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**Statement by Mr. Werner Sipp, President,  
International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)**

**Special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem**

**Side event on:**

**Addressing global disparities in access to controlled substances for medical purposes,  
with focus on treatment and pain relief, while preventing diversion and misuse**

**20 April 2016, 13.30 – 14.30 hrs.**

**CR 4**

Minister/s, Chair, ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to participate in this side event on behalf of the INCB. The topic we are discussing here is central to the architecture of the international drug control framework as outlined in the drug conventions.

**Indispensable and adequately available and not unduly restricted.**

These words used in the Conventions describe the fundamental principles that countries should apply to ensure the availability of internationally controlled drugs for medical and scientific purposes.

The Conventions express the primary interest of the international community in protecting the health and welfare of humankind by making these indispensable substances available for medical and scientific purposes while ensuring that there is no diversion or abuse.

The importance of making these substances available for those who need them is also highlighted in international human rights instruments and in a series of resolutions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the World Health Assembly and regional intergovernmental organizations.

After several decades since the entry into force of the Conventions, the essential objective of ensuring adequate access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes is far from being achieved globally.

INCB estimates that 92 per cent of morphine is consumed in countries in which only 17 per cent of the world population lives. At the same time, three-quarters of the world population, predominantly in lower-income countries, is left with limited or no access to proper pain relief. Looking at the prevalence of health conditions requiring palliative care, it becomes apparent that these widespread conditions are often not matched by an adequate opioid treatment and palliative care infrastructure.

Insufficient or inadequate access to psychotropic substances seems to be particularly pronounced in low- and middle-income countries, where it is estimated that about four out of five people who need treatment for mental, neurological or substance abuse disorders do not receive such treatment.

What are the reasons for this inadequate and unsatisfactory situation?

A comparison of data from the INCB surveys reveals that fear of addiction and onerous regulations, as reported impediments to access, have declined considerably since 1995.

Access is determined not only by physical availability and practical accessibility, but also by affordability; several countries referred to limited resources and high costs as issues.

Inadequate estimates submitted by States which do not reflect actual needs, burdensome regulatory requirements, including harsh penalties for unintentional violations, and delays in the supply chain can also cause limited availability.

However, the impediments to availability most frequently identified by Member States were lack of training/awareness among health care professionals, fear of addiction, limited financial resources, problems in sourcing, cultural attitudes and fear of diversion. More and more Governments highlighted the importance of addressing the training of health care professionals to overcome the problem.

Against this background, the Board recommends that Governments take firm action as follows:

- Review and streamline **national legislation and regulatory systems**.
- Strengthen **health care infrastructure** for dispensing medications and improving access.
- Ensure that opioid analgesics are **affordable** by ensuring that medications are covered by health insurance schemes and that they are available locally at affordable prices.
- Ensure that **health care professionals** are capable of prescribing and administering controlled medicines in a rational manner.
- Provide **education and raise awareness** in order to reduce resistance to the use of opioid analgesics and associated stigma and ensure access.
- Improve the way in which they **estimate** their needs and requirements, and be more accurate in reporting to the Board.
- Establish **benchmarks** for consumption of psychotropic substances.

Many governments are not in a position to implement the above recommendations. They need advice, training and resources to address the constraints they face. . For this reason, there is a role for the international community. The outcome document, to be adopted by the Special Session, devotes several paragraphs to the need to ensure availability. It is the hope of the INCB that the commitment expressed in the document will translate into concrete action on the ground.

Thank you.