

C. Americas

Central America and the Caribbean

The region of Central America and the Caribbean remains a transit route for cocaine being trafficked to North America, Europe and rest of the world. Crime and drug-related violence continue to be key issues of concern in Central American countries.

In addition to cocaine use, there is concern regarding the use of amphetamines and pharmaceutical stimulants by local communities.

1. Major developments

405. Central America and the Caribbean remains a major trans-shipment area for illicit drugs, in particular cocaine, trafficked from countries in South America to destination markets in North America and Europe. Owing to their geographical location along the cocaine route, countries in Central America have also been used for the refinement of cocaine.

406. Drug trafficking and other types of transnational crime continue to be a cause of corruption, violence and social and political instability in deprived areas in the region. In Central America, *maras* (street gangs) continue to be associated with drug trafficking. A criminal gang known as “Bagdad”, composed of a number of smaller criminal gangs, is expanding its criminal activities, including trafficking in illicit drugs, in Panama. In El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, the countries that make up the so-called “Northern Triangle”, the street gangs Mara Salvatrucha (MS13) and Barrio 18 have continued their illicit activities, including drug trafficking and the collection of extortion payments, which have a corrosive impact on the lives of citizens and the economies of the countries.

407. The restrictive measures implemented by Governments at the borders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in the disruption of drug trafficking routes by air, as well as a significant decrease in trafficking by land. Nonetheless, traffickers’ attempts to transport large amounts of cocaine by sea via Central America and the Caribbean have continued, as corroborated by significant seizures of the substance in the region in 2020.

408. To address the increasing presence of transnational criminal organizations and their alliances with local criminal groups in countries and territories of the Caribbean, drug control experts from the region point to the need to further increase maritime domain awareness in the Caribbean and enhance cooperation with international partners, as well as to the importance of developing and implementing national and regional maritime security strategies to counter drug trafficking and other related crimes.

409. Synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances that have become prevalent in Latin America and the Caribbean in the past decade now warrant the same level of monitoring and surveillance as cannabis, cocaine and other common drugs under international control. The Board noted that Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago have established national early warning systems to gather and disseminate information on emerging drugs and related drug threats and that other countries in the region, including Costa Rica and Jamaica, have taken steps towards the creation of their own early warning systems.

2. Regional cooperation

410. In October 2019, representatives of Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago were invited to attend the first Caribbean Youth Forum on Drug Use Prevention. The main aim of the Forum, hosted by the Executive Secretariat of CICAD, was to promote youth leadership in drug demand reduction by developing youth-led initiatives.

411. A number of countries from Central America and the Caribbean, including Belize, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, and Trinidad and Tobago, participated in the Orion V International Naval Campaign to Combat Drug Trafficking carried out in the Pacific, the Atlantic and the Caribbean in 2020.

412. In 2020, CICAD and UNODC continued providing a number of workshops and training sessions, including online courses, to the competent national authorities of the countries in the region. The training activities were focused, among others, on measures to care for front-line officers during the COVID-19 pandemic; the impact of COVID-19 on the structures of organized crime; illicit traffic using air cargo and courier services; and HIV prevention, treatment and support for people who use drugs.

413. In June 2020, under INCB Learning, regional online seminars were held on the assessment of national needs for internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes and overall implementation of the provisions of the international drug control conventions, including compliance with reporting requirements. The seminars, which form part of the ongoing dialogue between the Board and national competent authorities, were attended by representatives of eight countries from Central America and the Caribbean and South America (Belize, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras and Panama).

414. In July 2020, INCB coordinated access to and training on IONICS for intelligence officers from the Caribbean Community's regional communications centres, enhancing the exchange of information that supports international investigations into trafficking in dangerous substances. In August 2020, INCB provided training to over 240 law and regulatory enforcement officers from Central America and the Caribbean and South America (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago) on emerging new psychoactive substances, opioids and fentanyl-related substances, and precursors information exchange. In a separate event facilitated by the Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council, over 70 officers from Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Curaçao, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago received training about the changing situation with regard to trafficking in emerging new psychoactive substances, opioids and fentanyls and information exchange using the INCB global secure communication platforms.

415. In 2020, the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies II (COPOLAD II), financed by the European Commission, concluded its activities, which had spanned four and a half years and had been focused on the exchange of information, experiences, good practices and lessons learned, with the aim of consolidating effective policies on the basis of scientific evidence.

3. National legislation, policy and action

416. In 2019 and 2020, several countries in the region reviewed or adopted national drug control strategies. The Government of Antigua and Barbuda adopted the National Anti-Drug Strategy Plan for the period 2019–2023, the aims of which are to reduce demand for illicit drugs, delay the onset of drug use and strengthen cooperation between key stakeholders. To respond to drug use in the country, Barbados has revised its plan of action for the period 2020–2025. The Government of Costa Rica approved its National Strategy on Drugs and Associated Crimes for the period 2020–2030 and its National Plan on Drugs, Money-Laundering and Financing of Terrorism for the period 2020–2024. The Government of Saint Lucia has reviewed a new drug strategy for the period 2020–2024 that is aimed at discouraging the early onset of alcohol and drug use and to facilitate effective treatment for and the rehabilitation and reintegration of drug users. The Board noted that Trinidad and Tobago passed the Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Bill to amend the regulation of cannabis use for non-medical purposes.

417. In December 2019, the National Anti-Drug Commission of El Salvador released its National Strategy for Institutional Strengthening in the Interdiction of Drugs and Chemical Precursors. The strategy is aimed at strengthening compliance with the objectives and goals of the National Anti-Drug Strategy for the period 2016–2021. A new strategy for the strengthening of drug and precursor interdictions was also adopted by the Government of Costa Rica in 2019.

418. Several countries in Central America and the Caribbean, including Jamaica and Nicaragua, expressed concern with respect to the proliferation and marketing of illicit drugs and new psychoactive substances, as well as trafficking in precursors over the Internet, the dispatch of such substances in postal services, and the use of cryptocurrencies to pay for them. The importance of assessing the risk posed by e-commerce enterprises to international trade in the context of preventing drug trafficking was noted. In that regard, the Board noted efforts by Antigua and Barbuda to develop national legislation to regulate the use of virtual currencies to comply with recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

419. Since 2015, a number of countries in Central America and the Caribbean, including the Bahamas, Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras,

Nicaragua, and Trinidad and Tobago, have reported outdoor illicit cannabis cultivation in their territories. In Guatemala, the methods used to grow cannabis have been refined in recent years, which has resulted in a higher quality of the drug, as well as an increased price on the black market. In Honduras, cannabis is often cultivated by farmers with a low level of education who are recruited by criminal organizations. Locally produced cannabis herb is mostly trafficked and consumed within the region. In recent years, the most frequently mentioned country of origin, departure and transit of seized cannabis herb within Central America was Guatemala. In the Caribbean, it was Jamaica. In 2019, seizures of cannabis herb were reported by Costa Rica (16.8 tons), Honduras (16 tons), Panama (12.9 tons), Nicaragua (3.6 tons), Guatemala (1.9 tons) and El Salvador (1.3 tons). Costa Rica reported the eradication of a total of 11.6 ha of illicit cannabis cultivation in 2019, which was approximately the same as that eradicated in 2018.

420. According to the National Strategy for Institutional Strengthening in the Interdiction of Drugs and Chemical Precursors of El Salvador, about 84 per cent of the cocaine (base and hydrochloride) produced in South America is transported from south to north on the eastern Pacific Ocean. The main destinations for drugs transported by sea are the coasts of Guatemala and Mexico or Costa Rica and Panama, before their final overland transport to the United States. In the Caribbean, fast boats continue to be the primary method of trafficking in drugs. According to authorities in El Salvador, trafficking in cocaine by land in the country is minimal.

421. In 2019, the eradication of small areas under illicit cultivation of coca bush and opium poppy (totalling 37.3 ha) and the destruction of six clandestine cocaine-processing laboratories were reported by Guatemala. Small areas under coca bush cultivation (2.3 ha) were also eradicated in Honduras.

422. In 2018, seizures of cocaine in Panama and Costa Rica accounted for 4 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively, of a total of 1,311 tons of cocaine seized worldwide. By contrast, the amounts reported seized by countries in the Caribbean accounted for 0.5 per cent of the total global quantity of cocaine intercepted, mostly reflecting seizures made by the Dominican Republic.

423. In 2019, Costa Rica seized 31.1 tons of cocaine, an increase of 10 per cent compared with 2018. Seizures of cocaine in Nicaragua nearly doubled in 2019 compared with 2018, reaching 5.9 tons. Panama seized 78 tons of cocaine in 2019, 20.4 tons more than in 2018. In 2019, seizures of cocaine were also reported by Guatemala

(18.9 tons), Honduras (2.8 tons) and El Salvador (0.1 tons). The National Directorate for Drug Control of the Dominican Republic reported that the total amount of illicit drugs seized in the country in the first five months in 2020 amounted to almost 3.4 tons (2.3 tons of cocaine and 1.1 tons of cannabis herb), an increase of 18 per cent compared with the same period in 2019.

