

## Summary

As in previous years, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) notes an overall discrepancy between what is indicated by available information on precursors and their sources, and the wide availability of illicitly manufactured drugs.

This is true for seizures of both internationally controlled methamphetamine precursors, such as ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, and their substitutes, in East and South-East Asia, in the context of the large and growing methamphetamine market in that region. It is also true for acetic anhydride and other chemicals required to process opium into morphine and subsequently into heroin: seizures of precursors used to manufacture heroin in South-East Asia are virtually non-existent; seizures in Afghanistan have declined at a year-on-year rate of 50 per cent for the fourth consecutive year; and countries in Central Asia that share borders with Afghanistan have not reported any seizures for more than 15 years. By contrast, an increase in the reported seizures in Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan is beginning to reveal a more realistic picture of acetic anhydride trafficking in the region.

Whereas INCB has previously alerted countries about the absence of precursor information relating to the Near and Middle East, a region known for large-scale seizures of so-called “captagon” tablets, recent seizures in Lebanon and the prevention of a diversion attempt involving a company in the Syrian Arab Republic have now shed some light on the situation. Similarly, it is now clear that methamphetamine in Mexico is increasingly being illicitly manufactured from benzaldehyde, a chemical that is not under international control but which has been controlled in Mexico since January 2016. In 2016, for the first time, an illicit methamphetamine manufacturing operation in Nigeria used the same manufacturing method as in Mexico, suggesting that the country, as well as other countries in Africa, continue to be targeted by criminal organizations for precursor trafficking.

The significant seizures of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine in India and Nepal in 2016 highlighted once again the need for better national controls and understanding of legitimate manufacturing methods, domestic distribution channels and the operators and their roles in the national market. The same applies to chemicals used for the manufacture of cocaine, as the information available suggests that most seizures of potassium permanganate, the key oxidizing chemical, continued to be traceable to diversion from domestic distribution channels or illicit manufacture from pre-precursors, such as was found in cases in Colombia.

A number of previously reported non-scheduled “designer” chemicals to substitute for amphetamine-type stimulants precursors continued to be seized, such as esters and salts of 1-phenyl-2-propanone (P-2-P) methyl glycidic acid and 3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl-2-propanone (3,4-MDP-2-P) methyl glycidic acid; and new ones emerged, especially in Europe, a development that appears to be related in part to the placing of *alpha*-phenylacetonitrile (APAAN) under international control in 2014. Similarly, following the international scheduling of mephedrone, a synthetic cathinone that had been previously considered a “new psychoactive substance”, there has been an increasing number of incidents, mainly in Europe, involving precursors of that substance, which are not under international control.

The other region where non-scheduled substances constituted an important share of chemical seizures was South America, especially with regard to non-scheduled solvents, which were seized in volumes exceeding those of scheduled solvents. Increasing amounts of seizures of sodium metabisulfite and calcium chloride, two chemicals used to increase the efficiency of cocaine processing, indicate increasingly greater levels of organization of the related illicit activities and continued high levels of recycling of solvents.

With respect to the functioning of the international precursor control system, INCB is pleased to note the continued increase in the number of countries requesting pre-export notifications by invoking article 12, paragraph 10 (a), and the increasing use of Pre-Export Notification Online (PEN Online) and the Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS), the basic tools made available by the Board to support Governments in their efforts against chemical diversion. At the same time, the present report puts a special focus on the law enforcement component of precursor control, an area that is not being used to its full potential to prevent chemical diversion and which was also addressed in broader terms in the outcome document of the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, held in April 2016.