system in improving the available research and data on the dynamics of illicit drugs and the environment and the related impacts across all regions of the globe.

## Proliferation of highly potent synthetic non-fentanyl opioids

1016. In addition to the substantial proportion of overdose deaths resulting from illicit fentanyl manufacture, newly emerging highly potent synthetic non-fentanyl opioids are being encountered in drug markets around the world. Similar to fentanyl and its analogues, the potency of many of these non-fentanyl opioids, such as analogues of the nitazene group, makes possible the trafficking of smaller end-use quantities through express logistics and postal services worldwide. Online platforms and services, including e-commerce, social media and search and financial services, are exploited by vendors marketing these dangerous opioids, which have no known legitimate uses. To assist Governments in addressing this threat, INCB maintains a list of fentanyl-related substances and non-fentanyl opioids with no known medical, industrial or other legitimate uses.

**Recommendation 20:** The Board encourages the law and regulatory enforcement focal points of Governments and international organizations to take advantage of the suite of INCB proprietary counter-trafficking tools, including IONICS, for the secure real-time exchange of information; the GRIDS Intelligence HD strategic and operational

targeting platforms; the eLearning Individual Training Environment (ELITE), recommended in Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 66/2; the Scanning of Novel Opioids on Online Platforms (SNOOP) tool, for detection and dismantling of online vendor marketplaces; and INCB GRIDS Programme training.

**Recommendation 21:** The Board encourages all Governments to have their relevant law enforcement and regulatory agencies join the agencies of other Governments that already exchange real-time information through the IONICS bulk communication feature with regard to new psychoactive substances, non-medical synthetic opioids and related drugs that are seized or stopped or are otherwise suspicious shipments and to facilitate backtracking investigations involving such substances.

**Recommendation 22:** The Board stands ready to assist Governments to engage its relevant private sector partners with the goal of voluntarily identifying, preventing and eliminating the exploitation of legitimate business activities by traffickers of dangerous synthetic opioids not under international control and which have no known legitimate use. Governments are encouraged to make use of a series of practical guidelines prepared under the INCB GRIDS Programme to promote voluntary cooperation with the express courier industry, the freight forwarding industry, the e-commerce industry and Internet-related services.

**Recommendation 23:** The Board invites all Governments and, through them, industry partners to make use of the Board's list of fentanyl-related substances and non-fentanyl opioids with no known medical, industrial or other legitimate use, and to voluntarily refrain from any manufacture, marketing, export, import or distribution of those substances beyond limited research and analytical purposes.

## Narcotic drugs

1017. The Board, having reviewed the latest information and data on the supply of opiate raw materials and the demand for opiates for medical and scientific purposes, points out that although data from producing and manufacturing countries indicate that the supply of both morphine-rich and thebaine-rich opiate raw material is calculated to be sufficient to cover the demand for medical and scientific purposes as expressed by countries, there are significant disparities between countries in the availability of narcotic drugs because many countries do not accurately estimate their medical needs for opioid analgesics or have only limited access to them.

1018. The Board also reminds those countries that cultivate opium poppy rich in noscapine to provide information in a consistent and regular manner about the cultivation of noscapine-rich opium poppy and its intended use, and to report to the Board any extraction and use of the internationally controlled alkaloids, in spite of the fact that noscapine itself is not an internationally controlled substance, given that significant amounts of internationally controlled alkaloids can be extracted from opium poppy rich in noscapine.

**Recommendation 24:** The Board urges major cultivating countries to ensure, in collaboration with the Board, that there are no shortages on the global markets of the opiate raw materials rich in thebaine, codeine and oripavine.

**Recommendation 25:** Given that significant amounts of internationally controlled alkaloids, in particular morphine, can be extracted from opium poppy rich in noscapine, the Board reminds countries to provide information in a consistent and regular manner about the cultivation of noscapine-rich opium poppy and to report to the Board on any such extraction and use of the morphine alkaloid from this variety.

## Psychotropic substances

1019. The 1971 Convention does not require Governments to provide directly to the Board information on diversions or seizures of psychotropic substances from licit channels, although a number of Governments do provide such information to the Board on a voluntary basis. The Board is grateful to countries that provide voluntary reports or other information regarding seizures or other interdiction efforts with regard to the trafficking in or diversion of psychotropic substances.

**Recommendation 26:** The Board calls upon Governments to furnish directly to the Board any information on diversions or attempted diversions of psychotropic substances and to keep the Board apprised of developments in the trafficking of psychotropic substances.

## Precursor chemicals

1020. While no country is immune to attempts by traffickers to obtain chemicals for illicit purposes, territories whose status is unclear or contested or, at any given time, is not effectively within the scope of control of an internationally recognized entity's competent national authorities are at increased risk of being targeted by traffickers. INCB has on several occasions expressed its concern about

the increased risk of trafficking in precursor chemicals in such countries or territories. These areas are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers seeking to divert precursor chemicals from licit channels. Countries wishing to export precursor chemicals to areas facing conflict or with an ambiguous political status face practical challenges in ensuring that precursor chemicals in legitimate trade are not diverted.

**Recommendation 27:** The Board commends all efforts that contribute to ensuring the availability of controlled precursors for legitimate purposes in all regions of the world, irrespective of a territory's status, while managing the risk of diversion. The Board further invites all Governments to work with the Board to devise appropriate ways and means of monitoring trade pursuant to article 12 of the 1988 Convention and handling pre-export notifications, with a view to enabling the trade in chemicals to and from high-risk areas in a regulated manner.

1021. Further information and analysis of trends relating to precursor chemicals are contained in the Board's report on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.<sup>173</sup>

## Ketamine

1022. Many countries have informed the Board that they have reported ketamine seizures or trafficking in ketamine in their territory. This included both trafficking in pharmaceutical preparations and illicitly manufactured ketamine. Additionally, information about ketamine precursors is scarce and not systematically reported by countries, given that these chemicals are not under international control. Nevertheless, some countries submit such information to the Board. Reported seizures of ketamine precursors have predominantly involved two chemicals. Both substances are intermediates in the synthesis of ketamine and can readily be converted into the substance.

**Recommendation 28:** The Board commends Governments that voluntarily report seizures of ketamine precursors, their sources and related contextual information. Similarly, the Board commends Governments that use forensic profiling analysis to determine whether seized ketamine has been illicitly manufactured and from which chemicals. These efforts help to provide the evidence to prevent illicit ketamine manufacture while protecting legitimate supply chains, thus ensuring the availability of ketamine for legitimate purposes. The Board encourages all Governments to report seizures of ketamine precursors to the Board.