424. Container vessels continued to be used by traffickers to transport large amounts of cocaine, as evidenced by a seizure of 5 tons of cocaine in Costa Rica in February 2020. Seizures of 5 tons of unspecified illicit drugs and 0.7 tons of cocaine from semi-submersibles in Panama in February and June 2020, respectively, confirmed the increased use of non-conventional vessels reported by CICAD member States.

425. In 2019, Guatemala seized a total of 16.9 tons of amphetamine. The drug was allegedly destined for local markets and Mexico. In addition, authorities in Guatemala seized sizeable amounts of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which are precursors of methamphetamine. The country has also been mentioned as a source of methamphetamine seized in El Salvador. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances can be found in the report of the Board for 2020 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

5. Prevention and treatment

426. In 2018, the annual prevalence of use of cocaine in Central America and the Caribbean was 0.66 per cent and 0.63 per cent, respectively. Those rates were below the average in North America (2.13 per cent), Western and Central Europe (1.36 per cent) and South America (0.96 per cent).

427. The annual prevalence of cannabis use in the Caribbean (3.39 per cent) in 2018 was similar to that in South America (3.49 per cent) and considerably lower than that in North America (14.56 per cent).

428. Cannabis continued to be the drug most commonly used by the school-aged population, in particular boys, in El Salvador. According to a drug situation report published by the National Drug Commission of El Salvador in December 2019, the average age of first-time use ranged from 13 to 15.

429. Cannabis was the primary drug for which people sought treatment in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras;

in Costa Rica, it was cocaine. In Honduras, among persons receiving treatment for cannabis use, 90 per cent were receiving treatment for the first time.

430. In contrast to the use of cocaine, the annual prevalence of use of amphetamine, methamphetamine and pharmaceutical stimulants in Central America (0.98 per cent) and the Caribbean (0.9 per cent) was considerably higher than that of South America (0.27 per cent). In several Central American countries, the non-medical use of pharmaceutical stimulants, including weight loss pills, was reportedly more common than the use of other amphetamines, in particular among women.

431. The Board noted the continued efforts of the countries of Central America and the Caribbean to establish systematic monitoring of new psychoactive substances. While the total number of alerts on the emergence and presence of new psychoactive substances in Central America and the Caribbean and South America may currently be comparatively small, there is an increasing awareness by Governments in the region of the problems related to those substances and the associated adverse health effects of the use of those drugs.

432. According to the best estimates from the latest UNODC data, published in 2020, about 20,000 people in Central America and 100,000 people aged 15–64 in the Caribbean inject drugs. The joint 2018 UNODC/WHO/UNAIDS/World Bank estimate of the global prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs was 12.6 per cent. In Central America and the Caribbean, where HIV prevalence data were available for one third of all people who inject drugs, this prevalence was estimated at 3.4 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively.

433. People who use drugs may be particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 owing to underlying health issues, stigma, social marginalization and higher economic and social vulnerabilities, including a lack of access to housing and health care. The Board wishes to encourage all competent national authorities to continue providing comprehensive prevention and treatment services for those with a drug use disorder during difficult times, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

North America

During the COVID-19 pandemic, North America suffered from an increased number of overdose deaths and challenges in providing treatment to people who use drugs.

Cannabis legalization measures and decriminalization initiatives in North America continued to evolve and shape the regional market for cannabis.

1. Major developments

434. Deaths from illicit drug use are increasing in North America. Use of and trafficking in fentanyl, cocaine and methamphetamine increased in the past year, which had an impact on the lethality of drug overdoses in North America, owing in part to the use of fentanyl in many drugs sold on the region's illicit markets.

435. The public health emergencies surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic altered the region's drug trafficking landscape and affected the ability of Governments to respond to drug use threats and provide treatment for people who use drugs, including access to medications for opioid use disorders.

436. Mexico reported that it is undergoing a national drug policy transition on the basis of the principles of public health, scientific evidence and respect for human rights, based in the National Development Plan for the period 2019–2024. The Government of Mexico has indicated that new policies are designed to take a preventive and responsive approach to the needs of vulnerable populations, especially those in prison settings, women and adolescents, and other groups disproportionately affected by drug use and associated health conditions.

2. Regional cooperation

437. North American cooperation on drug control is focused on addressing the complex problems pertaining to trafficking, the opioid crisis and the multifaceted regional drug crisis. The trilateral efforts are embodied in the Annual North American Drug Dialogue, the fourth iteration of which was held in December 2019. The discussions among law enforcement and health officials solidified the region's collective understanding that efforts to combat synthetic drugs, including fentanyl and methamphetamine, should be intensified.

438. In December 2019, a bilateral meeting was held between Mexico and the United States to advance security

collaboration. Officials from the two countries agreed to strengthen the United States-Mexico High-level Security Group to combat organized crime and cross-border crime. The Group has a drug policy sub-group that focuses on counter-narcotics issues including maritime container control, the mail-based fentanyl supply chain and the tracking and safe destruction of precursor chemicals.

439. Officials from the Governments of Canada and the United States held a meeting in Washington, D.C., on 31 January 2020 on their Joint Action Plan on Opioids. The Steering Committee of the Joint Action Plan on Opioids established working groups and a framework for bilateral exchanges on the law enforcement, border security and health challenges facing the two countries.

3. National legislation, policy and action

440. In February 2020, the United States Office of National Drug Control Policy released the National Drug Control Strategy for 2020. The Strategy is focused on three areas: (a) preventing initiates to drug use through education and evidence-based prevention; (b) lowering barriers to treatment services; and (c) reducing the availability of illicit drugs through law enforcement and cooperation with international partners. It was confirmed in the strategy that the top priority for the Government was addressing the current opioid crisis and reducing the number of people in the United States dying from synthetic opioid overdoses.

441. The Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States released the *2019 National Drug Threat Assessment* in February 2020. The assessment contains an outline of the threats faced by the United States from domestic and international drug trafficking, including the opioid threat, which is described as continuing at ever-increasing epidemic levels. According to the assessment, threats from methamphetamine and cocaine are also increasing. Fentanyl-involved overdose deaths are highest in the Great Lakes, Midwest and north-east regions, with Ohio having among the highest age-adjusted rates of fentanyl-involved overdose deaths. The availability and new varieties of new psychoactive substances continue to be a challenge; and the domestic cannabis situation is evolving as legalization of cannabis for medical and non-medical purposes at the state level continues to spread.

442. In February 2020, the United States Office of National Drug Control Policy issued the Northern Border Counternarcotics Strategy, which contains specific goals

for reducing the availability of illicit drugs in the United States. It is explained in the Strategy that the border between the United States and Canada, the longest in the world between two countries, offers many opportunities for transnational criminal organizations to traffic drugs, including through exploitation of the mountain valleys in the States of Washington and Idaho, as well as the waterways on the border that are conducive to moving contraband. Implementation of the Strategy will include coordinated drug interdiction efforts driven by improvements to information-sharing processes, procedures and technology. Stakeholders from the two countries will be integrated into the law enforcement operations of the other, with coordinated investigative and operational efforts.

443. The Justice in Policing Act of 2020 was passed on 25 June 2020 by the House of Representatives of the United States, although it remained under consideration in the Senate. The legislation includes a section prohibiting so-called “no-knock warrants” in federal drug cases. This would amend section 509 of the Controlled Substances Act to include that a search warrant authorized under that section may be executed by a law enforcement officer only after providing notice of his or her authority and purpose. Law enforcement funding would also be conditioned on state and local prohibitions on “no-knock warrants”. While no action was taken on the legislation before the end of 2020, the bill could still form the framework for legal changes that take place during 2021.

444. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States has taken efforts to support more flexible prescribing practices, such as through telemedicine and without an in-person medical evaluation. The Drug Enforcement Administration has reported that it is working with its federal United States partners to ensure an adequate supply of controlled substances and medications during the pandemic. For example, owing to the public health emergency, authorized practitioners were granted the authority to prescribe buprenorphine for opiate use disorder by telemedicine, without conducting in-person examinations of the patient.

445. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were reports in the United States of shortages of critical medicines needed for placing patients on ventilators and of other essential prescription drugs. According to a December 2019 report from the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, even before the pandemic affected the supply chain, the number and duration of drug shortages in the United States had continued to rise in 2019. It was noted

in the report that more than 80 per cent of the active pharmaceutical ingredients for prescription drugs sold in the United States came primarily from China and India. The American Hospital Association released information in June 2020 explaining that, owing to COVID-19 treatments, the demand for certain drugs such as sedatives had increased, but the supply of those drugs had decreased, at least partly as a result of a fracturing of the supply chains.

446. Local and national governments in North America continued to adopt new measures for the legalization and decriminalization of the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes. In Mexico, the Supreme Court granted an extension to the Congress to approve draft legislation on a cannabis law, which would amend the cannabis regulations and permit consumption for non-medical purposes.

