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DESIGNER DRUGS ESCALATING OUT OF CONTROL, MAJOR EFFORTS REQUIRED TO COUNTER THE PROBLEM, SAYS INCB

The rapid development of new designer drugs which are produced to bypass existing control systems is highlighted in the INCB's Annual Report launched today.

These drugs of abuse are often manufactured by slightly modifying the molecular structure of controlled substances, resulting in a new substance with similar effects which can circumvent national and international control measures. Detailed instructions for the manufacture of designer drugs are often shared via the Internet.

“Given the health risks posed by the abuse of designer drugs, we urge Governments to adopt national control measures to prevent the manufacture, trafficking in and abuse of these substances,” says Hamid Ghodse, President of the Board.

To address the problem of designers quickly changing a single component of a drug to avoid legal control, some Governments have adopted measures to control entire groups of structurally related synthetic compounds.

INCB cites the designer drug 4-methyl-methcathinone, known as “mephedrone”, as having been abused in a growing number of countries and regions. With effects similar to cocaine, amphetamine and MDMA (“ecstasy”), the substance has resulted in a number of deaths. First noted in 2007 in the United Kingdom, mephedrone has now become a problem drug of abuse in Europe, North America, South-East Asia and Oceania (in Australia and New Zealand).

Mephedrone is available through the Internet and also through retail outlets known as “smart shops”, sometimes advertised as bath salt, plant food or research chemical to avoid detection and legal proceedings. Organized crime groups are involved in the trafficking and distribution of mephedrone.

Mephedrone is one example of a large number of designer drugs that are being abused. In Europe alone there are 15 other “designer cathinones” that are currently being monitored by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and in Japan 51 drugs have been recently placed under control. As with mephedrone, the abuse of new substances can spread quickly within and across regions.

INCB calls on Governments to remain vigilant in monitoring trends in drug abuse and in identifying new substances of abuse. Bilateral and international cooperation is essential in sharing information on this cross-border phenomenon. In the interests of public health, Governments should place these substances under national control, in order to be able to prosecute the individuals involved in their manufacture and distribution. Where possible, the Board recommends that Governments consider generic scheduling to control entire groups of such substances.