<sup>173</sup>E/INCB/2023/4.

1023. The Board takes note of the information voluntarily provided by countries regarding the status of control of ketamine and the requirements of those countries for import or export authorizations for trade in the substance. However, many countries neither control ketamine nor require an import or export authorization in order to trade in the substance, which may hinder trade with countries that do.

**Recommendation 29:** The Board encourages importing Governments that do not control ketamine and that do not require import authorizations for this substance to issue a letter of no objection or other proof of the legitimacy of the import in cases where ketamine is imported from countries where it is controlled.

*(Signed)*  
Jallal Toufiq, President

*(Signed)*  
Cornelis P. de Joncheere, Rapporteur

*(Signed)*  
Mark Colhoun, Secretary

Vienna, 17 November 2023

# Annex I

## Regional and subregional groupings used in the report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2023

The regional and subregional groupings used in the report of INCB for 2023, together with the States in each of those groupings, are listed below.

### Africa

|                                  |                             |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Algeria                          | Liberia                     |
| Angola                           | Libya                       |
| Benin                            | Madagascar                  |
| Botswana                         | Malawi                      |
| Burkina Faso                     | Mali                        |
| Burundi                          | Mauritania                  |
| Cameroon                         | Mauritius                   |
| Cabo Verde                       | Morocco                     |
| Central African Republic         | Mozambique                  |
| Chad                             | Namibia                     |
| Comoros                          | Niger                       |
| Congo                            | Nigeria                     |
| Côte d'Ivoire                    | Rwanda                      |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo | Sao Tome and Principe       |
| Djibouti                         | Senegal                     |
| Egypt                            | Seychelles                  |
| Equatorial Guinea                | Sierra Leone                |
| Eritrea                          | Somalia                     |
| Eswatini                         | South Africa                |
| Ethiopia                         | South Sudan                 |
| Gabon                            | Sudan                       |
| Gambia                           | Togo                        |
| Ghana                            | Tunisia                     |
| Guinea                           | Uganda                      |
| Guinea-Bissau                    | United Republic of Tanzania |
| Kenya                            | Zambia                      |
| Lesotho                          | Zimbabwe                    |

## Central America and the Caribbean

Antigua and Barbuda  
Bahamas  
Barbados  
Belize  
Costa Rica  
Cuba  
Dominica  
Dominican Republic  
El Salvador  
Grenada

Guatemala  
Haiti  
Honduras  
Jamaica  
Nicaragua  
Panama  
Saint Kitts and Nevis  
Saint Lucia  
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines  
Trinidad and Tobago

## North America

Canada  
Mexico

United States of America

## South America

Argentina  
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)  
Brazil  
Chile  
Colombia  
Ecuador

Guyana  
Paraguay  
Peru  
Suriname  
Uruguay  
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

## East and South-East Asia

Brunei Darussalam  
Cambodia  
China  
Democratic People's Republic of Korea  
Indonesia  
Japan  
Lao People's Democratic Republic  
Malaysia

Mongolia  
Myanmar  
Philippines  
Republic of Korea  
Singapore  
Thailand  
Timor-Leste  
Viet Nam

## South Asia

Bangladesh  
Bhutan  
India

Maldives  
Nepal  
Sri Lanka



## West Asia

Afghanistan  
Armenia  
Azerbaijan  
Bahrain  
Georgia  
Iran (Islamic Republic of)  
Iraq  
Israel  
Jordan  
Kazakhstan  
Kuwait  
Kyrgyzstan  
Lebanon

Oman  
Pakistan  
Qatar  
Saudi Arabia  
State of Palestine  
Syrian Arab Republic  
Tajikistan  
Türkiye  
Turkmenistan  
United Arab Emirates  
Uzbekistan  
Yemen

## Europe

### Eastern Europe

Belarus  
Republic of Moldova

Russian Federation  
Ukraine

### South-Eastern Europe

Albania  
Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Bulgaria  
Croatia

Montenegro  
North Macedonia  
Romania  
Serbia

### Western and Central Europe

Andorra  
Austria  
Belgium  
Cyprus  
Czechia  
Denmark  
Estonia  
Finland  
France  
Germany  
Greece  
Holy See  
Hungary  
Iceland  
Ireland  
Italy  
Latvia

Liechtenstein  
Lithuania  
Luxembourg  
Malta  
Monaco  
Netherlands (Kingdom of the)  
Norway  
Poland  
Portugal  
San Marino  
Slovakia  
Slovenia  
Spain  
Sweden  
Switzerland  
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

## Oceania

|                                  |                  |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Australia                        | Niue             |
| Cook Islands                     | Palau            |
| Fiji                             | Papua New Guinea |
| Kiribati                         | Samoa            |
| Marshall Islands                 | Solomon Islands  |
| Micronesia (Federated States of) | Tonga            |
| Nauru                            | Tuvalu           |
| New Zealand                      | Vanuatu          |

# Annex II

## Current membership of the International Narcotics Control Board

### César Tomás Arce Rivas

Born in 1954. National of Paraguay. Retired Director General, Office for National and International Cooperation and Institutional Strengthening of the National Anti-Drug Secretariat (2012–2020); Professor of Organic Chemistry, Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences, National University of Asunción (since 1993).

Doctorate in Forensic Chemistry, Center for Forensic Medicine, Medical University of Vienna (1988–1990); Bachelor of Science in Chemistry, Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences, National University of Asunción (1971–1975).

Previously held positions as Deputy Executive Secretary, National Anti-Drug Secretariat (2008–2012); Laboratory Director, National Anti-Drug Secretariat (1987–2007); Professor of Organic Chemistry I and II, Catholic University, Ciudad del Este, Paraguay (1996–2008); intern, laboratories of the Federal Police of Germany (1990).

Author and co-author of and contributor to numerous publications, including “Drug policy, strategy and action plan on drugs of Paraguay” (2016) and “Study of the interrelation of cannabinoids in marijuana and determination of the storage and harvest time of a marijuana sample, by means of the cannabinoid relation”.