447. In Canada, as of 1 January 2020, the legal age to buy or possess cannabis in Quebec was raised to 21. The province amended its regulations to prohibit possession of cannabis for non-medical purposes by anyone under 21, and individuals younger than 21 are not permitted on any premises where cannabis is sold. The government of Quebec further banned food items containing cannabis that could be considered attractive to people under the age of 21. In addition, it is forbidden in Quebec to smoke or vape cannabis in any public place, whether indoors or outdoors.

448. In July 2020, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police released a report of its special purpose committee on the decriminalization of illicit drugs. The findings of the committee include the recognition of substance use disorder as a public health issue and the recommendation that decriminalization of simple possession of drugs would be an effective way to reduce the negative health consequences of drug use. Also in the report, the Association endorsed alternatives to criminal sanctions for simple possession and access to diversion measures.

449. Under the 2018 United States Farm Bill, the commercial production of hemp, limited to no more than 0.3 per cent of THC, was legalized and the United States Department of Agriculture was directed to establish a national regulatory framework for hemp production. Hemp and hemp seeds were removed from the schedules of the Controlled Substances Act. Through an interim rule that became effective on 31 October 2019, the Agricultural Marketing Service established provisions for the approval of the plans of states and Indian tribes related to the domestic production of hemp, including use of the plant to extract cannabidiol. **In this**

connection, the Board calls upon States parties to ensure that the cultivation of cannabis for industrial purposes is undertaken in line with the requirements of the 1961 Convention as amended, which limits the cultivation of cannabis for industrial purposes to fibre and seed.

450. The Commonwealth of Virginia passed a law to decriminalize the simple possession of cannabis that provided for a civil penalty of no more than \$25. The law came into force on 1 July 2020. Violations of the law would result in a summons, in the same way as a motor vehicle law violation, with no liability for court costs for the offender. In addition, a working group was established under the law to study the potential impact of the legalization of cannabis for personal, non-medical use.

451. On 7 October 2020, the Governor of the State of Vermont allowed legislation on the commercial regulation of cannabis to go into effect. The law allows for the creation of a regulated market for the sale of cannabis for non-medical purposes. The legislation requires cities and towns to take further action before retail establishments may open and ensures that local zoning applies to cannabis cultivation and production. Up to 30 per cent of the tax revenue collected from commercial sales will go towards substance use education and prevention programming.

452. Following the elections of 3 November 2020 in the United States, in which a number of ballot measures were voted upon, there are now 34 states in which the use of cannabis for medical purposes is permitted and 11 states, in addition to Washington, D.C., in which cannabis possession and use for non-medical purposes have been legalized.

453. As a result of the 2020 ballot measures, the States of Arizona, Montana, New Jersey and South Dakota legalized the possession and use of cannabis by adults for non-medical purposes. In the States of Mississippi and South Dakota, measures were approved by voters to permit the use of cannabis for medical purposes.

454. In the State of Oregon, two ballot measures pertaining to drug control were approved by voters during the 2020 election. Measure 109 was approved to create a programme to permit licensed service providers to administer psilocybin-producing mushroom and fungi products to individuals aged 21 or older. Measure 110, which was also approved by voters in the State of Oregon, will decriminalize possession of all currently controlled substances and reclassifies the penalties for possession offences from a misdemeanor crime to a violation, subjecting offenders to a \$100 fine or a health assessment.

The manufacture and distribution of controlled substances in Oregon will continue to be subject to criminal penalties.

455. In Washington, D.C., voters approved, in the November 2020 election, a ballot measure that makes the investigation and arrest of adults for the non-commercial planting, cultivating, purchasing, transporting or possession of or engaging in practices with entheogenic plants and fungi among the lowest law enforcement priorities of the area's police department. These species of plants and fungi are defined as containing ibogaine, dimethyltryptamine, mescaline, psilocybin or psilocyn.

456. **The Board is concerned that legalization measures or regulations that permit the use of any controlled substance, including cannabis, for non-medical purposes are inconsistent with the obligations of States parties, in particular those included in article 4, paragraph (c), of the 1961 Convention as amended. The Board calls upon all States to respect their Convention obligations in the development of their national drug control policies.**

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

457. Illicit drug supply and trafficking patterns in North America have changed over the course of 2020 owing to the impacts of COVID-19. The social-distancing measures and societal challenges caused by the pandemic have led to shifting drug trafficking patterns and changes in illicit drug manufacturing.

458. According to preliminary research from the Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use, undertaken on the basis of information collected between 31 March 2020 and 10 May 2020, the illegal drug supply in Canada has been affected by business closures, border closures and social distancing. A decrease in the availability of different drugs, increased prices of drugs and increased drug adulteration were all noted. The full impact of COVID-19 on the illicit cultivation, production and manufacture of and trafficking in drugs in Canada continues to be a subject of research and analysis.

459. In Mexico, the COVID-19 pandemic and the related health emergency has had profound impacts on society and the economy. The pandemic is expected to affect the way in which transnational organized crime and illicit markets operate. Changes to the way in which organized criminal activity affects the economy could have long-term consequences, based on the Government's identification of three significant impacts: (a) an increase

in armed violence linked to organized crime; (b) diversification of criminal acts owing to a reduction in income from the drug market; and (c) a strengthening of criminal groups.

460. In July 2020, during a visit to the Port Complex of Manzanillo, one of the ports through which a large amount of precursors and fentanyl is trafficked to Mexico from Asia, the President of Mexico announced that, in response to the violence and corruption resulting from trafficking in drugs and precursors at ports in Mexico, the country's armed forces would be responsible for customs and addressing the problem of insecurity and drug trafficking at ports.

461. The Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States explained, in an intelligence report published in January 2020, that the flow of illicitly manufactured fentanyl into the United States had become more diverse since the start of the opioid crisis, in 2014, with new source and transit countries emerging. It was noted in the report that India was emerging as a source for finished fentanyl powder and chemicals used for illicit fentanyl manufacture, alongside the identified primary source countries of China and Mexico. The explanation provided in the report for the shift of production from China to India was the restrictions in China on the illicit manufacturing of all forms of fentanyl. The change in legislation in China in 2019, to place all fentanyl analogues under control, has resulted in substantially fewer detections at the border of fentanyl entering the United States from China.

462. In November 2019, the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States issued a warning over counterfeit prescription pills containing fentanyl that were being trafficked from Mexico. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, drug trafficking organizations were sending bulk shipments of counterfeit pills mixed with fentanyl that were disguised as real pharmaceutical products to the United States. Furthermore, the results of "Project Python", an operation targeting the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, were announced in March 2020 by the Department of Justice of the United States. According to the Department, the cartel was responsible for moving tons of cocaine, methamphetamine and fentanyl-laced heroin into the United States. Methamphetamine labs operated by the cartel are reportedly procuring precursors from China and India, as well as producing their own precursors.

463. In April 2020, the Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use published a bulletin describing the content of drugs on the illicit market in

Canada. According to the bulletin, fentanyl and its analogues are common in the country's illicit drug supply and were present in nearly two thirds of samples containing opioids studied by the Drug Analysis Service of Health Canada. Nationally, up to 3 per cent of samples containing stimulants contained fentanyl or its analogues. Data from the Province of British Columbia included in the bulletin suggested that between 14 and 36 per cent of fentanyl exposure was unknown or unintentional. The British Columbia Coroners Service in Canada reported extremely high fentanyl concentrations in post-mortem toxicology results from April to June 2020 compared with previous months.

464. In 2019, the INCB Operation Fast Forward identified interdictions of new pre-precursors (*N*-phenylpiperidin-4-amine and 4-piperidone), which could be used in the illicit manufacture of fentanyl. The substances were seized by Mexico arriving from China and India by express post and courier services. Operation Fast Forward, launched in January 2019, was aimed at identifying key sources and redistribution points involving fentanyl, fentanyl analogues and related substances trafficked using international post, express mail and courier services. The operation involved 45 Governments and two international agencies and resulted in 53 communications on target substances, with seizures of more than 29 kg. It also resulted in the identification and subsequent dismantling of a fentanyl-distribution operation in Canada.

465. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in North America can be found in the report of the Board for 2020 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

466. Concurrently, a number of emerging, potent, fentanyl-like synthetic opioids are increasingly appearing, including isotonitazene. Isotonitazene is a highly potent synthetic opioid and one of several analogues of etonitazene. It is structurally different from fentanyl, but INCB open net monitoring found that it is being marketed online as a legal replacement for internationally scheduled opioids. In May 2020, a special notification on the substance was sent through the INCB GRIDS Programme to all Project Ion and OPIOIDS project focal points. Numerous communications related to seizures of the substance were subsequently received through IONICS. Through the GRIDS Programme, information relating to isotonitazene trafficking has been provided to the relevant focal points in North America. In June 2020, the United States added it to schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act under its emergency procedure.

