



For information only — not an official document

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The INCB Annual Report 2018 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Board, highlights the drug challenges faced nationally, regionally and internationally, and sets out recommendations to Governments and international organizations to address these challenges and safeguard public health and well-being.

The three international drug control conventions, which enjoy near-universal adherence, were designed by States to ensure the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their illicit cultivation, production, manufacture, diversion and abuse. In 2016, at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the world drug problem, Member States unanimously reaffirmed their commitment to the goals and objectives of the three conventions. INCB is dedicated to supporting Governments in meeting their obligations under these three conventions, including through a suite of tools to facilitate cooperation in regulating and monitoring licit trade, and initiatives to address illicit manufacture and trafficking, particularly regarding precursors and related substances, and in building capacity of national authorities.

A major challenge is the availability of controlled medicines and, in particular, the uneven access to them. As a result, people in many countries are suffering from pain and surgical procedures without anaesthesia. This unnecessary suffering is also experienced in emergency situations, where we encourage Governments to utilize the special procedures to facilitate access to controlled medicines. The use of methadone and buprenorphine for treatment of opioid dependence is limited in some countries, even where there is significant prevalence of opioid dependence. On the other hand, oversupply of controlled medicines beyond the actual needs of patients can pose an increased risk of diversion and abuse.

To help Governments address the situation, the INCB Annual Report is published together with a supplement: *Progress in ensuring adequate access to internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes*. This special report presents a way ahead for Governments to make real progress towards alleviating suffering and achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

The thematic chapter one of the 2018 INCB Annual Report is about the risks and benefits of medical and scientific use of cannabis and cannabinoids, as well as developments concerning “recreational” use. We note how poorly regulated medical cannabis programmes and associated lower perception of risk may have contributed to the legalization of non-medical cannabis use in some countries. The chapter outlines the requirements for regulating the rational medical use of cannabinoids and summarizes the effects of cannabis use.

The use of controlled substances, including cannabis, is limited by the conventions exclusively to medical and scientific purposes. Legalization of cannabis for “recreational” purposes, as seen in a small number of countries, represents not only a challenge to the universal implementation of





For information only — not an official document

the treaties and the signatories to the treaties, but also a significant challenge to health and well-being, particularly among young people. INCB is committed to remaining engaged in a constructive dialogue with the Governments of the countries where the “recreational” use of cannabis is being permitted.

In our Annual Report, we call on the relevant United Nations bodies and agencies to provide further assistance to address the drug control challenges in Afghanistan, particularly given our concern about the significant increases in illicit opium production up to 2017, when the illicit opiate economy surpassed the value of total national licit exports.

2018 also represents 30 years of precursor control. Remarkable results have been achieved since the adoption of the 1988 Convention: there is virtually no diversion from international trade in *scheduled* precursor chemicals to illicit channels. Nevertheless, *non-scheduled* chemicals, such as substitute chemicals and pre-precursors, pose a significant challenge. In our Annual Report, we state the need for an international policy discussion to identify a way forward to address this challenge, as well as to address new psychoactive substances, and to prevent these potentially harmful substances from reaching people. These issues are addressed in detail in the 2018 INCB report on precursors.

The fundamental goal of the three international drug control conventions is to safeguard the health and welfare of humanity, which includes the full enjoyment of human rights. The 2018 INCB Annual Report includes recommendations on criminal justice responses to drug-related crime, with due respect for the principle of proportionality and human rights. We also urge States to develop effective strategies for the prevention of drug use and provision of treatment, rehabilitation, after-care and social reintegration services. On a related note, it is important to ensure that “drug consumption rooms” are well integrated into and part of a wide spectrum of health services provided to drug-dependent people, with the ultimate objective of treatment and rehabilitation.

As I state in my foreword to the INCB Annual Report, today’s drug control challenges may seem daunting, with an extensive impact on public health and well-being. Yet over the past century and since the first intergovernmental meeting on drug control in 1909, such challenges have been successfully overcome through cooperative efforts and political will. That same spirit and commitment are needed now. It is my deep hope that by studying the findings of INCB and implementing the recommendations contained in our 2018 Annual Report, Precursors Report and supplement on availability, Member States will be able to make significant improvements to the health and well-being of their citizens.

## **Viroj Sumyai**

President

International Narcotics Control Board