

# Foreword

Currently, there is a global debate taking place on “the right way in drug policy”. The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) will participate in this debate, given its mandate to monitor implementation of and compliance with the three international drug control conventions.

The General Assembly has decided to convene a special session on the world drug problem in April 2016 to review progress in the implementation of the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem and to assess the achievements and challenges in countering the world drug problem, within the framework of the three international drug control conventions and other relevant United Nations instruments. The special session, which will examine world drug policy, should lead to a rethinking and refocusing of the world’s drug control priorities and promote global cooperation in countering drug abuse and drug-related crime, while affirming that the global capacity to resolve these issues requires commensurate global political and legal commitment.

The International Narcotics Control Board is uniquely placed to contribute to current discussions on international trends and emerging threats in drug control. It will contribute the insight and experience it has accumulated over decades of monitoring the implementation of the drug control conventions and identifying achievements, challenges and weaknesses in drug control. INCB will engage in the special session and its preparation by highlighting and clarifying the approaches and principles underlying the international system of drug control and making recommendations based upon the conventions. In its annual reports, published pursuant to the treaties, INCB has been addressing, particularly in the thematic chapters, most of the relevant aspects of the global drug problem and most of the critical points in the ongoing debate on the “right way in drug policy”. Equally, the release of the present annual report of the Board for 2015, the annual report on precursors<sup>1</sup> and the supplementary report on the availability of internationally controlled drugs<sup>2</sup> is part of our contribution to the special session and the forthcoming policy discussions.

The present report of the Board for 2015 contains a thematic chapter on the health and welfare of mankind and the international drug control system. It shows that concern for health and welfare is at the core of the international drug control system. INCB emphasizes that the system in place, when fully implemented, contributes to protecting the health and welfare of people worldwide and ensures balanced national approaches that take into account local socioeconomic and sociocultural conditions.

Even with the reality of the constantly shifting contours of the drug problem, the 1961, 1971 and 1988 conventions have proved their value as the cornerstone of international cooperation in drug policy. The fact that the conventions have been almost universally ratified by States underscores that the desire to counter the world’s drug problem is shared globally. States have regularly reaffirmed their commitment to working within the framework of the three international drug control conventions and the political declarations.

Assessing the achievements and challenges of the current drug control system, INCB believes that the control of the international licit trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors has been an undeniable success, as today no noteworthy diversion of those substances from licit to illicit channels is taking place. On the other hand, the availability and accessibility of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical purposes is not at all satisfactory at the global level. Equally, the goal of a noticeable reduction in the illicit demand for and supply of drugs has not been reached. Finally, there are numerous new challenges emerging, such as new psychoactive substances.

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<sup>1</sup> E/INCB/2015/4.

<sup>2</sup> E/INCB/2015/1/Supp.1.

However, INCB is convinced that these challenges can be met by fully implementing the conventions and the principles of the political declarations. The drug control system is a balanced system, driving towards improving public health and welfare, based on the underlying principles of proportionality, collective responsibility and compliance with international human rights standards. Implementing this system means putting the health and welfare of mankind at the core of drug policies, applying comprehensive, integrated and balanced approaches to elaborating drug control policy, promoting human rights standards, giving higher priority to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and the reduction of the negative consequences of drug abuse, and strengthening international cooperation based on shared responsibility.

States parties to the treaties have a certain flexibility in their interpretation and implementation of the treaties, within the boundaries that they themselves set out and agreed upon during treaty negotiations. The treaties provide for alternatives to punishment: they do not require the incarceration of drug users for drug use or minor offences. Instead of or in addition to conviction or punishment, States can take measures for the prevention of abuse of drugs and for education, early identification, treatment, aftercare, rehabilitation and social reintegration of affected persons. In addition, States have a certain latitude regarding the sanctions they apply against unlawful behaviour, subject to their constitutional principles and the basic concepts of their legal systems.

Thus, it remains imperative that Governments give due regard to the letter and spirit of the drug control conventions in the elaboration of future policies. States will continue to have their own practical and operational approaches to addressing local drug problems, but compliance with the conventions means fully implementing the underlying principles and obligations.

The special session should reaffirm these principles. Governments should demonstrate that drug control is a shared responsibility among all States and that together Governments can focus on identifying measures to ensure full implementation of the conventions.

Recognizing that the framework of the conventions has sometimes been misinterpreted, INCB believes that the special session will provide an opportunity to emphasize that the spirit of the conventions and political declarations—namely, promoting the health and welfare of mankind—rests upon the ability of States to enact policies and practices that are grounded in evidence. The first chapter of this publication, the Board's annual report for 2015, shows that the current framework is both comprehensive and cohesive, promoting the application of scientific knowledge, proportionally and in moderation.

The present report, together with the supplementary report on the availability of internationally controlled drugs and the report on precursors, provides an update on the functioning of the international drug control system and delivers an analysis of developments in the world drug situation. These reports promote greater understanding of the role and work of the Board as the treaty-monitoring body and the importance of compliance by Member States with the conventions. Any proposals to work outside the framework of the treaties undermine the broad-based consensus upon which the drug-control system is founded.

INCB looks forward in the coming year to the continuing global dialogue and elaboration, through the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, of a set of practical actions to address emerging challenges.



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