Member of the delegation of Paraguay to the sixtieth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (2017); meeting of drug control and drug administration organizations for the implementation of prevention and treatment courses and the

strengthening of health systems, Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States, held in Cancún, Mexico (2017); 12th Specialized Meeting of Drug Enforcement Authorities, Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), held in Buenos Aires (2017); preparatory meeting for the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in Vienna (2016); special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in New York (2016); biregional high-level meetings of the European Union and the Community of Latin and Caribbean States on the problem of drugs, held in Buenos Aires (2017), The Hague (2016), Montevideo (2015), Athens (2014) and Brussels (2012); South American Council on the World Drug Problem, Union of South American Nations, Asunción (2012) (President pro tempore); Specialized Meetings of Drug Enforcement Authorities, MERCOSUR, Asunción (2015 and 2009) (President pro tempore); Twenty-fourth Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Asunción (2014) (Chair); international meeting of executives for the control of precursors and essential chemical substances, held in Santiago (1998); tenth, fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth international seminars of forensic chemistry, Drug Enforcement Administration, Washington, D.C. (1987–1995); Meeting of Auditors and Evaluators of the Control of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances in Public Health, Santiago (1992).

Member of INCB (since 2020). Member of the Standing Committee on Estimates (2020–2021). Second Vice-President and Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates (2022). First Vice-President (2023).

## Sevil Atasoy

Born in 1949. National of Türkiye. Professor of Biochemistry and Forensic Science, Vice-Rector and Director, Institute of Addiction and Forensic Science; Head, Department of Forensic Science; Director, Center for Violence and Crime Prevention, Uskudar University, Istanbul. Director, Institute of Forensic Science, Istanbul University (1988–2010). Director, Department of Narcotics and Toxicology, Ministry of Justice of Türkiye (1980–1993). Expert witness in civil and criminal courts (since 1980).

Bachelor of Science in Chemistry (1972), Master of Science in Biochemistry (1976), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Biochemistry (1979), Istanbul University.

Lecturer in biochemistry, criminalistics and crime scene investigation (since 1982); supervisor of more than 50 master's and doctoral theses in the area of biochemistry and forensic science. Author of over 130 scientific papers, including papers on drug testing, drug chemistry, drug markets, drug-related and drug-induced crime, drug abuse prevention, clinical and forensic toxicology, crime scene investigation and DNA analysis.

Hubert H. Humphrey Fellow, United States of America Information Agency (1995–1996); Guest Scientist at the School of Public Health, Department of Forensic Science, University of California, Berkeley, and the Drug Abuse Research Center, University of California, Los Angeles; Department of Genetics, Stanford University; Department of Human Genetics, Emory University; California Criminalistics Institute; Federal Bureau of Investigation, Virginia; Crime Laboratories, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, United States; Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), Wiesbaden; Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich Institute for Physical Biochemistry and Institute of Legal Medicine; Center of Human Genetics, Bremen University; Institute of Legal Medicine, Muenster University, Germany; United Nations Drug Laboratory, Vienna; Central Bureau of Investigation, New Delhi.

Member, special commission on preventing drug abuse, Office of the Prime Minister (since 2014). Founding Editor, *Turkish Journal of Legal Medicine* (1982–1993). Member of the scientific board of the *International Criminal Justice Review*. Founding President, Turkish Society of Forensic Sciences; Honorary Member of the Mediterranean Academy of Forensic Sciences. Member of the International Society of Forensic Toxicology; the Indo-Pacific Association of Law, Medicine and Science; the International Association of Forensic Toxicologists; the American Academy of Forensic Sciences; the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors; and the American Society of Criminology.

Member of INCB (2005–2010 and since 2017). Member (2006, 2018 and 2023) and Chair (2017 and 2020) of the Committee on Finance and Administration. Second Vice-President and Chair (2006 and 2021) and member (2007, 2020 and 2022–2023) of the Standing Committee on Estimates. Rapporteur (2007, 2019 and 2022). First Vice-President of the Board (2008). President of the Board (2009).

## Cornelis de Joncheere

Born in 1954. National of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Currently Chair of the Netherlands Antibiotics Development Platform and a consultant to WHO on pharmaceutical policies.

Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) and Master of Science (MSc) in Pharmacy, University of Groningen and University of Amsterdam, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) (1975–1981); Master's in Business Administration, University of San Diego, United States/San José, Costa Rica; Bachelor of Science (BSc). Pharmacy, cum laude (honour student), University of Groningen, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) (1972–1975).

Previously held positions as Director, Department of Essential Medicines and Health Products at WHO, Geneva (2012–2016), which included work on access to controlled medicines, and the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence; WHO Representative, Kyiv (2011–2012); WHO Regional Adviser for Pharmaceuticals and Health Technologies, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen (1996–2010); National Essential Drugs Programme Coordinator, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/WHO, Brazil (1994–1996); Pharmacist, Essential Drugs Projects Coordinator, PAHO/WHO, Costa Rica (1988–1993); Pharmaceutical expert, PAHO/WHO, Panama (1986–1988); pharmaceutical supply expert in Yemen, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate for International Cooperation, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) (1982–1985); hospital and community pharmacy in Amsterdam, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) (1981–1982).

President of the WHO Europe Staff Association (2006–2010); Member of the WHO Guidelines Review Committee (2007–2011); member of the Royal Dutch Pharmaceutical Society; author and co-author of numerous publications in the fields of pharmaceutical and health sciences.

Member of INCB (since 2017). Rapporteur (2017 and 2023). Member of the Standing Committee on Estimates (2017–2018 and 2021–2022). Member (2017–2018 and 2021) and Chair (2022) of the Committee on Finance and Administration. President of the Board (2019–2020).

## David T. Johnson

Born in 1954. National of the United States. President, SwanJohnson LLC; adjunct faculty member, Arizona State University; retired diplomat. Bachelor's degree in economics from Emory University; graduate of the National Defence College of Canada.

United States Foreign Service officer (1977–2011). Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, United States Department of State (2007–2011). Deputy Chief of Mission (2005–2007) and Chargé d'affaires, a.i. (2003–2005), United States Embassy, London. Afghan Coordinator for the United States (2002–2003). United States Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (1998–2001). Deputy Press Secretary at the White House and Spokesman for the National Security Council (1995–1997). Deputy Spokesman at the State Department (1995) and Director of the State Department Press Office (1993–1995). United States Consul General, Vancouver (1990–1993). Assistant National Trust Examiner, Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, United States Treasury (1976–1977).

Member of INCB (since 2012). Member (2012–2017 and 2022–2023) and Chair (2014 and 2018) of the Committee on Finance and Administration. Second Vice-President and Chair (2019), Vice-Chair (2022) and member (2020–2023) of the Standing Committee on Estimates.

## Galina Korchagina

Born in 1953. National of the Russian Federation. Professor, Deputy Director of the National Centre for Research on Drug Addiction (since 2010).

Graduate of the Leningrad Paediatric Medical Institute, Russian Federation (1976); Doctor of Medicine (2001). Thesis based on clinical and epidemiological research dealing with new ways of looking at management of drug abuse in a time of change.

