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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The INCB Annual Report for 2015—together with the Annual Report on precursor chemicals<sup>1</sup> and the special Report on the availability of internationally controlled drugs<sup>2</sup>—is published at a critical juncture in international cooperation in drug control, just weeks before the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on the world drug problem, which is to be held in April 2016.



The special session will review progress in international cooperation in countering the drug problem and assess the achievements and challenges in global drug control. INCB is contributing to the special session with experience and insight accumulated over decades of monitoring the implementation of the three international drug control conventions and identifying achievements, challenges and gaps in drug control.

The thematic chapter of this annual report has been prepared as a specific contribution to the forthcoming special session. It is titled “The health and welfare of mankind: challenges and opportunities for the international control of drugs”, recalling that the ultimate goal of the three international drug control treaties is to protect public and individual health and welfare.

Indeed, the treaties do promote the availability of controlled drugs for medical purposes. At the same time, they limit the use of drugs exclusively to medical and scientific purposes in order to protect the public from the dangers associated with drug abuse, illicit drug cultivation and production, and drug trafficking. The treaties ensure health and welfare, so long as they are fully implemented in a balanced and proportional manner, with full respect for human rights, and with consideration of local socioeconomic and sociocultural conditions.

At a time of debate on the best way forward in drug policy, INCB stresses in the thematic chapter that the conventions do not mandate a “war on drugs”. The option for future drug policy is not to choose between “militarized” drug law enforcement on one hand and the legalization of non-medical use of drugs on the other, but to put health and welfare at the centre of drug policy and to fully implement the goals and principles of the conventions and the political declarations.

The conventions provide Governments with flexibility in their implementation. While the conventions unambiguously require that the use of drugs must be limited exclusively to medical and scientific purposes, they give room for flexible responses to unlawful behaviour: any reaction to drug-related offences must be proportionate. Moreover, States have a certain flexibility in designing the appropriate punishment, namely regarding the legal consequences for the possession of drugs for personal use. Besides that, States can provide for alternatives to punishment for minor offences.

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2015 on the implementation of article 12 of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.*

<sup>2</sup> *Availability of Internationally Controlled Drugs: Ensuring Adequate Access for Medical and Scientific Purposes.*



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As INCB shows in the report, by providing prevention, education, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration as alternatives to conviction and punishment, States can better focus limited law enforcement capacity on drug trafficking and illicit drug cultivation and production. By ensuring the provision of prevention and treatment services, Governments not only promote the health of their citizens but they also contribute to reducing traffickers' user base.

The commitment made by States, in adopting the conventions, to ensuring availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes has not yet been met in all countries. Around three quarters of the global population does not have access to proper pain relief treatment, and around 90 per cent of the morphine used globally is consumed in countries representing less than 20 per cent of the world population.

In view of this grave situation, INCB decided to publish a special report on the matter, reviewing progress made since its last such report in 2010, identifying impediments and making recommendations to Governments and international organizations to improve the situation.

The INCB 2015 report on the control of precursor chemicals highlights, in the lead-up to the special session of the General Assembly, the considerable achievements in the monitoring of legitimate international trade in precursor chemicals. Statistics show that the diversion of licit substances into illicit drug manufacturing channels has shifted considerably from the international (cross-border) to the domestic level. The report presents recent trends and challenges such as the continued diversification in illicit drug manufacture and the great variety of non-scheduled substances used to circumvent existing controls, along with vast numbers of continually emerging new psychoactive substances. INCB's efforts working with Governments to address these challenges are also covered in the report.

INCB publishes annually, in addition to the above-mentioned reports, technical publications on the international control of the licit trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. The technical publications are a useful tool for the administration of national control systems, with a view to preventing diversion from licit to illicit channels while at the same time ensuring adequate availability for medical and scientific purposes.

As we approach the special session of the General Assembly, I urge Governments—as well as civil society—to keep in mind, in reviewing the progress made and challenges remaining in international drug control, the principles of the three drug control conventions, which enjoy universal adherence and which have at their core the fundamental goal of the health and welfare of mankind. When considering the effectiveness of the current drug control system, States should distinguish between the principles of the conventions and their implementation in practice. INCB is convinced that the best way forward is to ensure the full and balanced implementation of the treaties, with full respect for human rights.

## **Werner Sipp**

President

International Narcotics Control Board