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EMBARGO:

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Centennial of the Drugs Control System

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Africa

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) Annual Report states that cocaine destined mainly for illicit markets in Europe is increasingly smuggled through Africa. West Africa has become one of the world's major hubs for smuggling cocaine from South America into Europe. The number of cocaine seizures on the high seas of the Gulf of Guinea and on the African mainland has increased, as well as the levels of abuse of cocaine in some transit countries.

Cannabis still is the most abused drug in Africa: it is estimated that the substance is abused by over 42 million people in the region. Africa produces 26 per cent of all cannabis worldwide. Morocco remains one of the world's largest producers of cannabis resin, although cannabis herb is illicitly produced in countries throughout Africa.

East Africa is the main transit route for smuggling heroin from South-West Asia into Africa, mainly through the major airports of Addis Ababa and Nairobi. From East Africa, the heroin is smuggled into Europe and North America – mainly through countries in West Africa (especially Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria). The abuse of heroin has become alarming in some East and Southern African countries, in particular Kenya, Mauritius, South Africa and Zambia.

Another problem in the region is that counterfeit pharmaceutical preparations are available on the unregulated markets. The situation remains unresolved partly because of ineffective administrative mechanisms and insufficient resources for the proper enforcement controls such as licensing and inspection of distribution channels.

In recent years, Africa has emerged as a major area used for the diversion of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. Those substances, called precursors, are used in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine, especially in the Americas. Amphetamines are increasingly abused across Africa, in particular in South Africa. The number of amphetamine abusers in Africa is estimated by UNODC at 2.3 million, accounting for about 9 per cent of the world total.

The Board calls on the international community to assist African countries to strengthen the drug control system, particularly to verify the legitimacy of all shipments of precursors destined for Africa as well as to establish appropriate mechanisms for control over those substances.

Americas

Central America and the Caribbean

Central America and the Caribbean continue to be a major route for illicit drugs from South America on the way to North America and Europe. Since maritime drug trafficking routes are increasingly being monitored, drug traffickers are making use of low-flying light aircraft.



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Street gangs called *maras* continue to be associated with international drug trafficking networks. Mexican organized crime networks have been recruiting gang members from El Salvador and Guatemala. Many gangs in Central America have links with other gangs and criminal groups in the United States.

The Report shows that trafficking of controlled substances containing ephedrine and pseudo-ephedrine is increasing in Central America. Criminal organizations take advantage of the lax control of sales near Mexico's southern border to acquire drugs containing these precursors.

As a result of rising drug trafficking activity, drug abuse is on the rise in some countries of Central America and the Caribbean. For example, in the Dominican Republic drug abuse is increasing and crime has also escalated. Drug traffickers are often paid in drugs, thus expanding the local drug trafficking networks and increasing the local demand. The Government of the Dominican Republic is tackling corruption among drug control authorities. 5,000 members of the National Drug Control Directorate have been reprimanded and expelled from the institution since 2006, some of them on drug trafficking charges.

Jamaica continues to be the main source of cannabis in the region, while Guatemala is the only country in Central America with significant illicit opium poppy cultivation. Abuse of ecstasy, originating from Europe and Canada, is rising in Jamaica, especially in the tourist areas. The Board notes with concern the lack of published studies on drug abuse in Central America and the Caribbean and welcomes the initiative of the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs, which has announced that it is preparing a comparative study of the drug situation in Central America.

The Board encourages national authorities to vigorously deal with international drug trafficking networks including where the street gangs are involved and to take other measures such as passing legislation introducing civil forfeiture and anti-corruption programmes. They should also expand and continue activities in the field of drug control.

North America

The growing violence among drug cartels and between drug traffickers and law enforcement officers is a major problem in North America. The Government of Mexico faces violent opposition by drug cartels to its attempts to fight organized crime and drug trafficking.

Surpassed only by cannabis, the number of persons in the United States who abuse prescription drugs is now greater than the total number of persons abusing cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, ecstasy and inhalants. The abuse of prescription drugs among youth is of particular concern.

Cocaine and its derivative "crack" are still easy to obtain on the illicit market in Canada. Abuse of cocaine laced with methamphetamine has been identified as an emerging trend in that country. Canada has become a primary source of supply of MDMA (ecstasy). Unprecedented amounts of Canadian ecstasy were seized in other countries. In the United States and in Canada heroin abuse is stable at a relatively low level.

In 2007, an estimated 35.7 million people in the United States aged 12 or older (14.4 per cent), had used illicit drugs. However, an encouraging sign is the decline in overall illicit drug use among youth and young adults. Since 2001, there has been a decrease of 24 per cent in teenage drug abuse (12-17 years). Similarly the abuse of drugs by young adults (18-25 years) has decreased with the exception of pain relievers. In Canada and Mexico abuse of cocaine, cannabis and methamphetamine has increased. It is alarming that in Mexico children start using drugs at an age of 8-10 years.