Previously held positions as paediatrician at the Central District Hospital of Gatchina, Leningrad region, and doctor at a boarding school (1976–1979); Head of the Organizational and Policy Division, Leningrad Regional Drug Clinic (1981–1989); Lecturer, Leningrad Regional Medical Academy (1981–1989); Head Doctor, City Drug Clinic, St. Petersburg (1989–1994); Assistant Lecturer (1991–1996) and Professor (2000–2001), Department of Social Technologies, State Institute for Services and Economics; Assistant Lecturer (1994–2000), Associate Professor (2001–2002) and Professor (2002–2008), Department for Research on Drug Addiction,

St. Petersburg Medical Academy of Postgraduate Studies; Chief Professor and Head of the Department for Medical Research and Healthy Lifestyles, Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia (2000–2008); Professor, Department for Conflict Studies, Faculty of Philosophy, St. Petersburg State University (2004–2008).

Member of many associations and societies, including the Association of Psychiatrists and Drug Addiction Specialists of the Russian Federation and St. Petersburg, the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol, the International Council on Alcohol and Addictions and the International Society of Addiction Medicine. Head of the sociology of science aspects of medical and biological research section of the Research Council on the Sociology of Science and the Organization of Scientific Research, St. Petersburg Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences (2002–2008).

Author of more than 100 publications, including more than 70 works published in the Russian Federation, chapters in monographs and several practical guides. Award for excellence in health protection from the Ministry of Health of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1987). Consultant, Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (since 2006).

Expert on the epidemiology of drug addiction, Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe (1994–2003); participation in the WHO cocaine project (1993–1994) as leading researcher; WHO Healthy Cities project (1992–1998) as leading coordinator in St. Petersburg; WHO alcohol action plan, realization on the basis of the city treatment centre, St. Petersburg (1992–1998). Co-trainer, WHO programmes “Helping people change” (since 1992) and “Skills for change” (since 1995); and temporary adviser, WHO (1992–2008). Participant in meetings of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (2002–2008).

Member of INCB (2010–2015 and since 2017). Vice-Chair (2011, 2012, 2017 and 2019) and member (2018 and 2022–2023) of the Standing Committee on Estimates. Member of the Committee on Finance and Administration (2020). First Vice-President of the Board (2013 and 2021).

## Pierre Lapaque

Born in 1958. National of France. Master's degree in public law from the University of Toulon and the Var, France.

Previously held positions of Regional Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for the

Andean Region and the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay) (January 2022); UNODC Representative for Colombia (2019–2021); UNODC Regional Representative for West and Central Africa, Dakar (2012–2021); Chief, Implementation Support Section, Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking Branch, UNODC, Vienna (2010–2012); Chief, Law Enforcement, Organized Crime and Anti-Money-Laundering Unit, UNODC, Vienna (2009–2010); Attaché for Internal Security at the Embassy of France in Portugal (2005–2009); Senior adviser, Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission, Organization of American States, Washington, D.C., (2002–2005); Deputy Director of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (Trinidad and Tobago) (1999–2002); Head of various operational services in the French criminal investigation police (ranks ranging from Inspector of Police to Commissioner General of Police) (1982–1998).

Drafter and contributor to “Le Groupe d’action financière des Caraïbes (GAFIC)”, in the journal of INTERPOL, 2000.

Spoke on drugs, money-laundering, transnational organized crime and the financing of terrorism at a number of international forums (Financial Action Task Force, Group of Seven under the Presidency of the United Kingdom, Dakar Forum on organized crime in Africa) (since 1999); presented the work of UNODC at meetings of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (2009–2022); spoke at meetings of the OAS Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (General Assembly and Permanent Council) on developments related to drugs and the laundering of criminal assets in the Americas (2002–2005); and presented, as team leader, 13 mutual evaluations by member countries of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (1999–2002). Honours: Order of San Carlos at the level of Grand Cross (Colombia, June 2022).

Member of International Narcotics Control Board (since 2023).<sup>1</sup>

## Lu Lin

Born in 1966. National of China. Professor/Director, National Institute on Drug Dependence, Peking University; Professor/Director, Peking University Sixth Hospital/Institute of Mental Health; Professor/Director, National Clinical Research Center for Mental Disorders, China; Chair, Expert Committee on Drug Abuse Prevention and Control, National Narcotics Control Committee, China; Vice-President, Asian Association for Substance Abuse Research; Committee member, WHO

<sup>1</sup>Elected by the Economic and Social Council on 25 July 2023.

Expert Committee on Drug Dependence; Associate Editor, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*; Associate Editor, *American Journal on Addictions*.

Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Psychiatry, West China Medical Center, Sichuan University, China.

Previously held positions as Research Scientist, National Institute on Drug Abuse of the National Institutes of Health, United States (2003–2006); Postdoctoral Fellow, National Institute on Drug Abuse of the National Institutes of Health of the United States (2001–2003).

Author of and contributor to numerous publications including: “2019-nCoV epidemic: address mental health care to empower society”, *The Lancet*, vol. 395, No. 10224 (February 2020), pp. 37–38; “Control of fentanyl-related substances in China”, *The Lancet Psychiatry*, vol. 6, No. 7 (July 2019), p. 15; “Effect of selective inhibition of reactivated nicotine-associated memories with propranolol on nicotine craving”, *JAMA Psychiatry*, vol. 74, No. 3 (March 2017), pp. 224–232; “Selective inhibition of amygdala neuronal ensembles encoding nicotine-associated memories inhibits nicotine preference and relapse”, *Biological Psychiatry*, vol. 82, No. 11 (December 2017), pp. 781–793; “A novel UCS memory retrieval-extinction procedure to inhibit relapse to drug seeking”, *Nature Communications*, vol. 6, No. 7675 (July 2015); “A memory retrieval-extinction procedure to prevent drug craving and relapse”, *Science*, vol. 336, No. 6078 (April 2013), pp. 241–245.

Honours include: National Innovation Award (2020); Academician, Chinese Academy of Sciences (2017); Chinese Medical Science and Technology Award (2008 and 2015); Natural Science Award of the Ministry of Education (2008 and 2013); National Natural Science Award (2002).

Member of the International Narcotics Control Board (since 2022). Member of the Standing Committee on Estimates (2022). Member of the Committee on Finance and Administration (2023).

## Pavel Pachta

Born in 1953. National of Czechia. Retired Director for International Regulatory Affairs, International Cannabis and Cannabinoids Institute (2018–2021).