467. In February 2020, the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States initiated Operation Crystal Shield to focus efforts on stopping the growing methamphetamine threat in the country, to reduce the supply of methamphetamine and to respond to the trafficking in methamphetamine across the south-west border. The operation was designed to focus enforcement efforts on eight methamphetamine distribution hubs throughout the country, namely Atlanta, Los Angeles, Phoenix, El Paso, Dallas, Houston, St. Louis and New Orleans. Those cities are reportedly used by Mexican drug trafficking organizations to distribute methamphetamine.

468. In a summary of findings related to methamphetamine published in March 2020 by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, significant increases were highlighted in the rates of criminal violations involving methamphetamine between 2010 and 2018. Violations for possession of methamphetamine increased by 626 per cent over that period, and there was an expansion in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine in small laboratories throughout North America.

469. In 2019, Public Safety Canada released a study entitled "Patterns in cannabis cryptomarkets in Canada in 2018". In that study it was noted that, following the legalization of cannabis for non-medical purposes in Canada, sales by Canadian dealers of cannabis on cryptomarkets appeared to be increasing in number. It was concluded that the increase was ostensibly owing to sales for the international market. When comparing cannabis sales on cryptomarkets from July 2018 with those from November 2018, it was noted in the study that Canada had moved from eighth to fourth position in the world.

470. According to Statistics Canada, the price gap between cannabis for non-medical purposes purchased legally and illegally is increasing, with overall price increases attributable to the higher costs of cannabis sold legally. Based on data released by Statistics Canada on 21 February 2020, sales of cannabis totalled 1.2 billion Canadian dollars in 2019. Following a statistical analysis of voluntary responses to the National Cannabis Survey on the effects of legalization, Statistics Canada reported that, after the Cannabis Act, more consumers obtained cannabis from legal sources and fewer reported obtaining it from illegal sources or from family and friends.

471. In March 2020, officials from Colombia and the United States developed a bilateral agenda and joint action plan to reduce the levels of coca bush cultivation and cocaine manufacture by 50 per cent by the end of 2023; the levels of coca bush cultivation and cocaine

manufacture in Colombia stabilized in 2018 and 2019 for the first time since 2012.

472. In March 2020, UNODC and the Government of Mexico published the third technical monitoring report on illicit opium poppy cultivation following a study conducted between July 2017 and June 2018. The area under opium poppy cultivation in Mexico was estimated at 28,000 ha, with a statistical range of 21,200 to 34,800 ha. Compared with the period 2016–2017, the area under opium poppy cultivation decreased slightly, by 9 per cent, or 2,600 ha. The national average yield of opium gum was estimated at 16.1 kg per hectare; the potential national production of dry opium gum was estimated at 450 metric tons; and the morphine concentration in opium gum during the reporting period was 16.2 per cent.

5. Prevention and treatment

473. North America continued to be affected by opioid-related harms and deaths in 2019. In June 2020, the Public Health Agency of Canada reported that there had been more than 21,000 suspected opioid-related overdoses between January and December 2019. There had been 3,823 opioid-related deaths during the same period, of which 94 per cent were unintentional; 77 per cent of the cases involved fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. The COVID-19 pandemic has reportedly exacerbated the vulnerability of drug users to negative health impacts, with higher levels of concern about the drug supply and the quality, degree of contamination, potency and cost of drugs.

474. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, in response to the opioid overdose crisis, the Government of Canada issued a temporary exemption to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to facilitate prescribing through flexible treatment options, creating an alternative and safer supply than the illicit drugs available to users. The exemption has been extended until 30 September 2021. Prescription-grade heroin (diacetylmorphine) was added to the List of Drugs for an Urgent Public Health Need and safer supply pilot projects have been developed in cities across Canada. According to Health Canada, the early findings from the pilot projects have shown that using pharmaceutical-grade medications such as hydromorphone and diacetylmorphine can help save lives and improve outcomes for people at risk of overdose.

475. In April 2020, the United States National Center for Health Statistics published data showing that deaths from drug overdoses were an increasing public health burden in the United States. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the United

States has stated that it expects the COVID-19 crisis to contribute to increasing numbers of people struggling with mental health problems and substance use, coupled with corresponding increases in depression, anxiety, trauma and grief.

476. In Canada, on 21 May 2020, as a result of the increased toxicity of illicitly manufactured drugs, British Columbia issued a provincial overdose alert following an increase in fatal and non-fatal overdoses resulting from smoking and injecting illicit drugs. According to the British Columbia Coroners Service, 170 people died of illicit drug overdoses in May 2020, compared with 76 in February 2020. In May 2020, a new resource was launched, called the “Lifeguard App”, to help respond to the overdose crisis. The application is designed to be activated before a person administers a dose of drugs. An alarm will be sounded after 50 seconds and, if user does not respond after 75 seconds, emergency medical services are alerted to a potential overdose.

477. According to provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the United States that were available as at 8 June 2020, there were 3 per cent more drug overdose deaths in the United States during the period November 2018–November 2019 than during the year before.

478. The Director of the United States National Institute on Drug Abuse has raised concerns about the impacts of COVID-19 and the potentially heightened risks and complications for people who smoke, vape or use opioids or methamphetamine. In an article in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, the Director wrote that people with substance use disorder may be especially susceptible to COVID-19 and find it harder to get care. Social distancing during the pandemic could further increase the possibility of opioid overdoses if there are fewer people available to administer naloxone.

479. The potential health risks associated with using methamphetamine during the COVID-19 pandemic were outlined in an evidence brief issued by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. In the light of increases in Canada of methamphetamine-related visits to emergency departments, hospitalizations and overdose deaths, it was noted that people who regularly use drugs, including methamphetamine, may be at higher risk of COVID-19 infection.

480. The United States “Monitoring the Future Survey” for the period 1975–2019 found a dramatic increase in vaping among adolescents, including vaping of concentrated cannabis. During the period 2017–2019, the 30-day

prevalence of vaping of cannabis rose among students in the twelfth grade (usually 17- and 18-year olds), from 4.9 per cent in 2017 to 14.0 per cent in 2019. The rate of past-year prevalence of cannabis vaping among twelfth graders was 20.8 per cent. Daily cannabis use rates increased significantly in some grades, rising to 4.8 per cent among tenth graders and 1.3 per cent among eighth graders. These figures represent an increase of 85.7 per cent compared with 2018.

481. According to the National Drug Control Strategy of the United States for 2020, prior to COVID-19, the historically low prices for some synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine, had led to increasing trends of poly-drug use across the country. Addressing the increasing availability and use of cocaine in the United States is called for in the Strategy. Also in the Strategy, efforts are outlined to strengthen the capacity of state, local and tribal communities to identify and prevent substance misuse. The enhancement of research and the development of evidence-based prevention programmes, including through the “Drug Free Communities Support Program”, which is aimed at preventing youth substance use at the community level, are also called for.

482. In Mexico, there are indications of a growing methamphetamine epidemic. At the sixty-sixth regular session of CICAD, held in Miami, United States, from 19 to 21 November 2019, the National Commissioner against Addictions of Mexico stated that lifetime prevalence of methamphetamine use had increased from 0.1 per cent to 0.9 per cent of the general population between 2002 and 2016. Cannabis remained the main drug for which people sought treatment in Mexico. The National Commissioner noted that treatment in Mexico should respond better to the needs of women and youth and that hospital and forensic medical service registration systems needed improvement.

483. In a study, commissioned by the Government of Mexico, of heroin and crystalline methamphetamine users in the northern border cities of Mexico, tests of drug paraphernalia samples showed that 93 per cent of white powder heroin, 40 per cent of black tar heroin and 100 per cent of “speedball” (a combination of heroin and crystalline methamphetamine) contained fentanyl. The drug users who provided the paraphernalia were unaware that their drugs were combined with fentanyl. Therefore, although heroin use in Mexico is not high, except for in marginalized communities on the northern border, heroin users in Mexico have been unknowingly exposed to fentanyl. These findings also explain the overdoses among drug users in parts of Mexico in recent years.

484. In June 2020, the Department of Health and Human Services of the United States published a guide on the treatment of stimulant use disorders. The Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use explains in the guide that stimulant use, including misuse of prescription stimulants, is on the rise in the United States. The risk of overdose and death has increased substantially owing to illicitly manufactured stimulants containing unknown amounts of fentanyl. The treatment guide is meant to address a public health crisis involving cocaine and amphetamines, which have become more accessible, purer and cheaper.

485. In January 2020, the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services issued a report on the geographical disparities in the United States affecting access to buprenorphine services for opioid use disorder. According to the study, access to treatment is vital, but only a small percentage of people who need treatment in the United States actually receive it. The findings of the Inspector General concluded that 40 per cent of counties in the United States did not have a single health-care provider with a waiver permitting the prescription of buprenorphine in an office setting. The providers were also not necessarily located in the areas in which the need for such medication-assisted treatment was most critical.

