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STATEMENT BY MR. RAYMOND YANS, PRESIDENT, INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD

**Special event of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
Launch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime World Drug Report,
on the occasion of the
International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking
Vienna, 26 June 2013**

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, which we observe today, is an occasion for all – the public, civil society, national authorities and regional and international organizations - to reflect upon the drug situation and the suffering of those affected by drug abuse and drug trafficking, and to look at what must be done. It is therefore opportune that the Commission is convened today for this special event, to consider further action to address the global drug situation, also in the context of the preparations underway for the high-level review of the implementation of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action.

Allow me to congratulate Mr. Yuri Fedotov, and UNODC as a whole, on the launch of the World Drug Report 2013. As the main United Nations agency mandated to provide technical assistance in the area of drug control, UNODC has taken the initiative of publishing the World Drug Report on an annual basis. The report has become a valuable reference tool in the analysis of national, regional and global trends in drug abuse and in illicit drug cultivation, manufacture and trafficking. It complements the work being done by INCB, in particular our annual report, which focuses on the functioning of the international drug control system as a whole, including availability of medicines for medical and scientific purposes.

We face a difficult time in drug control and new challenges are before us. Yet this is not a unique situation. In the past hundred years or so, the world has seen significant drug control challenges – think of the opium dens of the early 1900s or the widespread use of “patent medicines” containing cocaine, etc. The international drug

control system has been effective in addressing many drug-related challenges, and provides the road map for the future, built upon the framework of the three international drug control conventions.

Regarding the drug policy debate ongoing globally, but particularly in the Western Hemisphere, we welcome such discussions that bring the drug control issue to the fore, and which are with a view to reducing suffering associated with drug abuse and illicit drug activity. Yet, such discussions should be within the framework of the drug control conventions; the member states of the Organization of American States reaffirmed the central role of the treaties in the Declaration they adopted earlier this month in Guatemala, just as all United Nations Member States did at the General Assembly in 2009, and as did this Commission last March.

The conventions, developed by and universally agreed upon among Member States, have the primary objective of safeguarding public health and welfare, by ensuring availability of controlled medicines used in the treatment of pain and illness and in preventing the diversion of these controlled substances to abuse and illicit channels, as well as to prevent illicit cultivation, manufacture, trafficking and abuse.

We have taken note of some initiatives to normalize and regulate the consumption of drugs for non-medical use, in other words, “recreational” use. Any such step would be in grave contravention of the drug control conventions and would have negative, far-reaching consequences for the functioning of the entire drug control system. It needs to be emphasized, and we need to remind ourselves, that there is mounting scientific research and evidence about the negative impact on the health of individuals of occasional and regular non-medical use of cannabis, the legalization of which some countries (such as Uruguay) are however considering, as well as two states of the United States.

The conventions are based upon the principle of shared responsibility and require a balance between supply reduction and demand reduction measures. Indeed, the key to tackling the drug control issue is to prevent the first use of drugs, to ensure early intervention in cases of abuse, and to rehabilitate those already dependent on drugs. It is essential that Governments are fully equipped in this regard.

This requires Governments to possess well-functioning regulatory systems, and well-resourced and trained competent national authorities and health professionals. Unfortunately, INCB sees more and more that the capacity in many countries, as well as the capacity to provide technical assistance in these areas, has not kept pace with needs. It is imperative that this aspect of drug control and drug abuse prevention does not continue to be neglected if spiralling abuse of prescription drugs, for example, is to be tackled.

INCB only last week conducted a training workshop for the national authorities of 12 West African countries to attend to these needs. INCB has also been working with UNODC to develop a programme of technical assistance for national authorities. We look to all States to support INCB and UNODC to enable all Governments to establish

the required capacity to ensure adequate availability and appropriate use of medicines, whilst preventing diversion and abuse in order to comply with their related treaty obligations.

INCB remains concerned about the continuing large scale illicit cultivation of opium poppy in Afghanistan. INCB is committed to ongoing dialogue with the Government of Afghanistan as it seeks to bring its country back into conformity with the conventions, and we call for the continued support of the international community in providing technical and financial assistance to the Government to this end.

In closing, drug control is a complex and multidisciplinary issue, but ultimately it is about health – preventing and treating drug abuse, and ensuring availability of controlled medicines for treatment of pain and illness. Whatever statistics might indicate about possible global stabilization of levels of abuse of controlled substances, this should be no grounds for complacency. Levels of abuse are still high and result in unnecessary suffering and loss of potential, of individuals, their families, communities and society as a whole. On this international day, I urge you, in your official and private capacities, to do your utmost to prevent and reduce drug abuse and related suffering.

Thank you.
