

small home laboratories. The principal precursor, ephedrine, is illicitly extracted from the *Ephedra* plant, which grows wild in the area. In recent years there has been increasing evidence of the abuse in central Asia of MDMA that has been smuggled out of Europe.

419. The large-scale smuggling of stimulants from Europe into the Persian Gulf area continues, as evidenced by seizures in transit countries such as Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey; however, information on the actual abuse of those substances in that area, on the origin and composition of the products involved and on the trafficking routes used, remains scarce. As in previous reports, the Board encourages all countries concerned to cooperate in obtaining that information so that the necessary action may be taken by the countries of origin of the products involved, which are being smuggled mainly under the brand name Captagon.

420. In September 1998, a significant quantity (about 70 kg) of amphetamine was seized in Pakistan for the first time.

Missions

421. In April 1999, a mission of the Board visited the Islamic Republic of Iran. The cooperation of the Government with the Board has been excellent.

422. The Board notes that legislative procedures to enable the Islamic Republic of Iran to become a party to the 1971 Convention have recently been completed. The Board therefore trusts that the Islamic Republic of Iran will soon deposit with the Secretary-General its instrument of accession to the 1971 Convention. The Board urges the Government to introduce, as a matter of priority, measures to enable the Islamic Republic of Iran to become a party to the 1972 Protocol amending the 1961 Convention.

423. The Board notes with concern that the situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran with regard to the abuse of drugs, in particular opiates, appears to be deteriorating and that a lack of resources has prevented the authorities from dealing with the problem more effectively, despite the fact that the Government is using confiscated funds derived from drug trafficking for such purposes (see paragraph 401 above). The Board recommends that the assessment of the drug abuse situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran should be finalized and that, on the basis of that assessment, the international community should consider supporting appropriate projects to reduce illicit drug demand.

D. Europe

Major developments

424. The availability of cannabis in Europe has increased considerably. This is partly the result of intensified cannabis cultivation in countries in southern Europe, mainly Albania, and soaring indoor cannabis cultivation in western Europe. The surge in indoor cannabis cultivation has been facilitated by the unrestricted sale of cannabis seeds and cannabis-growing accessories in so-called "hemp shops" and on the Internet. The increasing and, in many cases, uncontrolled availability of cannabis, coupled with a tolerant attitude towards the substance, has led to increases in cannabis abuse. Most European countries have reported that cannabis abuse is flourishing. For example, a study undertaken in Switzerland in 1998 revealed that the prevalence of cannabis abuse among 15-year-old pupils in secondary schools had quadrupled in the previous 12 years. Unless Governments take action against indoor cannabis cultivation, there will continue to be increases in both cannabis abuse and the sale of that substance on the illicit market.

425. Cocaine seizures throughout Europe have increased. Significant seizures of cocaine, amounting to more than 1 ton each, have been made in several countries in western Europe, indicating that the illicit demand for the substance remains high. Although there have been few comprehensive studies on its prevalence, surveys undertaken in secondary schools in western Europe have revealed an upward trend in cocaine abuse, brought about, in part, by lower prices.

426. The abuse of synthetic drugs, in particular amphetamine and amphetamine-type stimulants, has risen. While the abuse of MDMA ("ecstasy") is no longer increasing in those countries in Europe where it had appeared earlier, there has been an upward trend in the abuse of amphetamines in almost all countries in the region. Measures to prevent the abuse of those substances have been difficult to implement since most synthetic drugs are considered fashionable and harmless by young people, who also constitute the largest group of abusers of such substances. The abuse of synthetic drugs is viewed as commonplace by many young people frequenting dance locales, and fatalities resulting from the abuse of synthetic drugs, although still limited, have increased significantly.

427. The Board is satisfied that the number of heroin abusers is declining in most western European countries; however, heroin abuse has become a growing problem in eastern Europe, particularly in countries situated along heroin trafficking routes. Several countries in central and eastern Europe are confronted with increasing problems involving the abuse of and trafficking in all types of drugs.

428. The Board believes that Governments of European countries need to make more efforts to reverse the above-mentioned negative trends, in order to accomplish the objective set by the General Assembly at its twentieth special session, devoted to countering the world drug problem, held in June 1998. In the Political Declaration adopted by the General Assembly at its twentieth special session,³² States committed themselves to achieving significant and measurable results in the field of demand reduction by the year 2008. The Board invites Governments to elaborate national strategies for the implementation of the goals and targets set out in the Political Declaration adopted by the General Assembly at its twentieth special session.

