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Centennial of the Drugs Control System

INCB WARNS ABOUT NEW CHANNELS OF DIVERSION FOR AMPHETAMINE-TYPE STIMULANTS

Vienna, 19 February (*United Nations Information Service*) – Criminal organizations often pose as fictitious companies to obtain the chemicals they need to manufacture illicit drugs. In its Annual Report released today, the International Narcotics Control Board warns about the new channels of diversion of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, the chemicals used in the manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) such as methamphetamine, amphetamine and MDMA (ecstasy).

According to INCB, traffickers place orders with legitimate trading companies, using falsified authorizations to import pharmaceuticals containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine into developing countries, where controls over chemicals are lax or non-existent. In 2008, African countries imported significant quantities of those substances, quantities that exceeded their yearly medical and scientific requirements. In Ethiopia, for example, criminals used falsified licences to order shipments of pseudoephedrine and ephedrine, totalling 12.5 tons. Numerous suspicious shipments that went to Africa had Mexico as a final destination, where methamphetamine production supplies the large market in the United States.

Since the Government of Mexico has prohibited the import of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, trafficking of those substances appears to have spread south of the Mexican border. The demand for pharmaceuticals containing pseudoephedrine has increased in Belize, El Salvador and Honduras. In Argentina, authorities seized 1.2 tons of ephedrine in 2008. In its Report, INCB urges all Governments to pay close attention to commercial transactions of chemicals, as traffickers keep exploiting the loopholes in international trade to obtain the raw materials needed to supply their drug labs.

Canada has become a primary source of supply of MDMA (ecstasy) found on the illicit market in that country and in the United States. Chemicals are smuggled from China into the country and Canadian-manufactured drugs have been seized in Japan and Australia. In the United States, total seizures of MDMA manufactured in Canada have quadrupled: from 1.1 million doses in 2004 to 5.2 million in 2006.

In 2008, INCB supported international initiatives targeting trafficking of ATS precursor chemicals that led to the seizure of a total of 37.1 tons of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, therefore preventing a potential manufacture of over 23 tons of methamphetamine from reaching the streets.

INCB notes that abuse of ATS is worsening in several regions of the world. In many countries on the Arabian Peninsula, abuse of ATS is on the rise. Abuse of counterfeit “Captagon” tablets containing mostly amphetamine is particularly widespread. Seizures of ATS have risen sharply in Saudi Arabia indicating a possible surge in its abuse.

The 2008 INCB Annual Report examines the manufacturing and abuse of ATS and other drugs, specifically by region and issues recommendations to countries on how to address the drug problem.