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**STATEMENT BY DR. LOCHAN NAIDOO,
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**Economic and Social Council High Level Panel discussion:
“Sustainable Development and the World Drug Problem:
Challenges and Opportunities”
15 July 2014, New York**

Mr. President, Mr. Vice-President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address you this morning on the critical issue of sustainable development and the world drug problem, and I congratulate the President and Bureau of ECOSOC on their initiative in convening this high-level panel discussion. It is also timely, given the conclusion just last week of the second meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development held under the auspices of this Council.

Consideration of sustainable development and the global drug problem by the Council, and within other fora, is critical as we move towards the post-2015 development agenda and the 2016 special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem. These processes aside, however, let me state at the outset that addressing this issue is not optional. Without addressing health issues, including drug abuse and addiction, and illicit drug cultivation, production and trafficking, our societies and communities will not be able to develop sustainably. The future of society lies among our youth, whose potential we cannot afford to lose to drug abuse and drug-related problems. At a time when almost every country suffers from one form or another of drug abuse, illicit cultivation, production, trafficking or drug-related corruption and violence, sustainable development cannot be achieved without acknowledging the links between drug issues and social and economic development. Similarly, drug problems cannot be dealt with in isolation, without addressing other global concerns like social justice, health, economic development, corruption, organized crime and human rights. In an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, we must exercise our shared responsibility in addressing the interactions between illicit drug supply and demand.

The three international drug control conventions, whose implementation INCB is mandated to monitor and promote, are founded upon this principle of shared responsibility and form a road map, so to speak, that States Parties have set out to follow towards addressing the drug problem. The objective of the international drug control system is two-fold – to ensure availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific use while preventing their diversion to illicit channels, trafficking and abuse. Target 8.E of the Millennium Development Goals is to, in cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries. However, as mentioned by some

reviews of its implementation¹, this is the only data series for which no data has been reported to the MDG database and one with a target that is difficult to operationalize. Yet, difficulties in setting a target and tracking its progress should not prevent the international community from working together on this matter.

INCB has repeatedly drawn attention to the importance of ensuring availability of internationally controlled drugs for medical purposes, and just last week I addressed this issue at a high-level meeting of the General Assembly to review progress in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases. INCB is committed to supporting Governments in their efforts to improve the functioning of their regulatory systems with a view to improving accessibility and availability of these important drugs for the treatment of pain and mental and neurological disorders. In considering the drug “problem” as a whole, we must not forget the untold suffering and pain that is prevented through the appropriate medical use of many drugs that are under international control. At the same time, some have argued that international control of these substances can limit their availability for medical use. To the contrary, the conventions set out the minimum requirements for the control of these medicines, and provide a mechanism of estimates and assessments of national requirements. The system is based upon the objective of balancing global supply of opiate raw materials and demand for medicines containing these materials. It is up to Governments to ensure that they have effective national systems in place for sourcing and distributing medicines to those in need. This includes sound regulatory systems and well-trained health professionals. By ensuring access to these essential medicines, untold suffering and pain can be avoided, which can in turn lead to improved productivity and contribute to development.

While the international response to the world drug problem is already geared towards an integrated and balanced approach to reducing illicit drug supply and demand, the ongoing debate on the response of the global community to the world drug problem is contributing to focusing attention on essential aspects such as treatment, prevention, human rights and more generally, the dignity of the individual. These concepts, which are often seen as an alternative to law enforcement, are most obviously associated with the realm of drug demand reduction, but they also have their rightful place in supply reduction efforts.

Indeed, illicit cultivation of the crops from which plant-based drugs are produced relies on agricultural input of a significant scale, and thus tends to be inextricably intertwined with socio-economic factors such as poverty, lack of alternative livelihoods, limited access to educational opportunities, disenfranchisement and weak governance. Moreover, while illicit cultivation can serve to exacerbate these problems, it frequently is itself a consequence of, or at least facilitated by, these circumstances and should therefore not be seen exclusively as the root problem. Rather, the supply of plant-based drugs needs to be placed in the broader context of sustainable development.

The current trend is to redefine the concept of alternative development and to broaden the scope of the international efforts in this area beyond alternative crops to recognise and address the underlying socio-economic aspects. The upcoming special session of the General Assembly is an opportunity for the international community to harness this trend and to steer the current groundswell in favour of revisiting the international response to the world drug problem in order to appropriately synchronize this response with the efforts to achieve sustainable development.