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Addressing the United States, the INCB reiterates its call to take measures to tackle the issue of direct-to-consumer advertising, which may promote medically unjustified consumption of pharmaceuticals in the United States as well as in other countries and should therefore be stopped.

South America

Colombia remains the world's largest producer of coca leaf. According to UNODC, despite the continuation of eradication efforts, illicit cultivation of coca bush increased by 27 per cent. The forced manual eradication of coca bushes in Colombia was hampered by violent attacks by armed and criminal groups using firearms and anti-personnel mines to protect illicit crops.

Colombia accounts for 55 per cent of the total area under illicit coca bush cultivation in South America, followed by Peru (29 per cent) and Bolivia (16 per cent). The Board notes with concern that in September 2008, the Bolivian Government signed an agreement with coca growers of the Yungas allowing them to cultivate larger extensions of coca bush than those already permitted in the Chapare.

International criminal groups continue to use Venezuela as one of the main departure areas for illicit drug consignments leaving the region of South America. According to UNODC, the smuggling of cocaine through this country has increased significantly since 2002.

According to Europol, drug trafficking networks in South America cooperate in temporary joint ventures established on an ad hoc basis. They are making use of specialists in all sectors of their criminal activities, ranging from chemists, to skippers, pilots, trained couriers and financial experts. The South American trafficking organizations also exploit the unstable social and economic situation and weak drug control mechanisms in some African countries.

Cannabis is the most abused drug in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay. According to the first comparative study on drug abuse among the general population in six South American countries, the highest lifetime prevalence of abuse of cannabis, 27.1 per cent, was found in Chile and the lowest, 4.0 per cent, in Peru.

In the past few years, most South American countries have reported increasing abuse of cocaine, probably a spillover effect of drug trafficking throughout the region. Several countries in the southern part of South America previously used as transit areas by drug traffickers have been used more and more for drug processing. That shift has resulted in the increased availability of inexpensive semi-refined cocaine derivatives, such as cocaine base and coca paste (*paco*), in the local markets. Several countries in South America report an increase in the non-medical use of psychotropic substances in the past year, in particular sedatives and tranquillizers. The increased abuse of so-called "date rape drugs" that can be used to assist criminal in the commission of sexual assault is a concern.

Asia

East and South-East Asia

A large amount of illicit drugs is smuggled into East and South-East Asia from outside the region, mainly from Canada and West Asia. Most drugs seized by authorities were found in shipments and with air passengers, but significant seizures of cannabis originating in the Lao People's Democratic Republic



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have been found hidden in motor vehicles. National authorities in East and South-East Asia continue to report significant seizures of drugs smuggled through the postal system.

While heroin continues to be the most widely abused drug in China, Malaysia and Viet Nam, a significant increase in the abuse of amphetamine-type stimulants was also reported. Ketamine is the most commonly abused psychotropic substance in the whole region and the drug of choice for 73 per cent of drug abusers under the age of 21 in the Hong Kong (SAR) region.

The Philippines have the highest annual prevalence of abuse of amphetamines in the world: 6 per cent of the population abused those substances in the past year. Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia and Thailand, among others, also have a high rate of abuse of such substances.

The unsafe practice of sharing needles among drug abusers remains one of the main causes of HIV transmission in many countries in South-East Asia.

The Board notes that Governments in East and South-East Asia continue to strengthen national drug control legislation and improve the provision of treatment and rehabilitation services for drug abusers. In particular, China has adopted a law that includes provisions on voluntary community-based treatment and rehabilitation for drug abusers.

South Asia

Large seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants and their precursors in South Asia in recent years point to the emergence of an illicit market for those substances. However, South Asian countries could also be used as transit areas between manufacturing hubs in East Asia and the rapidly growing illicit markets in the Arabian Peninsula. It is feared that the widespread availability of those substances may lead to an increase in their abuse in South Asia.

Increasingly large seizures of "yaba", tablets containing a mixture of caffeine and methamphetamine have been reported in Bangladesh, where the drug has gained popularity among young people. Most of the "yaba" circulating in Bangladesh is smuggled out of neighbouring countries such as Myanmar.

Recent survey data from several South Asian countries indicates that the HIV transmission rate is still high among persons who abuse drugs by injection. In India, the prevalence of HIV infection among injecting drug users in 2006 was estimated at a national average of 8.71 per cent, compared with 0.36 per cent in the general adult population.

In the region of Dhaka, Bangladesh, the rate rose from 1.4 per cent in 2000 to 7 per cent in 2006 and in Kathmandu, Nepal, was still high in 2007, at 34 per cent, but had decreased from a peak of 68 per cent in 2003.