Treaty adherence

429. Since the last report of the Board was published, Andorra has acceded to the 1988 Convention. Of the 44 States in Europe, 41 are parties to the 1961 Convention, 40 are parties to the 1971 Convention and 38 States and the European Community are parties to the 1988 Convention.

430. Albania is the only country in Europe that is still not a party to any of the international drug control treaties, although it is a significant transit point for the smuggling of illicit drugs and is faced with a growing drug abuse problem. While the Albanian authorities have made efforts to remedy the situation through cooperation with other Governments, particularly in law enforcement, structural weaknesses of the legislative and judicial systems have seriously diminished the effectiveness of such efforts. The Board urges the Government of Albania to confirm its political will by acceding to the three main drug control conventions and to undertake the necessary measures to bring its national legislation in conformity with the provisions of those conventions.

431. Albania, Estonia, the Holy See, Liechtenstein, San Marino and Switzerland remain the only States in Europe that have not ratified the 1988 Convention.

Regional cooperation

432. The Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European

Communities and certain related acts entered into force in May 1999, enhancing the ability of European Union institutions to act in areas of drug control where they previously had no formal right or initiative. The Treaty makes possible the implementation of community-wide measures to provide information on and prevent drug abuse. It also reinforces efforts to reduce drug-related problems and provides for strengthened cooperation, *inter alia*, in the area of drug control within the European Union and at the international level.

433. The Board appreciates the fact that many Governments in Europe have stepped up their bilateral and subregional cooperation. In December 1998, the Governments of Hungary and Slovakia signed a protocol on cooperation in the fight against organized crime, terrorism, drug trafficking and other criminal activities. The Governments of Lithuania and the Russian Federation signed in June 1999 a protocol on cooperation against organized crime. In July 1999, the ministers of the interior of the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine agreed on joint efforts to fight drug and arms trafficking, including through the exchange of information, specialists and training methods.

434. In eastern Europe, there have been a large number of bilateral meetings, both formal and informal, to promote joint efforts against illicit drug trafficking. The network of agreements with authorities from the western part of Europe has also expanded.

435. The Board welcomes the positive results of the cooperation with, and assistance from, the European Union such as the Phare multi-country programme for the fight against drugs and the Tacis Programme of the European Union. Those programmes have assisted States in the region in improving their legislative framework and the effectiveness of their efforts to intercept illicit drug consignments.

436. The Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe continues to be active in facilitating both the discussion at the regional level on drug control issues and concerted efforts against the drug problem that involve all European countries.

437. The Board appreciates the efforts of Governments and international agencies to assist the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina and to promote cooperative agreements between the entities of that country, especially in drug law enforcement. The Board also recognizes the continuing cooperation between the Governments of countries in south-eastern Europe and the European Commission, Interpol and UNDCP aimed at the suppression of drug trafficking throughout Europe.

National legislation, policy and action

438. In Europe, various efforts have been made at the regional level to coordinate and strengthen legislation and measures to fight drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking. The Board takes note of the draft Action Plan to Combat Drugs (2000-2004), which was submitted by the European Commission to the European Council and the European Parliament in May 1999. The draft Action Plan, which provides for a multidisciplinary and integrated response to the drug problem, will improve coordination and ensure that the fight against drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking will remain a priority of the European Union.

439. In January 1999, the European Parliament and the European Council adopted a four-year Community action plan on promoting safer use of the Internet by combating illegal and harmful content on global networks. The action plan is aimed at creating a safer environment by establishing a European network of hotlines and by introducing activities to increase awareness. National law enforcement authorities, assisted by Europol, will continue to be in charge of prosecuting and punishing those responsible for such illegal content.

440. The Board notes that, in many European countries, numerous laws and other measures have been introduced to deal with the drug problem. Some noteworthy examples are provided below.

441. The Board welcomes the fact that Governments of countries in eastern Europe have paid increased attention to the link between organized crime and drug trafficking. They have focused on the fight against organized crime and its drug trafficking component. Many of those Governments, such as the Governments of Bulgaria, the Russian Federation and Slovakia, have declared that fighting organized crime and corruption is one of their main priorities.