486. Facing challenges of drug use, manufacture and trafficking in rural areas, the United States launched the Rural Community Toolbox in June 2020 to connect rural leaders with funding, data and information from 16 federal government departments. The aim of the Toolbox is to provide rural communities with the resources needed to overcome the opioid epidemic and drug use crisis through evidence-based prevention and treatment services. It provides rural leaders with data about drug overdose deaths and factors that are driving drug use trends, such as those relating to education and unemployment levels. In January 2020, the Rural Community Action Guide was released, which contains recommended practices and action steps to increase the stability of rural communities.

487. In October 2020, the Department of Justice of the United States announced the resolution of its criminal and civil investigations into the opioid manufacturer Purdue Pharma and the conclusion of its civil investigations into the company’s individual shareholders. Purdue Pharma agreed to plead guilty in federal court to charges of conspiracy to violate the Federal Anti-Kickback Statute, with a criminal fine of over \$3.5 billion and \$2 billion in criminal forfeiture. A settlement in the amount of \$2.8 billion will resolve the civil liability under the False

Claims Act for opioid prescription practices that were unsafe, ineffective and medically unnecessary, resulting in abuse and diversion. The resolution does not resolve other claims that states may have against the company.

488. In 2020, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction published a report on the costs and harms associated with substance use during the period 2015–2017. It contains updates to the previous figures, from the period 2007–2014, found in the 2018 report. As set out in the latest publication, substance use cost Canada almost 46 billion Canadian dollars in 2017 and led to over 275,000 hospitalizations. While nearly 63 per cent of the total costs were due to alcohol and tobacco use, opioids accounted for \$5.9 billion Canadian dollars, or 12.9 per cent of the total costs. Cocaine accounted for \$3.7 billion Canadian dollars, or 8.1 per cent of the total costs.

489. A socioeconomic review of supervised consumption sites in the Province of Alberta, Canada, was released in March 2020. Since 2019, the government of the province had frozen funding for any new supervised consumption sites until a review of the impact of existing sites was carried out. The Health Authority of the province advised the committee reviewing the sites that, since October 2017, there had been about 6,541 adverse events at the sites, and that death rates in their vicinity had increased. The committee was concerned about issues of transparency and accountability surrounding how overdose reversals were tracked and reported. Non-opioid substance use, such as methamphetamine, also reportedly increased at some of the sites and, in most areas, crime in the immediate vicinity increased.

490. On 6 January 2020, the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health of Canada issued a statement on cannabis extracts, edibles and topical products. Released through the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Council advised, in the statement, that cannabis was not harmless and that it carried risks. Evidence continued to emerge on the longer-term health effects of cannabis use, which highlighted the importance of ongoing research. It was further indicated in the statement that the safest approach for people who use cannabis was to avoid smoking or vaping cannabis extracts, and that side effects from cannabis products should be reported to Health Canada.

491. Mexico reported to the Board that, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Institute of Psychiatry had enacted a series of remote intervention programmes for drug users. Guidance is provided to people, at any time, over the Internet. Mexico reported on its drug abuse and depression assistance programme, which provides

brief online psychological treatment from a professional counsellor to encourage a reduction in drug use and address symptoms of depression. Mexico also reported on additional programmes that had been designed to strengthen social, emotional and parenting skills to help prevent the use of drugs.

South America

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected trafficking routes, supply of and demand for drugs, and microtrafficking modalities in South America.

Total cocaine manufacture potential in Colombia increased by 1.5 per cent in 2019 despite a decrease in the area under coca bush cultivation.

The manufacture and presence of synthetic drugs is on the rise in South America, in particular in Chile.

1. Major developments

492. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected South America, with significant repercussions for the cultivation and manufacture of, trafficking in and consumption of drugs in the region. As lockdowns of varying degrees were imposed across South America, criminal organizations again demonstrated their capacity to adapt to new circumstances. This was noted in particular with regard to the channels used for the illicit movement of drugs: alternative routes were created to circumvent border closures and road and air travel restrictions; maritime routes acquired a prominent role, with traffickers taking advantage of the limited capacity in some countries in the region to detect and seize controlled substances trafficked along river and sea routes; and there was an increase in the use of light aircraft, flown at low altitude to avoid radar, to transport drugs between Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil and Peru.

493. Changes in supply and demand as a result of border closures have also had an impact on drug prices in the region. In Brazil, there was an increase in cocaine prices and, in Colombia, a similar trend was observed with regard to the price of coca paste. No official data have been made available yet to calculate the exact increase in the price of cocaine for consumer markets. Between January and April 2020, the price of coca leaf dropped by 46 per cent in Peru and by 58 per cent in the valley of the rivers Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro, one of the major coca bush-growing areas in the country, as a

result of the impact of COVID-19 on demand for cocaine. The prices of cocaine hydrochloride and coca paste also decreased in Peru, by 25 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively.

494. Organized criminal groups that control more resources were better able to anticipate and overcome the repercussions of the lockdown on their illegal businesses by stockpiling drugs. Reduced economic activities and restrictions on transport also had an impact on the procurement of chemical precursors. As such, while some criminal organizations have relied on the reserves of chemicals that they had on hand to produce cocaine hydrochloride, others have tried to produce their own precursor chemicals. Although a trend towards self-reliance in the manufacture of cocaine was observed before the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions related to the pandemic have increased the interest of organized criminal groups in developing and manufacturing their own chemical precursors to sustain their production in difficult circumstances.

495. Lockdowns related to the COVID-19 pandemic have also prompted changes in microtrafficking practices across the region, with drug traffickers taking increased advantage of existing licit services, such as food delivery, Internet platforms and emergency services, or emulating such services as a cover for their operations. In July 2020, 24 people were detained in Chile for using a fake food delivery service as a front for delivering cocaine, cannabis and clonazepam. Other drug traffickers have taken advantage of the transportation of essential equipment during the pandemic to smuggle drugs. In March 2020, authorities in Brazil found 1.1 tons of cocaine hidden in surgical gloves that were being transported by truck, and police officers in Peru seized over 1 kg of drugs in boxes containing protective masks destined for Hong Kong, China.

496. In June 2020, the border between the city of Salvador Mazza in Argentina and the Plurinational State of Bolivia was closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and stop trafficking in goods and drugs between both countries. Controls at the border between the two countries have increased as drug traffickers appear to be taking advantage of the influx of people from the Plurinational State of Bolivia seeking medical assistance in Argentina to smuggle their drugs.

497. It is expected that the economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic will move the patterns of drug use and trafficking towards cheaper and more addictive substances. The Chilean Observatory on Drugs has noted a possible increase in the illicit market of synthetic drugs that are cheaper to manufacture and easier to transport

and distribute. This comes at a time when the presence of synthetic drugs such as “ecstasy” is becoming more evident in the region.

498. The pandemic has also evidenced the role that cartels and organized criminal groups have in the region. At times, they have filled the void left by Governments by implementing lockdown measures when and where the Government was not acting or was unable to enforce such measures.

499. According to a report from Fundación Paz y Reconciliación (Peace and Reconciliation Foundation), the presence of cartels and drug trafficking groups from Mexico has increased in Colombia. Although their presence dates back to previous decades, their activity has become more prominent. They have increased the funding and arming of Colombian drug trafficking groups, presumably to ensure that cocaine continues to reach Mexico as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army (FARC-EP) relinquishes control of drug-producing areas in Colombia.

500. In March 2020, the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, together with government officials and members of FARC, were indicted in the United States on counts of narco-terrorism and international cocaine trafficking. The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela immediately denounced the charges against its President as baseless, highlighting the aggressive action it had taken to fight drug trafficking and condemning what it considered attacks against its country. In April 2020, in response to the occurrence of maritime drug smuggling from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Government of the United States launched a counter-narcotics operation in the Caribbean Sea, which involved the deployment of warships.

501. In the Andean region, the area under illegal coca bush cultivation has been increasing since 2016, together with the potential for cocaine manufacture. Until 2017, the Board and other United Nations entities could carry out comparative analyses of the trends in illicit coca bush cultivation and cocaine manufacture in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia and Peru on the basis of the crop monitoring activities carried out by UNODC and the Governments concerned. While reports for Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Colombia continued to be published, since 2017 there have been no official figures for Peru. This absence of updated information impairs the comprehensive assessment of coca cultivation trends in the Andean region. **The Board expresses its concern about the lack of measurement of the area under illegal coca bush cultivation in Peru during 2018**

and 2019 and urges the country to complete and present the studies for the missing years and to renew its long-standing commitment to crop monitoring activities and to the promotion of comprehensive and sustainable alternative development.

2. Regional cooperation

502. In 2020, several new initiatives were developed to overcome the challenges that drugs pose to the region. On 4 and 5 March 2020, the first meeting of the intelligence agencies of Latin America was held in La Paz, with the participation of Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and the United States. Participating countries agreed to cooperate and exchange information to identify the persons involved and the *modi operandi* used in the production and manufacture of and trafficking in drugs in each country.