Master of Science in Foreign Trade (1976), Doctorate in International Economic Relations (1981), Prague University of Economics and Business.

Previously held positions of Deputy Secretary of INCB (2004–2013); Acting Secretary of INCB in 2011; Chief, Narcotics Control and Estimates Section, Secretariat of INCB, UNODC (2001–2013); Chief, Psychotropics Control Section, INCB Secretariat, UNODC (1991–2000); Assistant Professor, Prague University of Economics and Business (1976–1986).

Member of the Scientific Board of the Prague University of Economics and Business (2016–2022) and the International Cannabis and Cannabinoids Institute (2015–2021).

Drafter of and contributor to several publications of INCB, including sections of INCB annual reports (1991–2012), INCB technical reports on psychotropic substances (1991–2000) and INCB technical reports on narcotic drugs (2001–2012). Contributor on behalf of INCB to the following WHO publications: *Guidelines for the Psychosocially Assisted Pharmacological Treatment of Opioid Dependence* (2009), “Guidance on the WHO review of psychoactive substances for international control” (2010), *Ensuring Balance in National Policies on Controlled Substances: Guidance for Availability and Accessibility of Controlled Medicines* (2011).

Member of INCB delegations at the following meetings: Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Vienna, several meetings between 1991–2013; Economic and Social Council, substantive session, New York in 2004, New York in 2008 and Geneva in 2011; high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, New York, 2011; World Health Assembly, Geneva, in 2002, 2003 and 2011; WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence, Geneva, 2006.

Keynote speaker at several international conferences and lecturer at many training events, such as: Challenges for Promotion of the Countermeasures against Amphetamine-type Stimulants Abuse, Tokyo, 2001; Harmonization of Licit Drug Control Laws in Central Asia, Almaty, 2004; Worldwide Summit for National Associations of Hospice and Palliative Care, Vienna, 2009; Medical Cannabis and Cannabinoids, Prague, 2015; Medical, Scientific and Industrial Use of Cannabis, Bogotá, 2019; Participant in the INCB expert group meeting on control and monitoring requirements for cannabis and cannabis-related substances, 2021.

Member of International Narcotics Control Board (since 2022).<sup>2</sup> Member of the Standing Committee on Estimates (2023).

## Jagjit Pavadia

Born in 1954. National of India. Graduate in English Honours (1974), Dhaka University, LLB from Delhi University (1988), Master’s Diploma in Public Administration, Indian Institute of Public Administration (1996). Completed dissertation “Forfeiture of property under the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985” towards completion of Master’s Diploma.

Held several senior positions in the Indian Revenue Service for 35 years in the Government of India, including Narcotics Commissioner of India, Central Bureau of Narcotics (2006–2012); Commissioner, Legal Affairs (2001–2005); Chief Vigilance Officer, Power Finance Corporation (1996–2001); Customs Training Adviser Maldives, deputed by the Commonwealth Secretariat (1994–1995); Deputy Director, Narcotics Control Bureau (1990–1994); and retired as Chief Commissioner, Customs, Central Excise and Service Tax, Nagpur, in 2014.

Recipient of Presidential Appreciation Certificate for Specially Distinguished Record of Service on the occasion of Republic Day (2005), published in the *Gazette of India Extraordinary*.

Member of the Indian delegation to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Vienna (2007–2012); introduced resolutions 51/15 (2008) and 53/12 (2010), adopted by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, and organized a side event on the margins of the Commission’s 2011 session, presenting issues involved in the illegal movement of opium poppy seeds to producing, importing and exporting countries. As representative of the competent national authority, attended Project Prism and Project Cohesion task force meetings (2006–2012), and coordinated and organized the Project Prism and Project Cohesion meeting in New Delhi (2008). Participated in the Thirtieth Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok (2006), and organized the Thirty-fifth Meeting of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and the Pacific, held in Agra, India (2011). Member of the INCB advisory expert group on the scheduling of substances (2006), and member of the advisory group finalizing the INCB *Guidelines for a Voluntary Code of Practice for the Chemical Industry* (2008). Rapporteur of the Subcommittee on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East at its forty-first session, held in Amman (2006); Chair of the Subcommittee at its forty-second session, held in Accra, India (2007); organized the meeting of the Paris Pact Initiative Expert Working Group on Precursors, held in New Delhi (2011), and participated in the International Drug Enforcement Conferences hosted

<sup>2</sup>Elected by the Economic and Social Council on 7 December 2022.

by the Drug Enforcement Agency of the United States, held in Istanbul, Türkiye (2008) and Cancún, Mexico (2011).

Member of INCB (since 2015). Second Vice-President and Chair (2015, 2017 and 2020), Vice-Chair (2018) and member (2019 and 2023) of the Standing Committee on Estimates. Member (2016–2017 and 2020) and Chair (2019 and 2023) of the Committee on Finance and Administration. First Vice-President of the Board (2016). President of the Board (2021–2022).

## N. Larissa Razanadimby

Born in 1988. National of Madagascar. Head of the Division for the importation of products under international control and customs clearance of donated health products, Department of Health Products Management, Directorate of Pharmacy, Laboratories and Traditional Medicine of the Ministry of Public Health (2014–2021).

Pharmacist, Graduate of the Faculty of Medicine, Specialization in Pharmacy, University of Antananarivo, Madagascar.

Previously, manager of the medical products storage warehouse of the Department of Pharmacy, Laboratories and Traditional Medicine, Ministry of Public Health (2014–2015); consulting positions in the Biorama cosmetics laboratory in Antananarivo, Madagascar (2014), acting pharmacist at the Ankadifotsy Pharmacy, Antananarivo, Madagascar (2013).

Appointed Permanent Secretary of the Technical Unit in Logistics Management of the Ministry of Public Health (2016).

Member of the Council of the National Order of Pharmacists of Madagascar, Member of the Board of Directors of the Solid Solutes Supply Unit in Madagascar (2019), Member of the Commission for the opening and closing of drug depots intended for human use of the Ministry of Public Health, Member of the Logistics Commission of the Ministry of Public Health of Madagascar, Member of the Drafting Committee of the National Pharmaceutical Policy and the National Pharmaceutical Master Plan of Madagascar (2016).

Lecturer on pharmacology and therapeutics, Nursing Sciences, Interregional Training Institute for Paramedics.

Consultant for the implementation of the Accredited Drug Dispensing Outlet project (2022) within USAID, Madagascar (2022).

