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**Statement by Mr. Cornelis de Joncheere, President,
International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)**

**Opening of the sixty-third session
of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs**

2 March 2020, Vienna, Austria

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address you today in my capacity as President of the International Narcotics Control Board.

With the adoption of the *Ministerial Declaration*, last year at the sixty-second session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the Members of the Commission reaffirmed their shared commitment to “enhancing [their] efforts to bridge the gaps in addressing the persistent and emerging trends and challenges through the implementation of balanced, integrated, comprehensive, multidisciplinary and scientific evidence-based responses to the world drug problem, placing the safety, health and well-being of all members of society, in particular our youth and children, at the centre of our efforts”. The Ministerial Declaration further reaffirmed the “treaty-mandated roles” of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, World Health Organisation and the International Narcotics Control Board, and importance of cooperation between those bodies with a view to the effective implementation of the three international drug control conventions.

I wish to highlight that the Board in its Annual Report for 2019 dedicated a thematic chapter to improving substance use prevention and treatment services for young people. The Convention of the Rights of the Child, which celebrated its thirtieth anniversary last year, in its article 33 committed Member States to taking measures to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of drugs. As the Board reaffirms in its report, there is a need to ensure that interventions for prevention of substance use and treatment of substance use disorders among youth are implemented in a systematic manner using evidence-based tools, through supporting practitioners and policymakers in developing their knowledge, skills and competencies.

One of the operational recommendations of the UNGASS 2016 Outcome Document concerned the need to respect, protect and promote “all human rights, fundamental freedoms and the inherent dignity of all individuals and the rule of law in the development and implementation of drug policies”. The Board wishes to express, as it has done in its Annual Report, its serious concern with the continued reports of grave human rights violations perpetrated in the name of drug control. In this regard, the Board again in strongest terms wishes to call for an immediate halt to any extrajudicial responses to suspected drug-related criminality or drug use. Let me reiterate that when the drug control measures adopted by States violate internationally recognized human rights standards, they also violate the international drug control conventions.

Although the determination of specific sanctions applicable to drug-related conduct remains the prerogative of States parties to the three international drug control conventions, the

conventions provide the possibility for States parties to develop and implement proportionate measures for drug-related offences, while providing possibilities of subjecting crimes of lesser gravity to alternative measures to conviction, punishment and incarceration, including education, rehabilitation or social reintegration. On the issue of capital punishment for drug-related conduct, the Board also wishes to reiterate its call to all States that retain capital punishment for drug-related offences to consider its abolition on a voluntary basis, reflecting a growing consensus in the international community on this point.

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Recent years have seen developments in some States parties and their territories towards development and adoption of measures aimed at legalising cannabis for non-medical uses in contravention of fundamental provisions of the international drug control conventions. In response to these developments, INCB has reiterated that both the 1961 Single Convention, as amended by the 1972 Protocol, and the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic substances oblige States parties to limit exclusively to medical and scientific purposes the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution of, trade in, use and possession of drugs. This duty is owed not to the Board, but to each of the contracting parties to these two instruments. This fundamental principle, which lies at the core of the international drug control conventions, continues to represent a broad consensus that health and welfare of humanity are best protected through the limitation of use of controlled substances to medical and scientific purposes. Despite measures taken in a handful of States, this broad consensus continues today, and the Board is held to uphold it in the exercise of its quasi-judicial treaty-mandated functions.

The international community also faces other challenges such as the proliferation of non-scheduled chemicals, including “designer precursors” which continue to test the boundaries of national and international regulatory frameworks. The Board analysed this challenge in its 2018 report on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention and during its recent sessions and I invite you to continue the policy discussion initiated in 2019 on options to respond to these challenges and put in place a global framework to address non-scheduled chemicals more effectively. Specifically, the Board has prepared a Conference Room Paper on this issue as a contribution to the normative segment (specifically item 5b) of this session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and I look forward to a substantive dialogue later this week.

In line with CND resolution 62/4, the Board continues to address the multifaceted challenges posed by the non-medical use of synthetic drugs, in particular synthetic opioids, through the collection of data and the dissemination of information and recommendations, including in its latest Annual Report. The world is facing a global opioid imbalance with over-prescription, abuse and addiction in some countries, while in others insufficient supplies of medicines containing controlled substances lead to unnecessary suffering.

Ensuring availability of controlled substances for medical purposes, is one of the main aims of the three international drug control conventions and one of the commitments that the international community undertook under SDG 3, in the UNGASS 2016 outcome document and other policy instruments. There is a continued need for a balanced approach to drug control, whereby national, regional and international efforts need to be mobilised towards ensuring adequate access to the medicines needed for relief of pain and suffering. Although the Board observes that there has been an increase in total global availability, there remain substantial discrepancies among countries and regions due to various obstacles, including, in particular in the area of capacity within national health care systems, attitudes, awareness, professional training and resources.

Another matter of concern is the serious drug control situation in Afghanistan. Despite the reduction in the total area under illicit opium poppy cultivation and in the estimated amount of opium produced in Afghanistan in 2018, the illicit opiate economy of Afghanistan remains so

substantial that it even exceeds the value of the total national licit exports of goods and services. Within the framework of Article 14 *bis* of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the Board at its last session in February this year, held consultations with the Government of Afghanistan with a view of identifying urgent needs in drug control that can be addressed through technical and financial assistance of the competent United Nations organs and its specialized agencies. Some of those identified needs have been reflected in the press release issued by the Board on 10 February.

In conclusion, let me reiterate the continued readiness of the Board to assist you, States parties, in close collaboration with the Commission, UNODC, the WHO and other partners, in addressing these complex interrelated challenges affecting the health and welfare of humanity and having a direct bearing on the implementation of the three international drug control treaties and on the achievement of the SDGs . I wish you a success in your important deliberations and look forward to continued cooperation with all of you.

Thank you.