503. From 1 April to 15 May 2020, 26 countries from Europe and the Americas, including Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Uruguay, collaborated in the Orion V International Naval Campaign to Combat Drug Trafficking, the operational aspects of which were coordinated by Colombia. As a result of the campaign, 50.3 tons of cocaine, 7.3 tons of cannabis, 10 kg of heroin, 12 kg of amphetamines, 10 kg of “ecstasy” and 13 kg of methamphetamine were seized. Also as part of the operation, 38 vessels, two submarines and four aircraft were seized and 72 laboratories were dismantled. Activities under the Orion V naval campaign were initiated in 2018; from January to May 2020, a total of 180.3 tons of cocaine and 22.6 tons of cannabis were seized as part of it.

504. In April 2020, CICAD published the first information bulletin of the newly established early warning system for the Americas. The system was created in 2019 in the context of a growing need to monitor the presence of new psychoactive drugs in the States members of OAS. The system collects information from national early warning systems in the region. As of April 2020, Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay had operationalized their national early warning systems for emerging drugs and related threats, while Brazil, Paraguay and Peru had taken steps toward the creation of such systems.

505. Between 28 September and 1 October 2020, officials of the competent national authorities of Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Ecuador and Peru participated in the webinars delivered by the INCB Learning project. The webinars provided an opportunity

to enhance participants’ understanding of the drug control and reporting requirements as established by the international drug control conventions and offered a platform for the exchange of best practices among South American authorities.

506. In November 2019, INCB participated in the International Conference on Synthetic Drugs in Santiago, which strengthened the capacity of law enforcement agencies to identify and interdict new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids and to exchange intelligence on trafficking in those substances. More than 130 international experts and front-line officers from Brazil, Chile, China, Germany, Italy, New Zealand and Spain, as well as representatives of INTERPOL and INCB, participated in the event, which was hosted by the Government of Chile. Following the event, INCB provided training to 21 officials from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Public Health, the police and the postal and customs agencies of Chile on awareness-raising and safe-handling approaches for emerging substances and information exchange using IONICS. In August 2020, as part of its public-private partnership initiatives to counter trafficking in dangerous substances, the GRIDS programme participated in an online regional event organized by the Postal Union of the Americas, Spain and Portugal, during which 150 postal security officers from 18 countries received awareness-raising training on emerging new psychoactive substances, non-medical synthetic opioids and fentanyl-related substances trafficked through the international mail and express mail services.

3. National legislation, policy and action

507. On 28 February 2020, the National Council on the Fight against Illicit Drug Trafficking of the Plurinational State of Bolivia released the 2020–2025 National Strategy Against Drug Trafficking and the Illicit Drug Economy, under the slogan “United, Free of Drugs”. The strategy is composed of six thematic areas: (a) public health; (b) socioeconomic inclusion; (c) sustainable development; (d) regional and international cooperation; (e) tackling the financial foundations of drug organizations; and (f) enhancing the rule of law and governance on counter-narcotics. This strategy moves away from the “social control” approach of the previous Government and embraces direct coca bush eradication techniques. It is acknowledged in the strategy that the Plurinational State of Bolivia is not only a producing country, but also part of the drug market, with traffickers connected to regional and international networks involved in trafficking in drugs and gold, as well as trafficking in persons.

508. In March 2020, eight police officers were detained in the Plurinational State of Bolivia for involvement in the smuggling of cocaine that had been seized during an operation. The interim Government began investigating members of the former Administration for their involvement in drug trafficking and other illegal activities in the country. The former Minister of the Interior and the former National Director of the Special Force to Combat Drug Trafficking were placed under investigation for drug trafficking and corruption.

509. In June 2020, Peru adopted its Strategic Institutional Plan for the period 2020–2024. The Plan is aimed at, among other things, combating the criminal networks operating in the country. One of the objectives of the Plan is reducing trafficking in drugs.

510. In June 2020, the Government of Chile presented a draft bill to increase penalties related to drug trafficking, in particular for individuals who involve children under the age of 14 in activities related to drug trafficking, and to enable the use of seized assets for the national fight against drugs.

511. In June 2020, the National Assembly of Ecuador approved a bill on combating the consumption of and microtrafficking in drugs. The bill introduces administrative sanctions such as fines and community work for drug use in public spaces and at public events. It allows the placement of video cameras in and around educational institutions and, where not possible, the presence of law enforcement officers outside such institutions at peak hours, to ensure the security of students. Higher education institutions will have to include compulsory programmes on drug prevention in their curricula. The bill also creates a National Fund for the Comprehensive Prevention of Drugs, which will be partially financed by assets seized as part of prosecutions for drug trafficking and will support treatment and rehabilitation programmes for drug users.

512. Some Governments in South America have progressed further in regulating the cultivation and production of and trade in cannabis for medical and scientific purposes. In December 2019, the Brazilian regulatory agency for medicine issued new regulations on the use, production, commercialization, prescription, dispensing, monitoring and control of cannabis derivatives for medical purposes. Under the regulations, the cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes is not authorized in the country.

513. On 7 and 8 January 2020, the Government of Uruguay published two new laws (law No. 19845 and law

No. 19847) on the use of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes. Law No. 19845 is focused on the promotion of scientific research on cannabis and it establishes a national research centre on cannabis to contribute to research, technology transfer and training. The law also establishes a national research fund for cannabis, which will be partially funded by revenue obtained from the sale of cannabis for non-medical purposes. Law No. 19847 was passed to protect, promote and improve public health through quality-controlled cannabis-based products. It provides for the creation of a national programme to access cannabis for medical and therapeutic purposes, a commission to integrate cannabis businesses into the banking system of Uruguay and a commission to promote small and medium-sized manufacturers of cannabis.

514. In February 2020, the first licences to cultivate and manufacture medicinal cannabis were granted to 12 companies in Paraguay. The Government has stipulated that 2 per cent of the amount produced is to be transferred to the Ministry of Health, which will distribute the cannabis products free of charge to patients with a medical prescription. Paraguay, together with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Uruguay, currently allows the use of cannabis for medical purposes.

515. In March 2020, the National Council on the Fight against Illicit Drug Trafficking of the Plurinational State of Bolivia announced that the Secretary of the Committee for the Fight Against Drug Trafficking of the Chamber of Deputies had produced a draft bill to permit the use of cannabis for medical purposes, with the ultimate intention of permitting the production of medical cannabis-based products in the country.

516. Through its resolution 315 of March 2020, the Ministry of Health of Colombia updated its list of scheduled substances and established a mechanism to allow the National Narcotics Fund to authorize new activities, such as research and development, involving internationally controlled substances. The resolution also includes provisions under which medicines containing cannabinoids can be sold. Medicines containing more than 2 mg of *delta-9-THC* are subject to control and monitoring by the National Narcotics Fund. According to information from the Ministry of Health, an inter-institutional project is currently being developed to reformulate the regulatory framework in relation to safe and informed access to cannabis for medical and scientific purposes.

517. Suriname has also begun talks to address the use of cannabis for medical purposes. In May 2020, the Surinamese Standards Bureau shared with other ministries its cannabis standards for medical and scientific

purposes, which are aimed at regulating the cannabis industry for medical and scientific purposes.

518. The Board reiterates its view that, while the cultivation, production and use of cannabis for medical purposes are permitted by the 1961 Convention as amended, such activities must be carried out in a manner that is consistent with articles 23 and 28 of that Convention.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

519. Colombia, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia accounted for 70 per cent, 20 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively, of the global area under coca cultivation in 2017, the latest year for which comparable estimates are available. According to the *UNODC World Drug Report 2020*, following an increasing trend during the period 2013–2017, the total area under coca bush cultivation remained stable in 2018.

520. According to UNODC, Colombia reported a decrease of 9 per cent in the total area under coca cultivation, from 169,000 ha in 2018 to 154,000 ha in 2019, a continuation of the decreasing trend observed in the previous year. In spite of this decrease, the total manufacture potential of pure cocaine hydrochloride was 1,137 tons, which represents an increase of 1.5 per cent in relation to 2018. This increase could be explained by improvements in cultivation techniques, which have resulted in an increase in the size of the coca leaf harvest, and the higher performance of cocaine manufacture sites. Estimated coca leaf production in 2019 was 993,107 tons, representing an increase of 1.6 per cent compared with 2018.

521. Increasingly sophisticated efforts by drug traffickers in terms of the illicit manufacture of cocaine could also explain the increase in the manufacture of cocaine hydrochloride in Colombia. In recent years, drug traffickers appear to be becoming more self-sufficient by producing their own chemical precursors, such as potassium permanganate. This goes against a previously observed trend of some drug traffickers moving the manufacture of cocaine hydrochloride outside Colombia.

522. In 2018, the Government of Colombia proposed a zoning system based on the characteristics of the territories affected by coca bush cultivation, to design public policy in a way that was more responsive to local conditions. UNODC noticed that 48 per cent of the coca detected in 2019 was concentrated in 3 of the 12 zones: (a) forest reserve areas (18 per cent); (b) black community

land (16 per cent); and (c) areas of strategic interest for productive integration (14 per cent).