442. The Board notes with satisfaction the adoption of new, or the strengthening of existing, drug control legislation in Bulgaria, Hungary and Latvia. Changes were also introduced in the criminal codes of those countries. In Ireland, the Criminal Justice Act was enacted in May 1999, introducing a minimum 10-year prison sentence for major drug traffickers.

443. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Poland and Romania have taken action against money-laundering by, *inter alia*, enacting legislation or regulations to deal with the problem. The parliament of Jersey (Channel Islands) passed tougher laws against money-laundering, bringing its legislation in line with current British law. Croatia passed a law removing legal impediments

to undercover operations, the use of controlled delivery and the collection of evidence.

444. The Board welcomes the establishment of the Confiscated Assets Fund in the United Kingdom, which will ensure that assets seized from drug traffickers are channelled back into activities aimed at fighting the drug problem. The Fund will also allow for seized assets to be shared with other Governments if they cooperate in the case. Luxembourg and Spain launched comparable initiatives in previous years. The Board encourages Governments that have not yet done so to undertake similar steps in that direction. The Board invites all Governments to consider following the example of Luxembourg and set aside at least part of such seized assets for international drug control programmes.

445. The Russian Federation and Slovakia have adopted new drug control strategies.

446. The Board notes with appreciation the initiative taken by the Government of Poland to establish a system of information on drug abuse which, when implemented, will be compatible with the drug abuse information system used in the European Union. The Board encourages other Governments to follow suit, since there continues to be a general lack of accurate data to enable the dimensions of drug abuse in eastern Europe to be determined.

447. The Government of the Russian Federation has established an inter-ministerial centre for the coordination of action against illicit drug trafficking. The Board reiterates its recommendation to Romania to establish a mechanism for coordinating its national drug control policy and to adopt legislation on the classification and control of licit narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

448. The Board encourages the authorities of Croatia and Slovakia to accelerate the adoption of legislation on precursors which would tighten the control of chemicals listed in the 1988 Convention.

449. In April 1999, a draft law was approved in Portugal stipulating that drug users will face fines rather than jail sentences. Under the new law, the abuse and possession of drugs for personal use will no longer be criminal offences but only administrative offences. As the Board has stated repeatedly, this is not in line with the international drug control treaties, which require that drug use be limited to medical and scientific purposes and that States parties make drug possession a criminal offence. It should be noted that the exercise of criminal jurisdiction is discretionary and Governments may provide offenders with alternatives to conviction and punishment.

450. The Board is concerned about a ruling of the Supreme Court of Switzerland by which the tribunal overturned a one-year prison sentence for a man convicted of trafficking in MDMA. The line of argument used, namely that MDMA is a “soft drug” the use of which “does not generally lead to criminal behaviour” and that it is mostly used by “socially integrated people”, appears to be contrary to recent efforts by the international community to prevent the spread of trafficking in and abuse of amphetamine-type stimulants. Under Swiss law, serious drug offences carry prison sentences of up to 20 years.

451. The Board regrets that draft laws introduced in Germany and Luxembourg would allow for the establishment of drug injection rooms, also known as “shooting galleries” (see paragraphs 176-177 above).

452. The Board examined the report of the External Panel on the Evaluation of the Swiss Scientific Studies of Medically Prescribed Narcotics to Drug Addicts, which was released in April 1999. One of the key conclusions in the report is that the “Swiss studies were not able to examine whether improvements in health status or social functioning in the individuals treated were causally related to heroin prescription per se or a result of the impact of the overall treatment programme”. It is also stated in the report that the Swiss studies did not provide convincing evidence that, even in cases where methadone treatment has persistently failed, the medical prescription of heroin generally leads to better results than further methadone-based treatment. In view of the conclusions of the External Panel and mindful of the responsibilities accorded to it in the international drug control treaties, the Board remains concerned over the Swiss heroin programme and policy of heroin prescription. The Board does not encourage other Governments to allow heroin to be prescribed to opiate addicts.

Cultivation, production, trafficking and abuse

Narcotic drugs

453. Albania has emerged as an important producer of cannabis, grown on large areas in the south of the country, from where it is smuggled into Greece, Italy, Slovenia and other European countries. In Italy, cannabis seizures increased from 11 tons in 1996 to over 54 tons in 1998. It is estimated that 90 per cent of cannabis herb trafficked in Slovenia is of Albanian origin and enters the country by sea. Impoverished small farmers in Albania have reportedly planted *Cannabis sativa*, at hundreds of sites, and cannabis prices have plummeted.