¹*Statistics and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda*, UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, July 2013

INCB has drawn attention over the years to the benefits of sustainable development, including alternative livelihoods, and advocates a truly comprehensive approach, one that provides not only for viable economic alternatives but also transport and infrastructure development, education, health care, security, stability and good governance. In general, alternative development efforts have evolved from straightforward crop substitution to promoting rural development in general and providing sustainable legitimate livelihoods for those who had been growing illicit drug crops. However, the concept of alternative development needs to be expanded even further, beyond the rural communities that cultivate illicit crops. A much broader application of alternative development or alternative livelihoods in both rural and urban societies will reap greater dividends than if it is practised in either of those societies alone because of the symbiotic nature of the relationship between supply and demand.

Poverty, despair and lack of prospects are among some of the factors contributing to some people becoming involved in drug abuse and other drug-related activity, such as illicit cultivation or trafficking. The provision of mental health services and abuse prevention, treatment and aftercare services is an important component of alternative development efforts, particularly as some farmers and workers involved in cultivation may also be users. Some would even be remunerated with the drug itself. Indeed, an increase in drug abuse is often seen along major drug trafficking routes and near major drug-producing areas. Those involved in distribution of drugs at the street level are themselves often suffering from addiction, requiring access to prevention, education and treatment programmes. Therefore, demand reduction and HIV/AIDS prevention programmes should be integrated into alternative development programmes whenever possible.

Alternative development programmes also have a critical role to play in preventing and reducing the environmental impact of illicit drug cultivation and manufacture. Illicit cultivation of drug crops can reduce the amount of arable land available for food crops, or impact upon biodiversity or deforestation. The chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs can also cause untold environmental damage.

Alternative development programmes must be integrated with law enforcement and drug abuse prevention and treatment activities. There can never be a “quick fix” solution: these efforts will only be viable if conceived and implemented as part of a comprehensive and sustained national development programme aimed at raising the economic and social well-being of the entire population, and including not only the cultivation of alternative crops, but also the development of infrastructure, the provision of a viable means of transporting legal products to markets and the provision of education and health care services. Given the vicious cycle that can often occur between illicit drug cultivation, manufacture and trafficking and drug-related violence and corruption, it is essential that alternative livelihood programmes are initiated in a context of strengthening of governance and stability. Investments in social cohesion also have a critical role to play in contributing to the sustainability of alternative development initiatives. I praise the work being done by civil society, especially at the grass-roots level, towards building social cohesion and preventing and treating drug abuse.

Sustainable and equitable development can be facilitated by an effective international drug control system characterized by, *inter alia*, public health and the rule of law. The effectiveness of the international drug control system depends upon States’ implementation of the three drug control conventions that they themselves have developed and entered into out

of concern for the health and welfare of mankind. At a time when some are arguing towards alternative approaches to the drug problem, such as legalization for non-medical use, I would like to recall that the conventions provide for a balance between demand reduction and supply reduction, and provide a significant amount of flexibility to States in their implementation. For instance, the conventions provide for flexibility in terms of sanctions for drug-related offences, including the provision of treatment as an alternative to incarceration. While the conventions do not preclude States from adopting measures more strict or severe than those set out in the conventions, INCB has repeatedly encouraged Governments to apply the principle of proportionality. Just months ago, INCB encouraged States to consider abolishing the death penalty for drug-related offences.

As we move towards the post-2015 development agenda, it is time to focus on policies that adopt a multidimensional approach, and to foster a spirit of common and shared responsibility in advancing global and regional partnerships for addressing the drug problem in the context of sustainable development. An integrated and comprehensive approach based on a common and shared responsibility is therefore of critical importance to our discussion on the post-2015 development agenda. The drug problem is in essence a health problem, and we can have no sustainable development without health. I focused today on drugs and health – availability of essential medicines, prevention and treatment of drug abuse, and improving overall health and well-being through addressing illicit drug cultivation, production and trafficking. We have much work ahead of us and the stakes are high – our global society depends on the health and potential of our youth.

Mr. President, in closing let me again thank you and the Council for the opportunity to participate and say that I look forward to our discussion and that I'm at your disposal, Mr. President, to comment and contribute further as the discussion unfolds this morning.

Thank you.