

Foreword

The Internet has changed the world of communication and information exchange for the better. It provides a valuable means to collect information, to connect with friends, business partners and the world at large, and to sell and buy goods. It has revolutionized communication and trade. For many of us, the Internet has made professional and personal life easier, allowing previously onerous transactions to take place effortlessly and in very little time. As a result, there have been important improvements in the quality of life of people in all countries and, in particular, for people in remote areas for whom it used to be difficult to engage in timely communication and gain access to services.

But the Internet can also be exploited and abused by criminals. Child pornography, the promotion of violence and financial fraud are probably the best-known forms of such abuse; most of us have read or heard about them. Among the numerous other ways in which the Internet can be exploited by unscrupulous criminals is drug trafficking. Drug traffickers use the Internet to establish and maintain their criminal networks and to sell illicit drugs or the chemical precursors used to manufacture such drugs.

Less well known, but no less dangerous, is the misuse of the Internet by illegally operating Internet pharmacies to sell prescription medicines to the general public without the required prescription. Many of the pharmaceuticals trafficked in this way are either diverted from the licit market or counterfeit and, as such, constitute a danger to the health of individual consumers and the public at large. Moreover, the sale of controlled pharmaceuticals outside the legally established framework of bona fide pharmacies constitutes a criminal offence. The online sale of such pharmaceuticals by unscrupulous racketeers is no different from the trafficking in illicit drugs, as it endangers lives just as much as street sales do.

Enforcing the law is important but not enough. Preventive measures need to be taken to stop the further proliferation of illegally operating Internet pharmacies and to reduce their number. The International Narcotics Control Board invites Governments and international organizations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Universal Postal Union, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the World Customs Organization to join it in its efforts to deal with this problem. The Board hopes and expects that such cooperation will better protect the public against the illegal distribution of pharmaceuticals and, in particular, of controlled substances.

As the Internet is a global and dynamic medium, close cooperation between States is important. The need for collaboration was the main reason why the Board developed the present guidelines, which have been elaborated with the support and contribution of national experts and relevant international organizations, Internet service providers, financial services and pharmaceutical associations. The Board hopes that the guidelines will serve as a starting point for the kind of successful international cooperation that will, in the long term, lead to a successful international agreement on the matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hamid Ghodse", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Hamid Ghodse
President
International Narcotics Control Board