

Foreword

In this foreword to the annual report of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) for 2016, I would like to recognize the tremendous efforts that went into the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly, which was held in April 2016. Over the past two years, we have seen the global community examine in depth the successes and challenges faced in addressing the world drug problem, and INCB applauds the results of this hard work, as reflected in the outcome document of the thirtieth special session, entitled “Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem”.¹

INCB notes that, in the outcome document, Member States underscored the role of the three international drug control treaties as the basis for international cooperation, ensuring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes, preventing illicit drug crop cultivation and production and addressing drug trafficking and abuse. Governments have demonstrated that they intend to fulfil their joint commitments to cooperate on demand and supply reduction as well as on preventing diversion. At the special session of the General Assembly, the international community reaffirmed the pivotal role of the conventions and reiterated its commitment to their implementation. However, some actors will continue to talk about a need to “modernize” the treaties and their provisions; INCB is of the view that the international drug control system continues to provide a modern and flexible structure that can meet the world’s drug control needs of today and tomorrow.

In that context, INCB calls upon all stakeholders to place science and evidence-based approaches at the centre of drug control discussions. INCB sees its treaty-mandated role in determining the extent to which implementation at the national level is within the flexibility allowed for by the conventions. As we have often pointed out, the conventions provide for a certain flexibility at the national level, particularly with respect to determining appropriate sanctions, including non-punitive or non-custodial measures, for minor offences, for example for possession of drugs for personal use. However, flexibility has limits; it does not extend to regulating the use of drugs for non-medical purposes. States parties are now challenged to examine how to respond to the developments in some countries that are in contravention of the treaties by permitting and regulating the non-medical use of drugs. A special topic in chapter II of the present report explores the possible effects of legislation in several jurisdictions that permits the non-medical use of cannabis.

The success of future international cooperation on drug control will depend on the ability of States parties to recognize that the treaties emphasize, first and foremost, the health needs and human rights of individuals. As a treaty-monitoring body, INCB assumes that the States parties themselves understand that it is their treaty obligation to prevent and treat drug abuse and reduce its negative consequences, based on the principles and provisions of the conventions and political declarations. Protecting the health and welfare of humankind remains the ultimate goal of the international drug control system; all drug-related policies and programmes that address current challenges in a balanced manner, in conformity with the treaties and with respect for human rights, will continue to be acknowledged and supported by INCB.

This year’s report of the Board contains a thematic chapter on women and drugs, the specific needs of women who use drugs and the harms they face in connection to drug use. That chapter looks at the epidemiology of drug use among women and the socioeconomic contexts surrounding issues such as drug injection. Drug-related harms to women and the resulting consequences for communities are often sorely under-studied, and gender-disaggregated data on drug use are rarely collected. There are also inadequate budget allocations by Member States for the specific prevention and treatment of drug dependence and substance use disorders among women, who often do not

¹General Assembly resolution S-30/1, annex.

have access to any assistance and suffer in silence. INCB believes that this year's thematic chapter can change perceptions and remind people, particularly policymakers, of the importance of protecting the rights of women who use drugs or who have committed drug-related crimes and of protecting the rights of their families.

In the foreword to the INCB annual report for 2015, I discussed the spirit of the conventions, with the hope that when Governments developed their operational approaches to addressing local drug control issues, they would strive for the betterment of public health and put in place practices and programmes that fully respect human rights. Criminal justice responses to drug use must be tempered by respect for due process and acknowledgment that the conventions foresee humane and proportionate responses to substance abuse and drug-related crimes, including alternatives to conviction through education, treatment, aftercare, rehabilitation and social reintegration. In that connection, the death penalty for drug-related offences should not be retained. Moreover, it is often the most vulnerable in society who suffer most from unjust, inappropriate or disproportionate law enforcement measures and criminal justice sanctions. Public safety and security are critical objectives for any Government, yet the pursuit of them must not be at the expense of the inherent dignity of the individual. It goes without saying that the same applies to demand reduction: there is no place for demand reduction interventions that violate human rights in the name of drug control. Such interventions are contrary to the spirit and letter of the drug control conventions, the objectives of which include the protection of public and individual health and welfare.

This year's report, together with the annual report on precursors, provides an up-to-date analysis on developments in global drug control, as well as recommendations to Governments and relevant international and regional organizations. In the light of the discussions surrounding the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly, the Board's recommendations in our 2016 publications are aimed at helping States take effective measures and implement comprehensive plans to tackle drug-related challenges. In the report on precursors,² for example, guidance and information are provided to enable States to enhance information-sharing, develop multilateral operational cooperation and implement measures for preventing the diversion of chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs.

Following the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly, we are actively working towards the next milestone of a review in 2019 of the implementation of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem. INCB looks forward, in the next three years and beyond, to being a voice for the practical application of evidence-based knowledge that coherently supports States in the protection of the health and welfare of their citizens. I hope that, through the release of these annual reports, greater understanding of the work and functions of INCB can be achieved. As always, Member States are invited to communicate directly with the Board regarding any questions they may have about implementation of the treaties.



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²E/INCB/2016/4.