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EMBARGO:

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SHARED RESPONSIBILITY—KEY TO EFFECTIVE DRUG CONTROL

INCB calls for renewing the spirit of shared responsibility in preventing the suffering caused by inadequate access to medicines, drug abuse, drug trafficking and illicit drug production

Shared responsibility is integral to international drug control efforts and is the key theme of the Annual Report for 2012 of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). As INCB President, Raymond Yans, stresses, “Shared responsibility is essential to the global efforts to prevent and reduce the suffering and loss of potential caused by drug abuse, and to reduce the negative impacts, such as crime, violence and corruption, associated with illicit drug markets.”

International cooperation in drug control is based upon the principle of shared responsibility: “it represents a mutual commitment of nations to common goals, and a commitment to complementary policy and joint action, within the framework of the international drug control conventions”, noted the President of INCB. Shared responsibility in the control of international trade in controlled medicines is essential if “people are to have access to medicines for the relief of pain and for the treatment of illness, including mental and other disorders, and if illicit distribution and abuse of these medicines is to be avoided”.

The Report tracks the historical development of the idea of shared responsibility and how it evolved as a principle of international law in the context of drug control from 1912, with the adoption of the 1912 International Opium Convention of The Hague all the way through to the three treaties that today make up the international drug control system.

The INCB Report makes a number of recommendations to Governments and the international community to further efforts in drug control in the context of shared responsibility. These recommendations give due attention to the need for a delicate balance between supply and demand reduction measures, and highlight the importance of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation measures in reducing illicit demand for drugs.

“Shared responsibility in drug control can only be effective when States fully meet their obligations at the national level,” as stressed by the President of INCB. Key to the effectiveness of national drug control is the sustainable capacity of the national regulatory authorities for the control of licit medicines/drugs. The Board, therefore, urges Governments to commit the necessary resources to maintain the capacity of their authorities and urges the international and donor communities to, as appropriate, help deliver technical assistance and support to strengthening the capacity of national competent authorities to ensure adequate availability and rational use of medicines yet prevent their diversion and abuse.



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Unprecedented proliferation and abuse of new psychoactive substances poses a grave risk to public health—INCB calls for decisive action by Governments

New psychoactive substances continue to constitute a growing threat to public health, as evidenced by increased emergency room admissions and calls to poison centres. Often called “designer drugs”, “legal highs” or “herbal highs”, these substances are not under international control but have similar psychoactive effects to controlled drugs. They can also include substances that are not necessarily “new”, but which are increasingly being abused.

The INCB Annual Report for 2012 addresses this issue as a special topic, and outlines the scope of this public health and drug control challenge. In recent years, there has been an unprecedented surge in the abuse of new psychoactive substances. For example, in Europe, the number of notifications of new psychoactive substances of abuse increased from an average of five per year between 2000 and 2005, to almost ten times that number in 2011, representing a new substance being notified almost every week. The total number of such substances on the market has been estimated to be in the order of thousands, posing a significant challenge to public health systems in preventing and dealing with their abuse.

To address this rapidly evolving challenge, Governments have been increasingly adopting various measures to limit the availability of these substances, including by establishing early warning systems, by tightening controls on retailers, by making use of food and medicine safety legislation to remove them from circulation and by resorting to emergency and temporary control measures.

The exchange of information between national Governments, as well as between different institutions at the national level, about new psychoactive substances is crucial, given the globalization of trade and the ease with which these substances are marketed and sold over the Internet. Primary prevention and education remain the key tools in ensuring that people are aware of the potential risks of new psychoactive substances and in deterring the abuse of these substances.

In its Annual Report, INCB encourages Governments to establish mechanisms to monitor the emergence of new psychoactive substances on illicit markets, including through early warning systems, and urges concerted action by States to prevent the manufacture, trafficking and abuse of these substances.

Abuse of prescription drugs: a serious health and social threat in many countries; major efforts required to guarantee availability and rational use of controlled medicines.