523. According to data from the Ministry of Defence of Colombia, from 1 January to 12 July 2020, 44,905 ha under illicit cultivation had been eradicated. The eradication target for 2020 is 130,000 ha of coca bush, 30 per cent higher than that of 2019. After a meeting between the President of Colombia and the President of the United States in March 2020, discussions were launched on the use of aerial spraying of glyphosate to increase the effectiveness of the eradication plan. Colombia had suspended aerial spraying in 2015, following a recommendation by WHO indicating that its use could have serious repercussions for human health and the environment. The Colombian Constitutional Court has blocked aerial spraying until the Government can meet various health and environmental requirements, including undertaking an inclusive consultation process with all affected communities. Given COVID-19 prevention requirements, the consultations were to have taken place online, but many of the affected communities have limited or non-existent Internet access. In 2019, 94,606 ha of illicit crops were manually eradicated. This represents an increase of 58 per cent compared with 2018, when a total of 59,978 ha were manually eradicated.

524. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the 5.7 per cent decrease in the area under coca bush cultivation from 2017 to 2018 was reversed in 2019, when the area under cultivation increased by 8.2 per cent, to 25,000 ha, from 23,100 ha in 2018. Political instability in 2019, border permeability and the country's location near the largest consumers and manufacturers of illicit drugs in South America are factors that could have led to the increase in cultivation.

525. As a consequence, the Plurinational State of Bolivia registered an increase in cocaine manufacture that could also have been caused by the large amount of coca leaf circulating on the illegal market. In 2018, an estimated 55,168 tons of coca leaf were produced in the country, according to the Directorate-General for Coca Leaf Commercialization and Industrialization. UNODC reported that, in 2019, authorities in the country dismantled 50 illicit cocaine laboratories and 841 factories. In 2018, authorities recorded an increase in the number of cocaine laboratories in remote, difficult-to-access areas in the eastern part of the country.

526. In October 2020, the National Drug Directorate of the Peruvian National Police published a report on trends in criminal drug trafficking networks in Peru. The report was based on available data from national anti-drug

operations, the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States, the European Union and UNODC, and validated the estimates, made by the United States Office of National Drug Control Policy, of 52,100 ha under illicit coca cultivation in 2018. This would represent an increase of 4.4 per cent in the area under cultivation in the country compared with 2017.

527. In July 2020, authorities in Peru dismantled six laboratories used to process coca paste and disabled 17 clandestine airstrips intended for use in drug trafficking. The laboratories served an area of over 70 ha of coca leaf cultivation and some 16 tons of coca leaf debris were seized. According to data from the Government of Peru released in May 2020, 25,526.31 ha under illicit coca bush cultivation were eradicated in 2019, surpassing the target for the year by 2.11 per cent. For 2020, the eradication goal remains 25,000 ha.

528. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the number of clandestine airstrips and suspected drug flights increased in 2019. The Government reported the confiscation of 23 light aircraft and the destruction of 36 clandestine airstrips in 2019. Most of the country's clandestine airstrips are located in the State of Zulia, which borders the Catatumbo region in Colombia, a significant area for cocaine manufacture. However, the number of airstrips in Zulia might be bigger. According to reports from various organizations monitoring the matter, some 400 airstrips have been identified for the landing and departure of aircraft bound for the Caribbean islands and Central America. It appears that drugs flown from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela are primarily bound for El Salvador and Honduras. The Mexican cartel Sinaloa has also been detected in Zulia, where it has taken advantage of the airstrips to build centres of transit and collection of narcotic drugs with the support of the Colombian National Liberation Army, which has expanded its activities in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

529. Uruguay reported two historic seizures of cocaine and coca paste in 2019 and 2020. In December 2019, 6 tons of cocaine were seized at the Port of Montevideo in containers bound for Togo. In February 2020, Operation Bagdad-Bangui resulted in the record seizure of 347 kg of coca paste and 206 kg of cocaine that had been smuggled by light aircraft, a recurring and increasingly common technique used by drug traffickers. Uruguay is gradually becoming a country for the trans-shipment of illicit drugs. In 2019, the country seized 12 tons of cocaine, the highest amount reported to date and a considerable increase from 2018, when only 782 kg of cocaine were seized. At the same time, the corruption of law

enforcement officers by drug traffickers is becoming more visible as the country plays an increasingly significant role in the international market for illicit drugs. In January 2020, four Uruguayan navy officers were accused of assisting drug trafficking organizations.

530. Brazil remains a significant transit hub and a key departure point for the cocaine that enters Asia and Africa. In April 2020, 555 kg of cocaine destined for Côte d'Ivoire were seized in the Port of Paranagua. Data from UNODC show that, between 2014 and 2018, most of the cocaine trafficked to Africa and smuggled onwards to Europe had departed from Brazil.

531. In May 2020, in the course of Operation Tsunami, authorities in Ecuador seized 3 tons of sodium hydroxide, a chemical controlled in Ecuador that can be used for the processing of cocaine, in the Province of Esmeraldas. Esmeraldas has seen a rise in the presence of drug trafficking organizations from Colombia in recent years. In the past decade, Ecuador has become a significant exporter of cocaine that is produced primarily in southern Colombia. The drug is usually bound for Europe and for Central America, from where it is trafficked onwards to North America.

532. In May 2020, Paraguay reported an increase in the amount of cocaine seized. In the first few months of 2020, the amount seized totalled approximately 4,300 kg. According to the National Anti-Drug Secretariat, that was a record amount for the country: in recent years, the annual average has been approximately 1,500 kg.

533. In 2018, South America accounted for 43 per cent of the quantity of cannabis herb seized globally. In May 2020, authorities in the Plurinational State of Bolivia destroyed over 46 tons of cannabis plant. In November 2019, a joint operation between Brazil and Paraguay (Operation Alianza 21), in the territory of the latter, led to the dismantling of 85 cannabis cultivation and production sites, the eradication of 160 ha of cannabis plant and the seizure of 19,480 kg of dried cannabis and 377 kg of pressed cannabis. In August 2020, the continued cooperation of the two countries under Operation Alianza 22 led to the dismantling of 63 cannabis sites, the eradication of 127 ha of cannabis plant and the seizure of 89.6 tons of chopped and processed cannabis. Brazil reported the seizure of 261 tons of cannabis herb in 2019 and, between January and May 2020, 141 tons of cannabis herb were seized. In May 2020, the Federal Police of Brazil carried out the biggest drug seizure in the country to date: 28 tons of cannabis herb being transported in a truck were intercepted in a city on the border with Paraguay.

534. Different cannabis varieties are appearing on the illicit cannabis market in Chile. Seizures of “creepy” cannabis, a genetically modified cannabis variety that contains high levels of THC and is popular among drug traffickers for its profitability, have increased sevenfold in the country in the past three years.

535. The overwhelming presence of cannabis and cocaine in the region often overshadows the presence of synthetic drugs. According to the UNODC *World Drug Report 2020*, the quantities of “ecstasy” seized in South America declined between 2017 and 2018. Nonetheless, a growing presence of the drug has been noted in the region since 2019. At the end of 2019, the Plurinational State of Bolivia announced the seizure of 1.5 kg of “ecstasy” tablets that had come from Spain. The most recent seizure of “ecstasy” in the country prior to that had been in 2006.

536. Chile also experienced a worrying influx of synthetic drugs in 2019. In 2010, the country reported the seizure of some 2,000 doses but, by 2019, the number had increased to up to 1.5 million. Chilean authorities are alarmed by the increasing presence of these drugs, a growing trend that can also be observed in the number of seizures and of laboratories dismantled. In 2010, the number of “ecstasy”-type substances seizures was 7 (1,501 doses) and by 2019 it was 444 (456,741 doses). The latest data from the Chilean Observatory on Drugs show that, in 2019, 15 clandestine drug manufacturing laboratories, largely dedicated to the manufacture of synthetic drugs, were discovered.

537. Brazil has reported an increase since 2019 in the domestic manufacture of “ecstasy”. Between 2018 and 2020, at least eight clandestine laboratories for the manufacture of the substance were dismantled. According to the UNODC regional office in Brazil, this is a new phenomenon in the country. Previously dismantled facilities were usually focused on the cutting and retableting of imported “ecstasy”; however, recently discovered laboratories in south Brazil have been dedicated to the entire manufacturing chain.

5. Prevention and treatment

538. Consistent with past years, cannabis and cocaine continue to be the most-used drugs in South America according to UNODC. The region has witnessed a steady increase in the use of cannabis, which appears to be more predominant among people from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds. UNODC reported that, in 2018, 2 per cent of the population of the Plurinational State of Bolivia

were past-year users of cannabis, compared with 1.3 per cent in 2014.

