

Foreword

Six decades ago, the international community came together in its concern about the health and welfare of humankind to discuss the indispensable role of narcotic drugs for the relief of pain and suffering, while at the same time acknowledging the public health problem of drug dependence. It decided to bring all the efforts made in previous bilateral and multilateral treaties into a single, unified system of international drug control. The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 was drafted to ensure effective international control over the licit movement of narcotic drugs around the world, from production, manufacture and trade to distribution and consumption. Ten years later, the international community came together again in the same spirit to address the problem of psychotropic substances and developed a similar system of monitoring and control. The underlying approach, which was based on the concept of common and shared responsibility, remains central to the international control system that is in place today.

Even with the reality of the constantly shifting contours of the drug problem, the 1961 Convention, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 have proved their value as cornerstones of international cooperation in drug policy. The fact that the conventions have been almost universally ratified by States underscores that the desire to counter the world drug problem is shared globally. States have regularly reaffirmed their commitment to working within the framework of the three international drug control conventions and the subsequent resolutions and political declarations.

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) was established to administer the control system, in cooperation with States parties, and to monitor and oversee the compliance of Governments with treaty obligations. Fifty and sixty years after the adoption of the two conventions, the INCB, according to the data at its disposal, can state that the international system of control, despite the challenges encountered, has been able to achieve international control of the licit production, trade and consumption of controlled substances. There is virtually no diversion of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances from licit manufacture and international trade to illicit trafficking, even though the number of drugs under the international narcotics control regime has increased substantially.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the goal of ensuring the availability and accessibility of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical purposes has not at all been achieved to a satisfactory extent at the global level. Equally, the goals of reducing the illicit cultivation, trafficking and non-medical use of drugs and providing treatment and rehabilitation services to people suffering from drug dependence, which were left to States parties to implement within their own social and cultural contexts, cannot be considered to have been addressed effectively.

The two conventions did not provide specific international tools or instruments for achieving those broader goals of reducing illicit trafficking, ensuring the availability of controlled medicines and providing treatment and rehabilitation services. However, over the years, the international community has recognized the need for concerted action to achieve those goals, devoted considerable resources to assisting countries in need and reiterated the importance of international cooperation.

The drug control system is a balanced system that is geared towards improving public health and welfare and based on the underlying principles of proportionality, collective responsibility and compliance with international human rights standards. Implementing the system means putting the health and welfare of humankind at the core of drug policies, applying comprehensive, integrated and balanced approaches to elaborating drug control policy, promoting human rights standards, giving higher priority to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and the reduction of the negative consequences of drug abuse, and strengthening international cooperation based on common and shared responsibility.

On this dual anniversary, INCB wishes to re-emphasize that the current system, when fully implemented, contributes to protecting the health and welfare of people worldwide and ensures balanced national approaches in which local socioeconomic and sociocultural conditions are considered. INCB considers that the current system is critically important in addressing the old and new challenges of the world drug problem, but at the same time calls for reflection on possible alternative and additional agreements, instruments and forms of cooperation to respond to the changing nature and magnitude of the global drug problem.

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Cornelis P. de Joncheere
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International Narcotics Control Board