More action is needed to promote adequate availability and rational use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances that are used in the treatment of pain and illnesses such as epilepsy or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, as well as mental and other diseases, according to the INCB Annual Report for 2012.



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The principal objective of the international drug control system is to ensure the availability of drugs for the treatment of pain and illness as well as for scientific purposes, yet at the same time prevent their diversion to trafficking and abuse. The INCB Annual Report gives an update on the status of efforts to ensure access to controlled medicines.

Of particular concern is the unabated increase in a number of countries in the already high levels of consumption and abuse of pharmaceutical preparations containing methylphenidate and other substances, used for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The report lists a number of recommendations aimed at addressing the problem, including education of health professionals, tighter controls on storage and distribution, and awareness-raising of the public about the health risks associated with abuse of such substances.

The abuse of prescription drugs has continued to spread in all regions of the world and has increased substantially in recent years in North America, South and South-East Asia, as well as some countries in Europe and South America, representing a serious health and social challenge. The abuse of prescription drugs by injection, increasing the risk of HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C infection, is apparent in many countries, particularly in South Asia. More than 6 per cent of secondary school students abused tranquilizers in some South American countries, while the problem of abuse of tranquilizers and sedatives is also seen in other regions and countries.

Abuse of medicines containing narcotic drugs has developed into a major threat to public health in North America and may, according to the Board, be caused partly by widespread availability of such medicines due to unethical practices, including poor prescribing practices. The INCB Annual Report presents a number of steps that Governments can take to address the problem while the Board has called upon Governments to develop effective prevention strategies including through promoting rational use of medicines.

Another major challenge in some countries is associated with medical cannabis schemes, which are permitted by international law under specific conditions set forth in the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. If not adequately regulated, such schemes may contribute to increasing levels of cannabis abuse, i.e. of use for non-medical and non-scientific purposes. INCB elaborates upon this issue in its report.

International community must be proactive in order to counter the diversion of and trafficking in precursor chemicals.

Chemical trafficking organizations have become more resourceful and increasingly adaptive in the ways that they obtain the precursors they need. In order to circumvent effective international precursor controls, traffickers are now more likely to use new or specially designed non-scheduled substances, and/or shift illicit manufacture of drugs of abuse to regions with weaker domestic regulatory and law enforcement capacity.

The INCB Annual Report on Precursors, launched together with the INCB Annual Report for 2012, identifies the gaps that currently exist in the international framework for precursors control. The report shows that new chemicals with little or no legitimate commercial use, such as alpha-phenylacetoacetonitrile (APAAN), are now being obtained throughout Europe and North America



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in large quantities by traffickers in order to illicitly manufacture highly addictive amphetamines. This development follows a similar spread, in North and Central America, of seizures of derivatives of phenylacetic acid, identified by the Board in its 2010 and 2011 reports.

INCB also continues to be concerned about the diversion of large quantities of preparations containing ephedrine for the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine in Asia. Furthermore, the diversion of acetic anhydride from domestic distribution channels which is subsequently smuggled across national borders and into Afghanistan remains the most common method of obtaining that chemical for heroin manufacture. Domestic diversion of potassium permanganate as well as its illicit manufacture for use in the illicit production of cocaine continues in South America.

These problems underline the critical importance of well-functioning domestic controls to ensure the effectiveness of the international system for monitoring trade and preventing the diversion of precursor chemicals. Countries that do not have basic control systems in place may be unable to fulfil their obligations under the 1988 Convention and they and their neighbours are more likely to become targets of organized crime.

Flexible solutions for Governments have already proven effective with the development of the INCB Pre-Export Notification Online (PEN Online) system—the stalwart of the international precursor system for monitoring legitimate trade—in operation since 2006. In March 2012, INCB launched the new Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS). Competent authorities from across the globe can securely share valuable intelligence on chemical trafficking in real-time and more quickly initiate bilateral investigations. PICS together with the PEN Online system and international cooperative activities, such as Project Prism and Project Cohesion, are the most effective tools available to Governments to substantially enhance their precursor control efforts.