

Foreword

Illicit drug markets are changing rapidly, with synthetic drugs now replacing plant-based drugs in terms of illicit manufacture, trafficking, marketing and consumption. The fentanyl crisis in North America, the trafficking in and misuse of tramadol in Africa, the high levels of methamphetamine consumption in South-East Asia, the increased availability and use of synthetic cathinones, and the trafficking in ketamine all serve as examples of this trend.

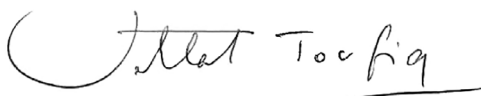
In this context, illicit drug manufacturers have considerably expanded their options for sourcing the chemicals they use. The system established under article 12 of the 1988 Convention was designed to monitor international trade and, as such, is a reactive one vis-à-vis the fast-changing pace of illicit drug manufacture today, as pre-precursors or custom-made precursors are increasingly being used to circumvent controls. In addition to seeking out opportunities to replace controlled precursors with non-controlled substitutes, the illicit drug industry is also exploiting loopholes in licit markets to recover precursors from non-controlled products that fall outside the scope of control of the 1988 Convention. In such an environment, innovative national and international approaches with a focus on systematic reporting of suspicious transactions, monitoring of drug manufacturing equipment and proactive cooperation with the private sector are needed to complement law enforcement interventions.

This report presents recent examples of such practical approaches, including INCB Operation Backup, and Operation Insight. The former supported an INCB assessment for the possible scheduling of chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. The latter was aimed at raising awareness about the vulnerabilities of free trade zones as they relate to the diversion of chemicals through such areas.

The report further reiterates the Board's call to Governments to continue to use the tools that have been developed to facilitate the exchange of information on both licit trade and illicit trafficking in internationally scheduled precursors, non-scheduled chemicals and equipment, such as the Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS), the Pre-Export Notification Online (PEN Online) system and the PEN Online Light system, to name but a few.

This year's thematic chapter presents cases of countries and territories experiencing conflict or unresolved territorial disputes where political instability and the absence of well-established State control and governance increase the risk of diversion of chemicals or illicit drug manufacture. I am confident that this information, together with the other updates contained in this report, will serve Governments to further inform their precursor control strategies at the national, regional and international levels.

Finally, I commend the efforts undertaken that contribute to ensuring the availability of controlled precursors for legitimate purposes in all regions of the world, while managing the risks of diversion. I thank all Governments that have worked with the Board in developing, supporting and maintaining the international precursor control system and its activities over the past decades.



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