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EMBARGO:

**28 February 2012,
1100 hours CET**

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Building on the Achievements of a Century of International Drug Control

The Annual Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2011 is dedicated to the centennial of the first international drug control treaty, the International Opium Convention of The Hague of 1912. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, governments and civil society recognized the grave danger to public health posed by the unregulated trade in drugs and high levels of drug abuse and addiction worldwide. In the United States at that time, around 90 per cent of consumption of narcotic drugs was for non-medical purposes, and in China, annual consumption of opiates was estimated at more than 3,000 tons of morphine equivalent—significantly more than the global consumption one hundred years later.



The signing of the 1912 Convention was a milestone that demonstrated the recognition that international cooperation and the principle of shared responsibility were essential to drug control. It recognized the importance of the availability of drugs for medical and scientific purposes and accorded priority to the protection of individuals and communities from drug abuse and addiction, and from the loss of freedom resulting from such drug dependence.

On this occasion, the Board recognizes the efforts and commitment of many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who, through their work to protect people from drug abuse, uphold the legacy of the progressive NGOs who played such a momentous role in the lead up to the 1912 Convention.

There have been notable achievements during the first century of international drug control: the three international drug control conventions are almost universally adhered to; diversion of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances has been almost fully eliminated at the international level; and an international system has been established for the control of precursor chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs.

However, despite these successes, there are some significant challenges in contemporary drug control that are yet to be solved and which require comprehensive action. Many of these problems are highlighted in the Board's Annual Report for 2011. For instance, many countries around the world have marginalized communities that are vulnerable to drug problems, and this challenge, and the means of addressing it, is explored in the thematic chapter of the Board's report. There is still inequitable access to internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, meaning that many people are suffering unnecessarily from pain or mental illness due to inadequate availability, while in other countries many individuals face the health risks associated with overconsumption of internationally controlled medicines. Some individuals have expressed doubts regarding



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the effectiveness of the current international drug control conventions and proposed legalization of drugs. However, many arguments presented for legalization are deeply flawed, overlooking the complexity of the drug problem, and there is no better alternative to the present drug control system foreseeable.

The drug problem is global and interconnected and requires action at international, regional, national, and local levels. As we look back upon the successes and experiences of international drug control since the signing of the 1912 International Opium Convention, let us also strengthen our joint efforts to ensure that the next century of international drug control is even more successful than the last.

Hamid Ghodse

President

International Narcotics Control Board