Summary

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), in cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and as a contribution to the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem to be held in 2016, convened in Bangkok in April 2015 an international conference entitled Precursor Chemicals and New Psychoactive Substances. The conference participants adopted an outcome document on addressing pertinent global challenges in precursor control, new psychoactive substances and related international cooperation.[a] INCB also launched at the conference a document to provide practical guidance to support Governments' implementation of the *Guidelines for a Voluntary Code of Practice for the Chemical Industry*, prepared by the Board in 2009.

Public-private partnerships and the work of INCB in this area are also given special focus in the present report, reflecting the strong belief on the part of the Board and many Governments in the merits and potential of this concept as one of the key components for addressing present and future challenges in precursor control.

One of these challenges, identified on the basis of information provided by Governments on form D for 2014, which is also evident through the Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS), is the continued diversification in illicit drug manufacture, in particular illicit synthetic drug manufacture. This includes chemicals available off the shelf, as well as a number of unusual chemicals that may be made on demand with a view to circumventing existing controls ("designer" precursors). Although the quantities are mostly still small, a new trend that may be unfolding is the use of benzaldehyde and nitroethane, or the subsequent intermediate 1-phenyl-2-nitropropene, in illicit manufacture of both amphetamine and methamphetamine. Because monomethylamine had been identified as a key chemical used in the illicit manufacture of various drugs and precursors, INCB conducted an operation under Project Prism targeting that chemical, its supply and its distribution, with a view to identifying suspicious transactions.

Chemicals that had been prominent in previous periods, such as *alpha*-phenylacetoacetonitrile (APAAN) and esters of phenylacetic acid, continued to be seized during the reporting period, although the seizures were typically smaller than before and occurred less frequently at international borders, suggesting that international controls (particularly regarding APAAN) and the measures introduced in the countries concerned, and in the countries from which, consignments had originated in the past, are having the desired effects.

In 2015, diversion from domestic distribution channels continued to be a major source of substances used in illicit drug manufacture, in particular acids and solvents listed in Table II of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988. Likewise, domestic sources were often used to obtain ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, potassium permanganate and acetic anhydride. During the reporting period, the Governments of several countries, including Afghanistan, China and Nigeria, took measures to identify the extent of domestic diversions and identify sources and modi operandi. Several Governments have strengthened or fine-tuned existing controls over precursor chemicals, as highlighted in chapter II of the present report.

In 2015, a number of discrepancies between the supply (availability) of drug end products and seizures of the precursors of those drugs became more apparent. They relate to almost all drugs and precursors, in different regions, and include, for

[a] https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/PressRelease/PR2015/Outcome_document_FINAL_rev02.pdf.

example, the continued lack of information about the sources of chemicals feeding the illicit manufacture of heroin from opium poppy grown in Afghanistan. Similar considerations apply to countries in South-East Asia, in particular Myanmar, the country with the second-largest total area under illicit opium poppy cultivation and the second-largest potential opium production; and to the situation in West Asia regarding Captagon. Long-standing conflicts and political instability in many such regions complicate implementation of the necessary action.

In terms of the core parameters used to define the functioning of the international precursor control system, no State became a party to the 1988 Convention in 2015, so there continue to be nine States that have yet to accede to the Convention. Bangladesh and the Sudan invoked article 12, paragraph 10 (a), of the Convention, making it mandatory for exporting countries to send pre-export notifications prior to a planned export, and Burundi registered with the Board's Pre-Export Notification Online (PEN Online) system, bringing to 151 the total number of countries registered with the system. PEN Online continued to prove that it plays an essential role as an effective means of preventing the diversion of precursor chemicals, with an increasing number of communications between the authorities of importing and exporting countries having been recorded within the PEN Online framework, resulting in the stopping of numerous suspicious shipments in international trade. A PEN Online system upgrade was launched in 2015.

To remind Governments of the basic kinds of action they could take to enhance international precursor control, the present report summarizes minimum action in three areas: (a) international trade monitoring through the PEN Online system; (b) international cooperation under Project Prism and Project Cohesion; and (c) sharing information about precursor incidents through PICS. The report also highlights the value of forensic analysis, especially in the form of drug characterization and impurity profiling studies, to support precursor control measures by improving knowledge of the chemicals actually being used in illicit drug manufacture and their sources. The Board encourages enhanced international cooperation in this area.