454. Belarus, Croatia and Lithuania have reported increased illicit cannabis cultivation, while Slovakia and Slovenia have reported a strong increase in trafficking in cannabis herb. In a continuing trend, cannabis is being smuggled into the region mostly in bulk (multi-ton) consignments hidden in containerized cargo.

455. The amount of cannabis grown indoors is increasing and is mostly very potent, having a high THC content. Indoor cannabis cultivation has increased significantly in many parts of Europe and has spread to Scandinavia and eastern Europe. Far from being cultivated “only” to supply personal consumption, indoor cannabis is increasingly being cultivated with the illicit market in mind. The expansion of indoor cannabis cultivation can be attributed partly to the ease with which cannabis seeds and paraphernalia may be obtained on the Internet and partly to the active marketing and advocacy of such cultivation by cannabis abusers and their supporters through the media. There are many Web sites based in European countries, particularly in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, offering to sell and deliver quickly, to almost any destination in the world, potent varieties of cannabis. The Government of the Netherlands has enacted legislation to ban all indoor cultivation of cannabis (“Nederwiet”) because of the increasingly serious dimension of the problem. The Board calls on the Governments of all countries where indoor cannabis cultivation has proliferated and where countermeasures have not yet been taken to urgently consider legislative and other measures to deal with the problem.

456. There are disturbing indications that fields where cannabis with a low THC content is allegedly cultivated for industrial purposes are in fact used for the cultivation of more potent cannabis destined for the illicit market. The Board notes with concern that, according to official reports from Switzerland, the vast majority of sites where hemp is cultivated purportedly for licit purposes are used for the production of cannabis for the illegal drug trade. It is estimated that, in 1998, more than 100 tons of cannabis were harvested in this way in Switzerland, distributed through a nationwide network of so-called “hemp shops” and to other European countries.

457. Morocco remains a major source of cannabis resin seized in Europe, despite the intensified activities of national law enforcement authorities in that country. Colombia has emerged as an important source of the cannabis herb sold on the illicit markets of Europe. Seizure data indicate that other countries, in particular in Africa and central Asia, may soon become major suppliers of cannabis for those markets.

458. The increased availability of cannabis in Europe, coupled with greater tolerance of cannabis abuse, has resulted in an expanded market for the substance. A survey published in April 1999 showed that one third of pupils in secondary schools in France had experimented with cannabis (the figure for Paris was more than 40 per cent) and one half of those that had experimented with cannabis abused it regularly. A similar study undertaken in secondary schools in the United Kingdom revealed that 25 per cent of the 13-year-olds surveyed had taken illegal substances (in most cases, cannabis). A study in Germany found that 69 per cent of juveniles participating in techno parties had taken cannabis.

459. It was the consensus of the international community to put cannabis, as well as other substances, under international control; that decision was based on evidence of its harmfulness to human health and its dependence potential. Cannabis abuse should by no means be treated as harmless or even inevitable. Governments must continue to emphasize the dangers of cannabis abuse in the context of activities aimed at reducing illicit drug demand and must not allow permissive attitudes towards cannabis abuse to develop, particularly at a time when increasingly potent cannabis, having a high THC content, is appearing on the illicit market.

460. Heroin seizures have remained stable. Most heroin seized in the European Union originates in south-west Asia. The Balkan route is still the main heroin trafficking route: it is estimated that 80 per cent of all the heroin seized in Europe has passed along that route. Reports of increased heroin seizures in Hungary and Romania reveal that trafficking along that route is continuing. Heroin from south-west Asia is being smuggled through countries in central Asia on its way to the Russian Federation or through countries in eastern Europe on its way to European Union member States. In 1998, heroin seizures increased more than fivefold in the Russian Federation.

461. In countries in central and eastern Europe depots have been set up for the distribution of heroin in smaller quantities to European Union States. There have been confirmed reports that several countries in central and eastern Europe are increasingly being used as storage points for drugs, heroin in particular, destined for sale in western Europe or for local distribution. Although Albania is reported to be used as an important channel for heroin trafficking, very few heroin seizures have been made in that country. The smuggling of heroin through the postal system remains frequent, though it generally involves smaller quantities of the substance. Seizures of Colombian heroin confirm that it is being shipped to illicit markets in Europe.

