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A HUNDRED YEARS OF DRUG CONTROL, MAJOR LANDMARK IN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

VIENNA, 24 February (United Nations Information Service)—The year 2009 marked a century of multi-lateral drug control efforts which started when the International Opium Commission was convened in Shanghai, China, in February 1909. At that time, drugs were unregulated and widely abused and the city of Shanghai was the main importation point of opium into China.

Since 1909, international drug control has evolved considerably. A series of multilateral drug control agreements were concluded, leading to the adoption of the three international drug control treaties that are the current framework for action in international drug control today. These treaties continue to enjoy the overwhelming support of the international community: more than 90 per cent of States, covering 99 per cent of the world's population, have agreed to be bound by their provisions.

To pay tribute to the achievements in international drug control, a special section of the Annual Report of the International Narcotics Control Board is devoted to the commemoration of the convening of the International Opium Commission, which was held on 26 and 27 February 2009 in Shanghai, China.

At this landmark event, Professor Hamid Ghodse, then INCB President, recalled the spirit of the original Shanghai Conference, which met when the opium trade was very lucrative, generating millions of dollars in revenues. "The International Opium Commission took the daring step of putting public health issues above commercial interests and decided to call for a global effort to regulate drugs in order to protect the health of the people," the INCB President said at the opening ceremony of the commemoration.

The statement, which is reflected in its entirety in the annual report, also highlights the challenges the international community faces such as the under-utilization of narcotic drugs for medical purposes. Access to controlled medicines, which is considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) a human right, is virtually non-existent in over 150 countries. According to a WHO estimate, between 30 million and 86 million patients suffer from untreated pain. These challenges are important, the President said, adding that "Governments and the international community as a whole have to find a way to tackle them, bearing in mind the principles of shared responsibility, the sovereignty of nations, the territorial integrity of States and the need to address the world drug problem in a balanced and integrated manner."

The 2009 Shanghai Declaration, which was adopted at the commemorative event, urges Governments to fully implement the international drug control treaties.