Participant in the subregional workshop for the strengthening of national skills and the improvement of procedures for the selection of essential medicines, including those for mothers and children, by experts from WHO, held in Cotonou, Benin (2018), training on supportive supervision, by USAID, Antananarivo, Madagascar (2018), training of quantifier pools on the need for health inputs, by USAID, Antsirabe, Madagascar (2018), training on supply chain management by Pamela Steele Associates, Nairobi (2017), seminar on pharmaceutical investment and cooperation by the Government of China, Beijing and Shanghai, China (2017), management training, monitoring and evaluation of the input supply chain, by USAID Deliver Project, Antananarivo, Madagascar (2016).

Publications include the scientific communication presented at the Biomad III conference in Mahajanga, Madagascar, on the theme “Health and biodiversity”.

Member of the International Narcotics Control Board (since 2022). Member (2022) and Vice-Chair (2023) of the Standing Committee on Estimates.

## Mariângela Simão

Born in 1956. National of Brazil. Director-President, Instituto Todos pela Saúde in São Paulo, Brazil, 2023.

Medical Doctor; Diploma in Public Health; MSc, with degrees in Paediatrics and Public Health.

Previously held positions as WHO Assistant Director-General for Access to Medicines and Health Products (2017–2022); UNAIDS Director of the Community Support, Social Justice and Inclusion Department (2010–2017); Brazilian Ministry of Health Director of the HIV/STI/Viral Hepatitis Department (2005–2010); several managerial posts at state and municipal levels in Paraná, Brazil (1983–2003).

Author and co-author of numerous papers in scientific journals, with a focus on primary health care in Brazil, HIV, stigma and discrimination against vulnerable groups, improving access to medicines in general and in particular on palliative care, as well as on public health, drug policy and harm reduction.

Several high-level meetings including the United Nations General Assembly, special sessions of the General Assembly on HIV, Commission on Narcotic Drugs, World Health Assembly and Executive Board meetings. Currently a board member of a range of international organizations, as well as scientific and advisory groups.



Member of International Narcotics Control Board (since 2023).<sup>3</sup>

## Jallal Toufiq

Born in 1963. National of Morocco. Head of the National Centre for Drug Abuse Prevention and Research; Director of the Moroccan National Observatory on Drugs and Addictions; Director of the Ar-razi University Psychiatric Hospital and Professor of Psychiatry at the Rabat Faculty of Medicine.

Medical Doctor, Rabat Faculty of Medicine (1989); Diploma of Specialization in Psychiatry (1994); lecturer at the Rabat Faculty of Medicine (since 1995). Undertook specialized training in Paris at the Sainte-Anne Psychiatric Hospital and Marmottan Centre (1990–1991) and at Johns Hopkins University as a National Institute on Drug Abuse research fellow and Clinical Observer (1994–1995). Conducted research at the University of Pittsburgh (1995); gained clinical drug research certificates at the Vienna School of Clinical Research (2001 and 2002).

Currently holding positions in Morocco as Head of the Harm Reduction Programme, National Centre for Drug Abuse Prevention and Research; teaching and residency training coordinator, Ar-razi Hospital; Director of the National Diploma Programme on Treatment and Prevention of Drug Abuse, Rabat Faculty of Medicine; Director of the National Diploma Programme on Child Psychiatry, Rabat Faculty of Medicine, and member of the Ministry of Health Commission on Drug Abuse.

At the international level, Representative of the Mediterranean Network (MedNET) for Morocco (MedNET/Pompidou Group/Council of Europe); former permanent correspondent of the Pompidou Group for Morocco (Council of Europe) on drug abuse prevention and research and former member of the Reference Group to the United Nations on HIV and Injecting Drug Use. Founding member and steering committee member, Middle East and North Africa Harm Reduction Association (MENAHRRA); Director of Knowledge Hub Ar-razi for North Africa, MENAHRRA; member, Mentor International Scientific Advisory Network (drug abuse prevention in youth); former focal point/expert on prevention, United Nations Office on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (local network for North Africa); founding member, MedNET (advisory group on AIDS and drug abuse policies) of the Council of Europe,

and member of the Reference Group to the United Nations on HIV and injecting drug use.

Held consultancy roles with the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, UNODC and other international institutions, research fellowships and the National Institute on Drug Abuse of the United States. Published widely in the field of psychiatry, alcohol and drug abuse.

Member of INCB (since 2015). Member of the Standing Committee on Estimates (2015). Chair (2021) and member (2016) of the Committee on Finance and Administration. First Vice-President of the Board (2018). President of the Board (2023).

## Zukiswa Zingela

Born in 1969. National of South Africa. Associate Professor and Executive Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences, Nelson Mandela University (since 2021).

Master of Medicine, Psychiatry (University of Pretoria); Fellow of the College of Psychiatrists of South Africa, PhD, Psychology (Nelson Mandela University).

Serves on the Medical and Dental Board of the Health Professions Council of South Africa and is also the Chairperson of the Health Committee of the Medical and Dental Board.

Previously held positions as Head, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences, Walter Sisulu University and Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital, Eastern Cape Department of Health (2015–2021); Leader of the Dean's Advisory Committee in charge of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Walter Sisulu University (2016–2017); Head of Clinical Unit, Dora Nginza Hospital, Eastern Cape Department of Health, and Senior Lecturer at Walter Sisulu University (2011–2015); Specialist Psychiatrist in private practice (2003–2008); Consultant Psychiatrist, Blackpool North Community Mental Health Team, National Health Service, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2003–2008). Duties in the above-mentioned posts included training of undergraduate medical students and postgraduate students in psychiatry with an emphasis on addiction psychiatry and substance use, providing substitution treatment for patients with opioid use-related disorders, neuropsychiatry, consultation liaison psychiatry, child and adolescent psychiatry, old age psychiatry, psychopharmacology and public mental health. Honours: Chairperson of the Board of the Ernest Malgas Youth Treatment Centre (Rehabilitation for Substance Abuse) (2016–2018);

<sup>3</sup>Elected by the Economic and Social Council on 25 July 2023.

Chairperson of the South African Society of Psychiatrists, Eastern Cape Subgroup (2016–2018); Chairperson of Walter Sisulu University Registrar Training and Implementation Committee (2015–2018); Chairperson of Task Team appointed by the Head of Department of the Eastern Cape Department of Health to investigate allegations of patient abuse in Tower Psychiatric Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre, with the investigative report delivered to Minister of Health in 2018.

Author and co-author of numerous publications including “First-episode psychosis and substance use” (authors: Thungana and Zingela (supervisor) and van Wyk (co-supervisor)), *South African Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 24 (2018); “Personality and personality disorder” (co-authors: Nagdee, Grobler and Zingela), chapter in *Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry for Southern Africa* (J. Burns and L. Roos, eds.), 2nd ed., 2016).