462. Heroin abuse in western Europe, which is estimated to affect about 1 million people, stabilized or slightly declined in the period 1995-1997 in almost all western European countries; however, increases were reported in most countries in eastern Europe, particularly in countries situated along the Balkan route. Due to very low prices and increased purity, a new generation of heroin smokers has emerged in European Union member States and that may result in an upsurge in heroin abuse.

463. A particularly alarming trend has been the rapid spread of HIV infection in some eastern European countries. The number of HIV-infected persons in Latvia increased sevenfold between 1997 and 1998. There was a 12-fold increase in the number of HIV-infected persons in the Moscow area in the first half of 1999 compared with the same period in 1998. The rapid spread of HIV infection is largely attributable to the infection spreading among intravenous drug users.

464. Cocaine seizures have steadily increased in Europe over the past few years. Illicit consignments of cocaine are being hidden among cargo on ships travelling from South America to Spain, the leading point of entry for cocaine found on illicit markets in Europe. Seizures of illicit coca paste indicate that traffickers are attempting to manufacture cocaine in Europe; however, only one major laboratory for processing cocaine in Europe has been discovered and dismantled, and it had been set up to manufacture synthetic cocaine only.

465. There is almost no information available on the nature and patterns of cocaine abuse; all that is known is that heroin addicts often abuse cocaine in conjunction with heroin. The scarcity of information on the subject is attributable to the fact that cocaine abusers with considerable health and social problems rarely seek help in public centres for the treatment of drug abuse. A study undertaken in the United Kingdom in 1998 showed that the abuse of cocaine had grown faster than the abuse of any other drug among 20-year-olds. The increased availability of cocaine, the resulting low prices and the association of cocaine with fashion and the lifestyles of the rich and famous may have contributed to the increased demand for the drug. There are few comprehensive studies on the extent, patterns and trends of cocaine abuse. The Board encourages Governments to examine this problem in greater depth.

Psychotropic substances

466. In European Union member States, the rise in the abuse of amphetamine-type stimulants has been more pronounced than the rise in other substances, including cannabis. Thus, stimulants emerged in Europe as the second most widely used illicit drug after cannabis, ahead of cocaine and heroin. A study undertaken in the United Kingdom revealed that young people considered drug abuse at dances to be commonplace, the drugs most often used being MDMA, followed by amphetamine, cocaine and lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD). The competent authorities should continue to monitor these developments very closely.

467. Over the past few years, Europe has become a major location for illicit drug manufacture, mostly amphetamine and amphetamine-type stimulants. Trafficking in and abuse of amphetamine and amphetamine-type stimulants pose a serious threat to the entire region because of the growing appeal of synthetic drugs among young people. The lack of adequate control over precursors used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine and amphetamine-type stimulants and the ready availability of technical expertise in that area have facilitated the clandestine manufacture of such substances.

468. The Netherlands has remained the main country in Europe in which amphetamine and amphetamine-type stimulants are manufactured; however, amphetamines are also manufactured in other countries in the region, such as Belgium, France, Germany, Poland, Slovakia and the United Kingdom. Law enforcement authorities in Ukraine dismantled more than 20 clandestine laboratories for illicit drug manufacture in 1998, several of which were involved in manufacturing amphetamine-type stimulants.

469. Methamphetamine, widely abused in Asia and North America, is not a major concern in Europe, though some seizures of methamphetamine originating in Myanmar have been made in Switzerland.

470. The Netherlands remains an important source country for MDMA and other amphetamine analogues, although the large-scale illicit manufacture of such substances has also been discovered in several other European countries. Major efforts have been made in the Netherlands and other countries to dismantle clandestine laboratories. Large seizures of MDMA suggest that the substance is being transported from the Netherlands, through airports in other countries in western Europe, to destinations in the United States, in particular Florida and New York. The Board notes with concern that western Europe is the main supplier of MDMA for illicit markets worldwide.

471. While the abuse of benzodiazepines appears to be increasing in western Europe, few European countries analyse information on general consumption patterns of psychotropic substances. The Board invites Governments to study such patterns, as well as prescription practices and trends involving psychotropic substances, with a view to detecting over-prescription or abuse and related public health problems.

472. Although drug abuse has not yet reached the dimensions known in the western part of Europe, it has grown at alarming rates in central and eastern Europe. Significant drug abuse problems have rapidly emerged in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, which, in the past, were mainly used by drug traffickers as transit countries. In Ukraine, where the number of drug-related crimes has doubled since 1993, a rapid increase in the number of drug abusers has been reported.

