



For information only - not an official document.

EMBARGO: 27 February 2002
00:01 hours GMT

BOARD CALLS ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO ASSIST AFGHANISTAN

Preventing the resumption of illicit opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is inextricably linked to achieving peace, security and development, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) states in its Annual Report published today (27 February 2002) in Vienna. INCB is calling on the international community to provide adequate technical and financial assistance to the country to be able to fully implement the drug control treaties. The Board also urges the authorities in Afghanistan, now or in the future, to commit themselves to full compliance with international drug control treaties.

The President of INCB, Professor Hamid Ghodse, said: "We are seriously concerned that illicit cultivation of opium poppy in Afghanistan is again increasing and we want to see international cooperation to prevent Afghanistan again becoming the world's largest producer of opium. If Afghanistan is to achieve peace and security it must tackle the drug control problem."

The Board has been engaged in a dialogue with the Islamic State of Afghanistan (the Northern Alliance/United Front) and the Taliban authorities after it formally invoked Article 14 of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 with respect to Afghanistan in May 2000.

Article 14 of the Convention is invoked when the Board has objective reasons to believe that the aims of the convention are being seriously endangered and sets in motion a process of formal consultations. The discussions aim to convince the authorities to take remedial action to bring the country into line with the international conventions. If such actions are not taken, the Board can recommend sanctions for adoption by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Discussions were held with the Taliban authorities in Kabul from 4-6 September and with the Northern Alliance in March 2001.

Three months after the invoking of Article 14, the Taliban announced a total ban on opium poppy cultivation, which led to a sharp decline in the cultivation of opium poppy for the 2000-2001 growing season in most areas controlled by them. Illicit cultivation in other areas has continued unabated. Continued seizures of opiates in the surrounding countries tends to indicate the existence of significant stocks held by trafficking groups.

The exact amount of stockpiles is not known, but they are obviously significant because the heroin market has not been affected and the price of heroin has remained largely the same. Stockpiles may lie not just in Afghanistan but along trafficking routes and in consumer countries in Western Europe. Recent seizures along the Balkan route reflect this trend. There are now signs that illicit cultivation of opium poppy is again increasing and this development has to be addressed without delay.

For the time being, Article 14 remains invoked. "The world community must ensure," states Professor Ghodse, "that the authorities in Afghanistan, now and in future, make compliance with the drug control Conventions a priority."