Pharmaceutical preparations diverted from licit manufacture in India continue to be widely abused in South Asia. Drugs smuggled into neighbouring countries include pethidine and codeine-based cough syrups. In 2007 drug control authorities in Bangladesh made a record seizure of more than 70,000 tablets containing codeine.

While Nepal is the most important producer of cannabis resin in South Asia, the amount originating in India is also noteworthy. India is the main producer of opium poppy to meet the world's licit



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requirement in opioids. However, Indian counter-narcotics forces eradicate large areas of opium poppy, which grows wild or is illicitly cultivated.

West Asia

Illicit opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan dropped by 19 per cent from its record level of 193,000 ha in 2007 to 157,000 ha in 2008, due to the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan and the international community. Despite those successes, Afghanistan continues to account for by far the largest share of the world's illicit opium poppy cultivation. Due to the higher crop yield, actual opium production dropped by only 6 per cent, from 8,200 tons in 2007 to 7,700 tons in 2008. The Board urges the Government of Afghanistan and the international community to ensure that farming communities involved in illicit crop cultivation are provided with sustainable, legitimate livelihoods.

Illicit opium poppy cultivation takes place in Pakistan and appears to be increasing. While the Government of Pakistan remains determined to eradicate such illicit cultivation, most of it takes place in remote areas near the Afghan border where the Government has difficulties in enforcing national laws.

In Central Asian countries, the rate of abuse of opiates continues to increase and HIV/AIDS transmission is growing faster than anywhere else in the world, through the sharing of needles among injecting drug users.

The countries in the southern Caucasus are increasingly used as transit areas for illicit consignments of drugs, mainly opiates from Afghanistan, resulting in increased drug abuse in these countries as well. New routes for trafficking in drugs, including heroin from countries outside of West Asia, appear to be opening through countries in the Arabian Peninsula. These new routes lead through countries such as Jordan, Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates. Several countries in the region are used as trans-shipment points for drug trafficking, including Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Cannabis from Lebanon is smuggled into Jordan, heroin on its way to Israel.

The United Arab Emirates still face difficulties to implement controls over drugs and precursors in its free trade zones. The country should take adequate measures against drug trafficking in all territories under its jurisdiction.

Europe

Cannabis is the most widely abused drug in Europe. About 71 million people (aged 15-64 years) have tried cannabis in their lifetime and about 7 per cent have used it in the last year. Europe is not only the largest illicit market for cannabis resin but also the second largest market for cocaine in the world.

Large consignments of cocaine from South America are smuggled into Europe by sea, often through West African countries. The smuggling of cocaine through Eastern European countries has significantly increased over the past few years. This reflects a new trend in cocaine trafficking, whereby more and more cocaine is being transported to illicit markets in Western Europe via the so-called Balkan Route, the route traditionally used for trafficking in opiates.



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The heroin available on illicit markets in Europe originates in Afghanistan and has been smuggled into Europe along one of two major routes: the Balkan route; or the so-called “silk route”, via Central Asia into the Russian Federation and from there to countries in Europe.

Europe remains the region with the second largest illicit market for opiates. In Eastern Europe, this market continues to expand. According to UNODC estimates, there are about 2 million abusers of opiates in Eastern Europe. The abuse of opiates increased in the Russian Federation and other countries in Eastern Europe, as well as in countries in South-Eastern Europe along the Balkan route. Furthermore, it appears that the abuse of heroin has become more widespread among younger drug abusers in Western Europe.

Treatment for heroin abuse in residential facilities, formerly the predominant treatment for such abuse in many European countries, is less common today. Most treatment now takes place on an outpatient basis. About 53 per cent of the outpatient treatment clients are treated for the abuse of opiates and the rest are treated for the abuse of other drugs, in particular cannabis (22 per cent) and cocaine (16 per cent). The number of people seeking treatment for the abuse of drugs, in particular opiates, is higher in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe.

Significant quantities of the precursor chemicals required by illicit drug laboratories in Afghanistan—where they are used in the illicit manufacture of heroin—smuggled through countries in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe. The Board encourages Member States to increase cooperation in order to counter illicit drug production and trafficking in Afghanistan, including by strengthening the monitoring of international trade in precursor chemicals.

Oceania

Cannabis continues to be illicitly cultivated in Oceania and is widely abused throughout the subregion. Abuse of cannabis is reported to be particularly high in Australia, Micronesia (Federated States of), New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.

A recent increase in drug trafficking from Canada to Australia has been noted. China is still the main source for methamphetamine in New Zealand, but trafficking in that substance from Canada has recently increased.

Illicit substances including cannabis, cocaine, heroin and precursor chemicals were seized in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu during 2007, confirming concerns that countries in Oceania other than Australia and New Zealand are also vulnerable to drug trafficking.

In Australia seizures of cocaine and also of amphetamine-type stimulants significantly increased in the period 2006-2007, compared to 2005-2006. Seizures of substances not under international control continued in Oceania. The primary method for transportation is still the postal system.