539. In Uruguay, 8.9 per cent of the population aged between 15 and 65 reported past-month cannabis use in 2018. Since 2011, the country has witnessed a rise in the number of regular and frequent cannabis users, to the extent that more than a third of those users were considered to be dependent. According to the seventh national survey of Uruguay on drug use in the general population, undertaken in 2019, the average age of first cannabis use is 20, an increase from previous years that has been attributed to the increased number of adults using cannabis. In 2011, the age of first use was 18.3 and by 2018 it had reached 20.1. In the ninth regulated cannabis market report, published by the Institute for the Regulation and Control of Cannabis in February 2020, it was reported that, as at 29 February 2020, a total of 53,399 people were authorized to access cannabis: 40,604 people had registered to acquire cannabis from pharmacies, 8,120 had registered for domestic cultivation and 4,675 had a membership of a cannabis club. UNODC, in the *World Drug Report 2020*, noted that users who accessed cannabis only through authorized means represented a small proportion of the cannabis users in the country.

540. The Board notes the efforts of the Government of Uruguay to monitor and provide information on the manufacture, distribution and consumption of cannabis for non-medical purposes. However, the Board expresses concern regarding the increase of cannabis consumption as reported by the Government of Uruguay and wishes to reiterate that legalization measures or regulations that permit the use of any controlled substance, including cannabis, for non-medical purposes are inconsistent with the obligations of States parties, namely those included in article 4, paragraph (c), of the 1961 Convention as amended. The Board calls upon all States to respect their international legal obligations in the development of their national drug control policies.

541. Treatment for substance use disorder in which cocaine is the primary drug of concern represents a large share of drug treatment in South America. It was estimated that, in 2018, 2.8 million people aged 15–64 were past-year users of cocaine in South America. In particular, in 2018 in Uruguay, 2 per cent of the adult population were past-year users of cocaine, 43 per cent of whom were suffering from cocaine use disorder.

542. In addition, a growing pattern of use of coca paste has been observed in the region. While the use of cocaine seems to be more prevalent among young adults from high- and middle-income backgrounds, coca paste is

more widespread among older users (36–45) from low-income groups. Uruguay has reported a decline in the use of cocaine base paste among young adults but an increase in such use among adults, as the users who initiated use at the age of 18 during the period 2002–2004 have continued using the drug over the years.

543. In the past, the use of coca paste predominantly took place in the countries where cocaine was manufactured. However, according to UNODC, it has spread to other countries in South America where the manufacture of cocaine does not take place. Nevertheless, it is difficult to provide accurate estimates on such use as cocaine base paste is commonly consumed by marginalized groups, which are not reached by treatment services and national surveys.

544. During the coronavirus pandemic, access to drugs such as cocaine has been limited because of a lack of movement across borders and a considerable rise in prices owing to limited stocks. However, this has not halted the consumption of cocaine or cannabis. On 14 July 2020, the Service for the Prevention and Treatment of Drug and Alcohol Use in Chile presented the results of an online survey on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the use of alcohol and other drugs in the country. According to the survey, cannabis consumption has remained more stable than cocaine during the pandemic. Since the beginning of the pandemic, respondents had had more access to cannabis (84.3 per cent) than cocaine (5.5 per cent). One third (33.3 per cent) of the participants said that they had consumed more cannabis during the pandemic, whereas 27.7 per cent said that they had consumed less. By contrast, 29.9 per cent said that they had consumed more cocaine during the pandemic and 49.2 per cent had reduced their consumption of cocaine.

545. A report published by CICAD and the Uruguayan National Drug Board in February 2020 showed a marginal prevalence of opioid use in the population (0.9 per cent lifetime use and 0.3 per cent in the past 12 months). This is consistent with the limited presence of opioids on the illicit market in Uruguay. However, the Government has noted that continued monitoring of this trend is required.

546. UNODC and WHO estimate that only 1 in 11 people in Latin America have access to drug treatment programmes. Reports from the Plurinational State of Bolivia indicate a general lack of public treatment centres; the centres that do exist are located only in urban areas. In its recently published national strategy on combating drug trafficking and the illegal economy for drugs, the Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia noted

that there were only two drug dependence treatment facilities managed by the Government.

547. Brazil is the largest cocaine market in South America, according to information from the *World Drug Report 2020*. In July 2020, resolution 03/2020 was issued by the Ministry of Health of Brazil allowing therapeutic communities to provide treatment to adolescents (aged 12–18) suffering from drug use disorders. According to a national study from 2017, 95 per cent of such therapeutic communities use non-evidence-based approaches to treat patients. In June 2019, the Government approved law No. 13840, to enable the compulsory hospitalization of drug users. This law modifies federal law No. 11343 of August 2006, which established the National System of Public Policy on Drugs. Under the new law, treatment of patients suffering from drug use disorders could take place without the consent of the patient, at the request of a family member or legal guardian or, in the absolute absence of a guardian, a public servant in the field of health who verifies the existence of reasons that justify the measure.

548. **The Board discourages the use of compulsory treatment for the rehabilitation of patients suffering from drug use disorders and recalls the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health submitted to the Human Rights Council at its forty-fourth session, held from 30 June to 17 July 2020 (A/HRC/44/48), in which the Special Rapporteur warned that medical rationales should never be used as a defence or justification for policies and practices that violate the dignity and rights of people who use drugs. The Board calls upon the Government of Brazil to implement voluntary, evidence-based treatment services with due respect for patients' human rights, in line with the UNODC-WHO *International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders and Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolutions 46/1 and 59/4.***

549. Governments of the region have continued to work on raising awareness among youth of the adverse consequences of drug consumption and on the prevention of drug use. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior signed a memorandum of understanding in June 2020 to address the prevention of and fight against the use of drugs in schools by providing information materials for students, educators and families through the country's schools.

550. Taking note of the heavy toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the most vulnerable sectors of society, especially people suffering from drug use disorders, Argentina and Uruguay developed action plans to assist those populations. In Argentina, the Secretariat for Comprehensive Drug Policies activated a contingency plan to guarantee the provision of essential services through community structures and call centres that are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In Uruguay, the National Drug Board started the implementation of Project Paradores, which offers places in daytime shelters to people living on the street who have a high risk of marginalization and social exclusion. National data from Uruguay show that 87 per cent of its citizens living on the streets consume some type of illicit drug. As such, Project Paradores has been promoted as part of a comprehensive initiative: while focusing on the prevention and containment of the transmission of COVID-19, trained personnel assist people with drug dependence issues.

551. While the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to lead to an increase in rates of substance use disorder, spending on drug prevention and treatment services is in long-term decline in the region. Access to drug treatment services might be disrupted as Governments divert their attention to address the economic crisis in the aftermath of the global pandemic.

D. Asia

East and South-East Asia

The continued increase in the illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of synthetic drugs, in particular methamphetamine in increasingly purer forms, remained a major concern for East and South-East Asia. The drug problem has had serious health, human rights, security and economic implications for the countries of the region.

It seems that the decision by China in 2019 to schedule fentanyl-related substances as a class-wide group has, over the course of the year, resulted in a sharp drop in the amount of those substances of alleged Chinese origin seized globally. However, it also seems that traffickers have now moved to fentanyl precursors as a way of manufacturing these substances, which calls for greater collaboration to deal with this trafficking challenge.

The Board has repeatedly expressed its concerns over serious human rights violations, especially with regard to extrajudicial actions, committed in purported pursuit of drug control objectives. These violations contravene internationally recognized human rights standards and are inconsistent with the obligations of Governments under the three international drug control conventions.

1. Major developments

552. More than any other part of the world, the countries in East and South-East Asia continue to see an increase in the illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of synthetic drugs, in particular methamphetamine. The price of methamphetamine decreased to its lowest in a decade, while purity remained stable or increased. UNODC estimates that the manufacture of and trafficking in methamphetamine and heroin in the region generated annual revenues of more than \$54 billion, with methamphetamine accounting for \$44.9 billion.

553. In early 2020, major seizures of synthetic drugs took place in a number of countries of the region, including China, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand.

554. In its annual report for 2019, the Board noted that, to further strengthen its drug control system, China had decided to schedule, as a class-wide group, all fentanyl-related substances as of 1 May 2019. Available data by the end of 2019, including as reflected in presentations by representatives of national agencies at INCB-hosted seminars for subject-matter experts, suggested that the number of interdictions of fentanyl-related substances of alleged Chinese origin had dropped markedly.

555. Effective regulatory mechanisms, as well as border management and control and forensic capacity with regard to precursors and other chemicals frequently used in illicit drug manufacture, continue to be of particular importance given that the chemical industry has a substantial presence in the region and the region's increasingly improved infrastructure has further enhanced connectivity among countries. Effective regional cooperation among the countries of the region through collaboration, joint operations and the sharing of information remains crucial. In particular, given the apparent effectiveness of the decision by China to schedule fentanyl-related substances as a class, traffickers have moved to precursors as a way of continuing to provide those substances to illicit markets, a development described in the Board's report on precursors for 2019, which gives even greater impetus to the need to work regionally to deal with this trafficking challenge.