

Vienna International Centre, P.O. Box 500, A-1400 Vienna, Austria
Telephone: +43-1-26060, Telefax: +43-1-26060-5867 / 5868
E-Mail: incb.secretariat@un.org Internet Address: <http://www.incb.org/>

Check against delivery

**Statement by Dr. César Arce,
First Vice-President of the International Narcotics Control Board**

**67th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
High-level side event:
End Inequalities End AIDS - On the Fast-Track: scaling up evidence-
based services to address transmission of HIV, and viral hepatitis
among people who use drugs**

**Friday March 15th, 13:00-14:30 (CET)
Location: M3 In-Person**

Question: Do the Conventions provide the ground of action for Member States and the international community that can be used in guiding interventions to address HIV/AIDS among people who use drugs?

It is an honour for me to be here today and I would like to thank the organizers of this event for the invitation.

The conventions provide some strong ground for action by Member States and the international community. Apart from the concern expressed in the preamble for the health and welfare of humankind, there are some key legal concepts in the conventions that can also guide interventions to address the problem.

Firstly, to address the increasing prison population, countries should make use of the principle of proportionality. INCB has repeatedly called upon States to give due regard to this in the implementation of criminal justice policy in their efforts to address drug-related crime. In the context of drug-related offences, this is a key aspect of a sound and effective drug policy.

Punishment for criminal offences has to be adequate and directly proportionate to the seriousness of the crime. This requirement is contained in all three of the international drug conventions. Extensive use of incarceration for low-level drug offenders still found in many countries is one of the reasons for the increase in the HIV/AIDS problem in prison settings.

The second element to consider is the importance of the objective of the conventions to ensure – and not unduly restrict – the availability of drugs considered indispensable for medical and scientific purposes.

While much emphasis has been given to ensuring access to and availability of controlled substances for pain relief, the Board has emphasized that the availability of methadone and buprenorphine for the treatment of opioid dependence is critical in the efforts to reduce HIV transmission among people who inject drugs.

Data reported to INCB show that consumption of both substances is concentrated in a limited number of countries where there is a significant presence of people who inject drugs. However, in some countries with a significant prevalence of people injecting drugs, the consumption of buprenorphine and methadone, and also the presence of opioid agonist therapy services, are limited or not present at all.

This is sometimes due to political and cultural issues, inaction by the responsible authorities or simply incapacity to recognize the problem. Some Governments do not recognize the use of these substances and the provision of related opioid agonist therapy services as effective in the treatment of opioid dependence.

Finally, article 38 of the 1961 Convention and article 20 of the 1971 Convention require States to take all practicable measures for the prevention

of drug misuse and for the early identification, treatment, education, aftercare, rehabilitation and social integration of people affected by drug problems.

INCB has recognized that a comprehensive package of interventions aimed at reducing the adverse consequences of drug use, including the transmission of HIV and other blood-borne viral infections among people who inject drugs, has been endorsed widely, including by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. INCB is committed to working with and assisting the international community towards achieving the vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths.

Thank you.