Member of steering committee for establishment of rehabilitation for substance abuse (Ernest Malgas Youth Treatment Centre) (2012–2015); consultant, consultation committee on the implementation of the Prevention of and Treatment of Substance Abuse Act. Advised, on a voluntary basis, the Ernest Malgas Youth Treatment Centre on implementation of substance abuse act and support for starting the rehabilitation programme (2015); established a mental health outreach programme for the Ernest Malgas Youth Treatment Centre offering assessment and interventions (since 2016);

facilitated support from the Department of Health to the local drug action committee through the allocation of a multidisciplinary staff member (clinical psychologist) to serve on the committee (2014–2016).

Fifteenth Biannual National Congress of the South African Society of Psychiatrists, 2018 (presented paper on first episode psychosis and substance abuse (authors: Thungana, Zingela and van Wyk)); substance abuse assessment and intervention: provincial training organized by Walter Sisulu University and Eastern Cape Department of Health, 2017; Seventh African Population Conference, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2015 (presented paper on school-based substance abuse awareness programmes, (authors: Zingela, Bronkhorst and Ngwetsheni); and paper on the integration of the South African Master Drug Plan Policy and Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan (author: Zingela); National Substance Abuse Colloquium, 2015 (chaired and presented paper on aftercare, outpatient and maintenance services for substance abuse); Substance Abuse Colloquium, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, in preparation for the opening of the Ernest Malgas Youth Treatment Centre, 2015 (organizer).

Member of INCB (since 2020). Second Vice-President and Chair (2023), Vice-Chair (2021) and member (2020) of the Standing Committee on Estimates. First Vice-President of the Board (2022).

## About the International Narcotics Control Board

INCB is an independent and quasi-judicial control organ, established by treaty, for monitoring the implementation of the international drug control treaties. It had predecessors under the former drug control treaties as far back as the time of the League of Nations.

### Composition

INCB consists of 13 members who are elected by the Economic and Social Council and who serve in their personal capacity, not as government representatives.

Three members with medical, pharmacological or pharmaceutical experience are elected from a list of persons nominated by WHO and 10 members are elected from a list of persons nominated by Governments. Members of the Board are persons who, by their competence, impartiality and disinterestedness, command general confidence. The Council, in consultation with INCB, makes all arrangements necessary to ensure the full technical independence of the Board in carrying out its functions. INCB has a secretariat that assists it in the exercise of its treaty-related functions. The INCB secretariat is an administrative entity of UNODC, but it reports solely to the Board on matters of substance. INCB closely collaborates with UNODC in the framework of arrangements approved by the Council in its resolution 1991/48. INCB also cooperates with other international bodies concerned with drug control, including not only the Council and its Commission on Narcotic Drugs, but also the relevant specialized agencies of the United Nations, particularly WHO. It also cooperates with bodies outside the United Nations system, especially INTERPOL and WCO.

### Functions

The functions of INCB are laid down in the following treaties: Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended by the 1972 Protocol; Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971; and United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988. Broadly speaking, INCB deals with the following:

(a) As regards the licit manufacture of, trade in and use of drugs, INCB endeavours, in cooperation with Governments, to ensure that adequate supplies of drugs are available for medical and scientific uses and that the diversion of drugs from licit sources to illicit channels does not occur. INCB also monitors Governments' control over chemicals used in

the illicit manufacture of drugs and assists them in preventing the diversion of those chemicals into the illicit traffic;

(b) As regards the illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of drugs, INCB identifies weaknesses in national and international control systems and contributes to correcting such situations. INCB is also responsible for assessing chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs, in order to determine whether they should be placed under international control.

In the discharge of its responsibilities, INCB:

(a) Administers a system of estimates for narcotic drugs and a voluntary assessment system for psychotropic substances and monitors licit activities involving drugs through a statistical returns system, with a view to assisting Governments in achieving, inter alia, a balance between supply and demand;

(b) Monitors and promotes measures taken by Governments to prevent the diversion of substances frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and assesses such substances to determine whether there is a need for changes in the scope of control of Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention;

(c) Analyses information provided by Governments, United Nations bodies, specialized agencies or other competent international organizations, with a view to ensuring that the provisions of the international drug control treaties are adequately carried out by Governments, and recommends remedial measures;

(d) Maintains a permanent dialogue with Governments to assist them in complying with their obligations under the international drug control treaties and, to that end, recommends, where appropriate, technical or financial assistance to be provided.

INCB is called upon to ask for explanations in the event of apparent violations of the treaties, to propose appropriate remedial measures to Governments that are not fully applying the provisions of the treaties or are encountering difficulties in applying them and, where necessary, to assist Governments in overcoming such difficulties. If, however, INCB notes that the measures necessary to remedy a serious situation have not been taken, it may call the matter to the attention of the parties concerned, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the Economic and Social Council. As a last resort, the treaties empower INCB to recommend to parties that they stop importing drugs from a defaulting country, exporting drugs to it or both. In all cases, INCB acts in close cooperation with Governments.

INCB assists national administrations in meeting their obligations under the conventions. To that end, it proposes and participates in regional training seminars and programmes for drug control administrators.

## Reports

The international drug control treaties require INCB to prepare an annual report on its work. The annual report contains an analysis of the drug control situation worldwide so that Governments are kept aware of existing and potential situations that may endanger the objectives of the international drug control treaties. INCB draws the attention of Governments to gaps and weaknesses in national control and in treaty compliance; it also makes suggestions and recommendations for improvements at both the national and international levels. The annual report is based on information provided by Governments to INCB, United Nations entities and other organizations. It also uses information provided through other international organizations, such as INTERPOL and WCO, as well as regional organizations.

The annual report of INCB is supplemented by detailed technical reports. They contain data on the licit movement of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances required for medical and scientific purposes, together with an analysis of those data by INCB. Those data are required for the proper functioning of the system of control over the licit movement of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, including preventing their diversion to illicit channels. Moreover, under the provisions of article 12 of the 1988 Convention, INCB reports annually to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs on the implementation of that article. That report, which gives an account of the results of the monitoring of precursors and of the chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, is also published as a supplement to the annual report.

