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CONTROL BOARD

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STATEMENT BY PROFESSOR HAMID GHODSE, PRESIDENT, INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD

Fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (12-16 March 2012)

AGENDA ITEM 4 C:

International cooperation to ensure the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their diversion

Madam Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes is at the heart of the international drug control conventions. The use of internationally controlled drugs is indispensable in the relief of pain and treatment of illnesses, including mental illness. Unfortunately, availability is limited in many countries and regions. Inadequate availability remains one of the main topics of the Board's dialogue with Governments on treaty implementation, and the Board has been cooperating with the World Health Organization on this issue.

The Board appreciates the increased attention and priority accorded to this issue by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Governments and civil society. The Board published a Supplement to its Annual Report for 2010 on "Availability of Internationally Controlled Drugs: Ensuring Adequate Access for Medical and Scientific Purposes", given the Board's ongoing concern about this issue and in response to Commission Resolution 53/4. The Supplement highlighted the stark contrast in consumption levels in the different regions of the world. The report analysed the various regions and calculated consumption levels for all countries, thereby identifying countries with particularly low levels of licit consumption of internationally controlled substances.

Low availability is not related to low supply. The Board monitors the global supply of and demand for opiate raw materials and I am pleased to reassure the Commission that the global supply of opiate raw materials is more than adequate for the production of opiates in the quantities required for medical purposes. Global capacity for the manufacture of synthetic opioids is also sufficient. Further, the manufacture of all opioid medications has increased fivefold over the last two decades. However, these impressive growth rates in manufacture and consumption did not benefit all countries, and were primarily caused by strong growth rates of manufacture and imports in countries where consumption levels were already high. Consumption levels remained low or even decreased in many of the countries with low consumption.

Impediments to availability vary between countries and regions, and national authorities have the responsibility to take appropriate remedial measures. In its Supplement on Availability, the Board made many recommendations for addressing low availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes.

A precondition for adequate availability is the identification of actual requirements for internationally controlled substances at the national level. Countries that are able to adequately estimate and assess their licit requirements for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are generally also able to improve availability. This is because the process of developing the mechanism and expertise to make appropriate estimates and assessments of legitimate requirements can lead to improved supply of internationally controlled substances.

However, many countries are not able to provide adequate estimates and assessments, often due to a lack of experience in collecting the necessary information and data, and in calculating the estimates and assessments. To support these countries, the Board has, in cooperation with the World Health Organization, developed a guide on estimating requirements for internationally controlled substances. This guide, which will be launched at the margins of the Commission, has been prepared with the aim of assisting Governments of countries with low levels of consumption to become aware of their actual requirements and to furnish the Board with estimates and assessments that more accurately reflect those requirements.

The guide provides information on the methods to calculate requirements for internationally controlled substances. The three methods presented in the guide are the consumption based method, the service based method and the morbidity based method. These methods suit different conditions and objectives, allowing for flexibility in their application. The most effective approach may be to use more than one method in combination or sequentially. The Board hopes that the guide will help national authorities to assess their present consumption levels and identify the additional quantities required under existing treatment facilities.

Madam Chair,

The Board appreciates the efforts of those Governments that submitted data for 2010 on the consumption of psychotropic substances used for medical and scientific purposes, pursuant to Commission Resolution 54/6 and the Board's recommendation. The Board hopes that all other Governments will soon collect - and report to the Board - reliable data on the consumption of psychotropic substances. This will ultimately help the Board to identify developments and recommend remedial action as appropriate, with the aim of ensuring adequate availability of psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes.

Madam Chair,

Following Commission Resolution 54/3 on "Ensuring the availability of reference and test samples of controlled substances at drug testing laboratories for scientific purposes", and in response to concerns regarding specific cases of difficulties in the procurement of such samples by national laboratories, as identified by UNODC, the Board conducted a special study on obstacles to obtaining test and reference samples. The results of the study were included as a special topic in the Annual Report of the Board for 2011.

The responses to questionnaires issued by the Board and UNODC confirmed that many national laboratories continue to encounter difficulties in obtaining test and reference samples, and that where procedures for applying for import authorization are not known or fully

complied with by laboratories, the authorizations may be delayed or denied. The study identified various impediments and the Board emphasises that the key to removing obstacles to the availability of test and reference samples of internationally controlled substances is awareness-raising and inter-agency cooperation. The Board invites all States to renew their efforts in this regard.

Madam Chair, Excellencies,

The Board appreciates and welcomes the increased attention given by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs to the subject of availability of internationally controlled substances, including in resolution 54/6 on this issue, and hopes that this will result in appropriate public health policies to ensure worldwide improvements in the availability of internationally controlled substances. At the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases in September 2011, the Board emphasised the importance of appropriate use of internationally controlled drugs in the treatment and management of non-communicable diseases, including cancer and mental illness, as well as in the treatment of painful conditions associated with other non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes.

The Board notes that action has been taken in some countries to improve the level of consumption of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes and congratulates those Governments. The Board urges other countries to follow suit but cautions that any efforts to improve the availability of controlled substances need to be balanced with efforts to ensure that diversion and abuse of these substances is prevented. The Board also appreciates the work of non-governmental organizations in promoting and advocating for adequate availability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.

The Board will continue to address the issue of adequate availability of internationally controlled substances, in accordance with its mandate under the international drug control treaties. However, the Board has drawn attention in its Annual Report to the need for additional resources to carry out additional activities and expand present activities aimed at ensuring adequate availability of internationally controlled drugs for medical and scientific purposes. Ultimately, the noble purpose of international efforts to improve availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes is to relieve human pain and suffering.

Thank you, Madam Chair.