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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

**19 to 21 April 2016, 15.00 – 18.00 hrs.
CR 4**

Round table 1: Demand reduction and related measures, including prevention and treatment, as well as health-related issues; and ensuring the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their diversion (“drugs and health”).

Honourable Chair, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to address this round table organized in the context of the General Assembly special session on the world drug problem. I would like, on behalf of INCB, to provide the Board’s view on the second part of this topic: Ensuring the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their diversion.

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.

Several decades after the entry into force of the Conventions, the essential objective of ensuring adequate access to controlled substances for medical purposes has still not been achieved.

The situation is extensively described in the background paper for this round table.

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.

Over the years, INCB has pointed out to Member States the importance of this significant aspect of the international drug control system. We also tried to find out the reasons for this situation and we formulated recommendations for improvement.

What are the reasons for this inadequate and unsatisfactory situation?

A comparison with data from previous INCB surveys reveals that fear of addiction and onerous regulations have declined considerably as obstacles to access 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 major impediments to access.

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 are also reported as causes for limited availability.

It remains that the impediments to availability most frequently identified by Member States include a lack of training/awareness among health care professionals, fear of addiction, limited material resources, problems in sourcing, cultural attitudes and fear of diversion. While the importance that Member States afford to the training of health care professionals has increased, it has not increased enough. Training for health care professionals and national regulatory authorities remains a priority and an area in much need of further development.

Against this background, the Board recommends that Governments take firm action in the following areas:

- Reviewing and streamlining **national legislation** and regulatory systems
- Strengthening **health care infrastructure** for dispensing medications and improving access
- Ensuring that opioid analgesics and psychotropic substances are **affordable by ensuring that needed medications are covered by health insurance schemes and that they are made available locally at affordable prices**
- Ensuring that health care professionals are **capable** of prescribing and administering controlled medicines in a rational manner
- Providing education and **raising awareness** in order to reduce resistance to the use of opioid analgesics and associated stigma and ensure access
- Improving the way in which States **estimate** their needs and requirements, and being more accurate in reporting to the Board
- Establishing **benchmarks** for consumption of psychotropic substances.

Many governments are not in a position to implement the above recommendations on their own. They need advice, training and resources to address the limitations of their systems. 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.