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**Statement by Mr. Cornelis P. de Joncheere, President,
International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)
Economic and Social Council Management Segment
Item 19(d) Narcotic Drugs**

3 June 2020

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

I am pleased to present to you the INCB 2019 reports with our findings and recommendations to Governments. You should have received electronic copies of the reports, which are also [available on the INCB website in the six UN languages](#).

Today, we face an increasingly complex world drug problem and amid the COVID-19 pandemic, it is especially important to ensure continued access to controlled medicines for all COVID-19 related medical needs and for ongoing medical needs such as those related to pain management, palliative care, mental and neurological conditions, and medicine-assisted substitution therapies.

The aim of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances is to ensure the availability of these substances for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their diversion and abuse. INCB's two annual technical publications review the functioning of the international system of estimates, assessments, and statistical returns, based on information reported to INCB by national authorities.

The Precursors Report calls on the international community to engage in a policy discussion on options to prevent the proliferation of non-scheduled chemicals, including designer precursors, from reaching illicit drug manufacturing laboratories.

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[Chapter I](#) of the [2019 INCB Annual Report](#) contains a thematic discussion on “improving substance use prevention and treatment services for young people” where we raise awareness on reducing the adverse public health and social consequences of drug abuse. We urge Governments to develop effective strategies for the prevention of drug use and provision of treatment, rehabilitation, aftercare and social reintegration services that focus on the physical, emotional and social impact that psychoactive drugs have on young people between the ages of 15-24 years. INCB also urges governments to improve services using evidence-based prevention and treatment interventions for young people.

The importance of protecting children from drug use and dependence is embodied in article 33 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in which States parties agreed to “take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances”.

[Chapter II](#) covers INCB's work to ensure the functioning of the international system for licit trade in controlled substances, which has continued to operate throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

INCB again urges Governments to scale up the rate of adoption of its electronic International Import and Export Authorization System ([I2ES](#)), which has become a critical tool in facilitating trade in controlled substances during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We also report on INCB Learning, an initiative the Board has been pursuing in response to General Assembly and Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolutions. INCB Learning has deployed e-learning modules to support Governments in estimating and assessing their needs for internationally controlled substances in both English and Spanish. As of 13 May 2020, 723 officials of competent national authorities of 93 countries and territories have enrolled in the e-learning modules, with a massive uptake in enrolment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

INCB remains concerned about the legislative developments in a small number of countries permitting the use of cannabis for "recreational" use, and in our report, we clearly state that these developments are contrary to the commitments those countries made with their contracting partners when agreeing to be bound by the drug control treaties. We urge those countries, with whom we remain engaged in active dialogue in order to facilitate their return to meeting their treaty obligations.

Chapter II reflects INCB consultations with the Government of Afghanistan under article 14 bis of the 1961 Convention. In February, the Government of Afghanistan and INCB explored areas where the United Nations entities could assist in addressing the drug control challenges confronting the country, aware of the extraordinary challenges affecting peace and sustainable development faced by the Government and the people of Afghanistan. INCB stresses that efforts to stabilize the country will not be sustainable without effectively tackling the illicit drug economy in Afghanistan.

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[Chapter III](#) of our report covers regional developments and addresses a series of [Global Issues](#) and I will mention three of the nine global issues in the report.

The first global issue deals with linkages between drug control and human rights, where:

- INCB notes its great concern over reports of grave human rights violations purportedly in furtherance of national drug control policies.
- INCB is compelled to remind all States that the primary objective of the international drug control conventions is to safeguard the health and welfare of humanity, which must be understood to include respect for human rights.
- INCB reiterates that, States must adopt and pursue drug control policies in compliance with internationally recognized human rights which, as described in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, are both inherent and inalienable.
- In addressing drug-related criminality, States must continue to apply the principle of proportionality as a guiding principle in determining and applying criminal sanctions.
- The treaties require Governments to give special attention to the possibility of applying alternative measures to conviction, punishment and incarceration for drug-related offenses, in appropriate cases of a minor nature, including education, rehabilitation or social reintegration, as well as, when the offender is affected by a drug disorder, treatment and aftercare.

The global issue on the “linkages between the international drug control conventions and the Sustainable Development Goals” stresses the interconnection of our collective work to implement the treaties with Goal 3, to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. Achieving that Goal entails, inter alia, access to high-quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, high-quality and affordable essential medicines; and strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse.

We also draw attention to the global synthetic **opioid crisis**.

- 53 million people have abused opioids in the past year, especially in North America.
- Globally, it is estimated that 66 per cent of deaths attributed to drug use disorders were related to opioids. Increases in drug-related deaths are in part due to the emergence and abuse of illicitly manufactured fentanyl and fentanyl analogues in North America.¹

INCB encourages Governments to work together with all stakeholders to promote public education about the risks associated with prescription drugs and adopt appropriate measures to decrease their abuse and potential to cause dependence.

Our report also highlights the work started under the Board’s OPIOIDS project, with global intelligence gathering operations, resulting in the growth of the information-exchange through the existing INCB IONICS system and platforms, assisting national authorities in addressing the emergence of new non-medical synthetic drugs

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[Chapter IV](#) of the report outlines 23 recommendations but let me briefly refer to four:

In recommendation 2, INCB again states that the conventions limit the use of controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances exclusively to medical and scientific purposes and that any contrary measures are in breach of State parties treaty obligations. INCB calls on Governments of countries in which the use of cannabis has been permitted for non-medical purposes, nationally or at sub-national levels, to return to compliance with their treaty obligations.

In recommendation 4, INCB calls on States to pursue drug control policies that respect and protect human rights and are consistent with international human rights instruments. Drug abuse and drug-related activities cannot be lawfully addressed without ensuring the protection of human rights.

With recommendation 5, INCB stresses that in addressing drug-related criminality States must apply the principle of proportionality in the determination and application of criminal sanctions, and

In recommendation 7, INCB recalls that State parties to the conventions are required to give special attention to and take all practicable measures for the prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration of persons affected by drug use disorders.

INCB calls on Governments to study the report and give due regard to the implementation of the Board’s recommendations. We stand ready to provide further guidance and support to your Governments in this regard.

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¹ UNODC WDR 2019, booklet 2, page 11, referring to “Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, “Global Burden of Disease Study 2017”, Global Health Data Exchange.”

The 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances gives the Board a set of monitoring and operational tasks and responsibilities in the area of precursors used in the illicit manufacture of drugs.

The [INCB Precursors](#) report addresses the use of non-scheduled chemicals for illicit drug manufacture, including purpose-made designer precursors with no known legitimate uses. The pace at which such chemicals are emerging is a cause of great concern to all of us.

The Precursor's report recommendations include:

- a further call for policy dialogue at the international level to address the challenge posed by the proliferation of non-scheduled chemicals and designer precursors, and to prevent these from reaching illicit drug manufacturing laboratories.
- enhancing the utilization of article 13 of the 1988 Convention to prevent and investigate the diversion of equipment used in illicit drug manufacture on which INCB launched [guidelines](#) for preventing the diversion of such equipment in March.

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

We are grateful for the ongoing cooperation of your Governments.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, INCB has continued to provide support to competent national authorities in the functioning of the system of international trade in controlled substances. Your national authorities are able to exchange import and export authorizations for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances through I2ES and issue pre-export notifications for precursor chemicals through INCB's Pre-Export Notification system – PEN online.

Your support for INCB's treaty-mandated work and initiatives as well as your participation and contributions are critical to treaty implementation and to achieving the health and well-being objectives of the treaties and the sustainable development goals. INCB stands ready to support you and your Governments in this endeavour.

Thank you very much.

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