Since 1992, the first chapter of the annual report has been devoted to a specific drug control issue on which INCB presents its conclusions and recommendations in order to contribute to policy-related discussions and decisions in national, regional and international drug control. The following topics were covered in past annual reports:

- 1992: Legalization of the non-medical use of drugs
- 1993: The importance of demand reduction
- 1994: Evaluation of the effectiveness of the international drug control treaties
- 1995: Giving more priority to combating money-laundering
- 1996: Drug abuse and the criminal justice system
- 1997: Preventing drug abuse in an environment of illicit drug promotion
- 1998: International control of drugs: past, present and future
- 1999: Freedom from pain and suffering
- 2000: Overconsumption of internationally controlled drugs
- 2001: Globalization and new technologies: challenges to drug law enforcement in the twenty-first century
- 2002: Illicit drugs and economic development
- 2003: Drugs, crime and violence: the micro-level impact
- 2004: Integration of supply and demand reduction strategies: moving beyond a balanced approach
- 2005: Alternative development and legitimate livelihoods
- 2006: Internationally controlled drugs and the unregulated market
- 2007: The principle of proportionality and drug-related offences
- 2008: The international drug control conventions: history, achievements and challenges
- 2009: Primary prevention of drug abuse
- 2010: Drugs and corruption
- 2011: Social cohesion, social disorganization and illegal drugs
- 2012: Shared responsibility in international drug control
- 2013: Economic consequences of drug abuse
- 2014: Implementation of a comprehensive, integrated and balanced approach to addressing the world drug problem
- 2015: The health and welfare of mankind: challenges and opportunities for the international control of drugs

- 2016: Women and drugs
- 2017: Treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration for drug use disorders: essential components of drug demand reduction
- 2018: Cannabis and cannabinoids for medical, scientific and “recreational” use: risks and benefits
- 2019: Improving substance use prevention and treatment services for young people
- 2020: A hidden epidemic: the use of drugs among older persons
- 2021: Illicit financial flows related to drug trafficking and their impact on development and security
- 2022: Analysis of the trend to legalize the non-medical use of cannabis

Chapter I of the report of the Board for 2023 is entitled “The role of the Internet, including social media, in drug trafficking and use”.

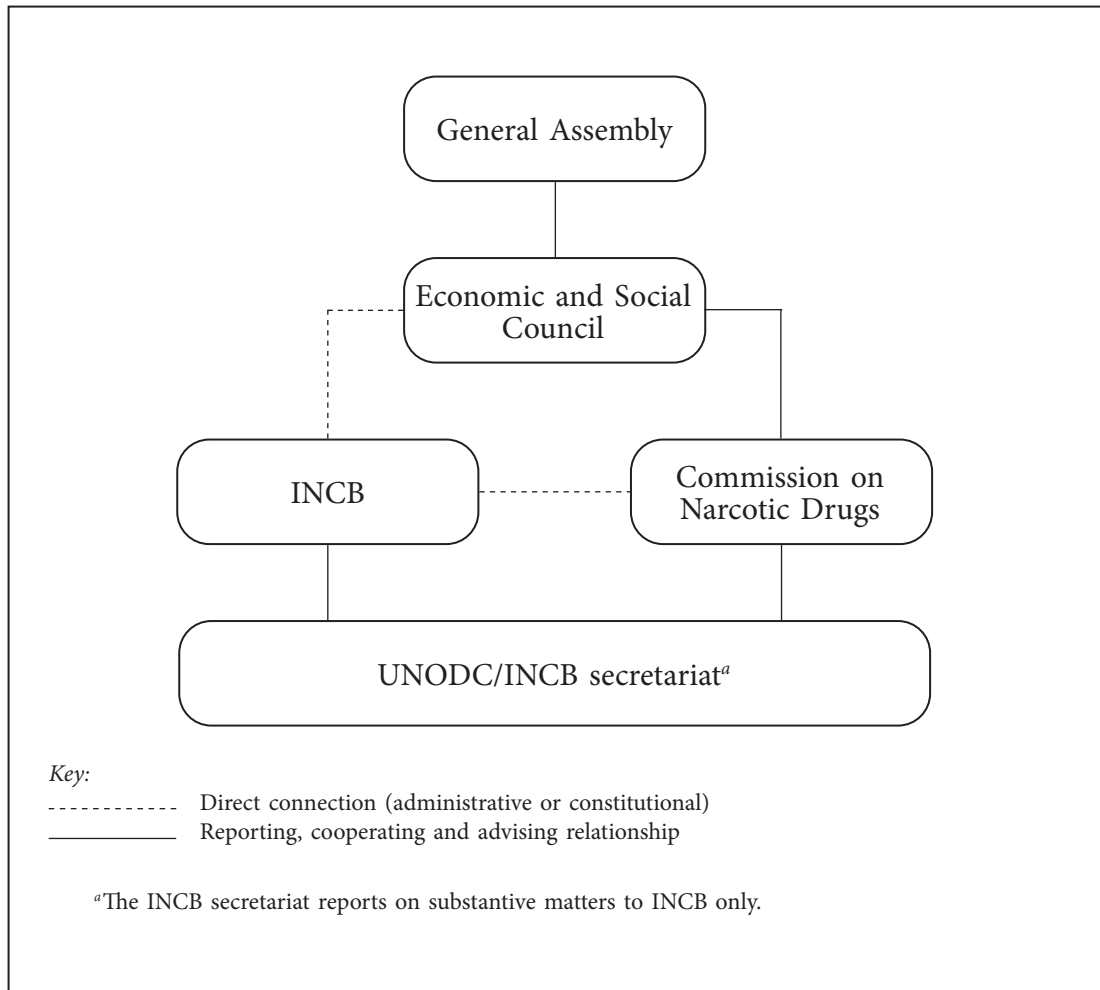
Chapter II presents an analysis of the operation of the international drug control system based primarily on information that Governments are required to submit directly to INCB in accordance with the international drug control treaties. Its focus is on the worldwide control of all licit activities related to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of such drugs.

Chapter III presents global issues and some of the major developments in drug abuse and trafficking and measures by Governments to implement the international drug control treaties by addressing those problems.

Chapter IV presents the main recommendations addressed by INCB to Governments, UNODC, WHO and other relevant international and regional organizations.



## United Nations system and drug control organs and their secretariat





## INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is the independent monitoring body for the implementation of United Nations international drug control conventions. It was established in 1968 in accordance with the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961. It had predecessors under the former drug control treaties as far back as the time of the League of Nations.

Based on its activities, INCB publishes an annual report that is submitted to the United Nations Economic and Social Council through the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The report provides a comprehensive survey of the drug control situation in various parts of the world. As an impartial body, INCB tries to identify and predict dangerous trends and suggests necessary measures to be taken.