Substances not under international control

473. The increased abuse of "psychedelic mushrooms", containing psilocin and psilocybine, has been reported in several European countries, in particular the Netherlands and Switzerland. The Board welcomes the fact that the Government of the Netherlands has reviewed its policy on such substances. In the Netherlands, a government task force has recently proposed a ban on four hallucinogenic plants producing substances that are fast-acting and, if used in large doses, poisonous. The Board encourages the Governments of other countries where the abuse of such substances exists to take steps to deal with the problem. In the Russian Federation, such substances have already been included in the list of prohibited substances, as a response to growing problems related to their abuse.

Missions

474. The Board sent a mission to France in April 1999. The Board reiterates to the French authorities that it endorses fully the principles of the national drug control policy of that country, which is fully in line with the international drug control treaties. The Board notes the adoption by the Government of France in July 1999 of a triennial plan to deal with problems related to the abuse of not only drugs, but also alcohol, tobacco and other psychoactive substances, regardless of their legal status. While the Board does not wish to suggest that control measures for alcohol and tobacco should be equated with those for substances under international control, the Board has always

been of the opinion that it may be useful to deal with the consequences of all harmful substances through prevention programmes. The Board appreciates the strong stand of the Government of France against decriminalizing the non-medical use of drugs and trusts that the Government will prevent any misuse of the new national drug control policy by those in favour of such decriminalization, of introducing a distinction between "soft" and "hard" drugs or of conveying messages implying that there is such a thing as the "safe use" of such drugs as cannabis.

475. The Board notes that in France the number of deaths caused by drug overdose has considerably decreased since the introduction of drug substitution programmes. However, the Board is concerned about the diversion into illicit channels of buprenorphine (Subutex), a substance used in those programmes, and its abuse by patients under treatment. The Board welcomes the plans by the French authorities to improve and to monitor closely the drug substitution programmes in order to provide the best possible treatment for patients while effectively preventing the abuse of drugs and their diversion into illicit channels.

476. Despite the already adequate medical supply of narcotic drugs for patients suffering from severe pain, there have been improvements in the pain management system in France resulting from the introduction of new prescription forms and the intensified efforts to inform the public about the system. The Board welcomes those improvements and trusts that the new system will not lead to an increase in falsified prescriptions and will not be misused to divert narcotic drugs from licit distribution channels.

477. The Board invites the Government of France to review the prescribing pattern for benzodiazepines, the consumption of which is at a very high level in that country, as it is in other European countries.

478. The Board welcomes the plans of the Government of France to improve existing legislation with regard to undercover activities and controlled deliveries, the seizure of precursors in case of suspicion, and the reversal of the onus of proof. The Board appreciates the efforts by the French authorities to monitor more closely the movement of precursors and to provide to the Board the required information on precursors.

479. The Board sent a mission to Germany in October 1999. The Board notes with appreciation that the German drug control policy puts major emphasis on the prevention of drug abuse among young people. The Board welcomes the intention of the

Government to provide for a comprehensive and flexible system of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration programmes to deal with the abuse of drugs as well as alcohol and tobacco. The Board appreciates the intention of the authorities to address the problem of abuse of licit medications, in particular those containing psychotropic substances. The Board notes the intention of the Government to update the national drug control plan.

480. The Board is concerned by the decision of the German authorities to establish a legal basis for the operation of drug injection rooms (see also paragraphs 176-177 and 451 above). Instead, the authorities should provide the largest variety possible of treatment options, including substitution treatment. The Board notes the positive experience of several German cities, such as Berlin, which base their drug policy on a balanced approach comprising both demand and supply reduction efforts.

481. Draft legislation has been prepared in Germany to provide for the establishment of registers of patients involved in the substitution programmes, as well as registers of appropriately qualified medical doctors permitted to prescribe controlled substances for substitution. The Board appreciates such measures. The Board notes the determination of the authorities to ensure that the pilot scientific project on heroin-based substitution, expected to start in the second half of the year 2000, will not lead to the reduction of resources available for current drug treatment programmes and will not bring about withdrawal of patients from such programmes. As expressed on previous occasions, the Board remains concerned over the possible proliferation of heroin experiments and the adoption of social policies, including the prescription of heroin before projects have undergone full and independent evaluation. The Board also remains concerned over the effect that the experiments may have on international efforts to curb the illicit supply of and demand for drugs. The Board notes with satisfaction that the authorities decided to consider the comments of the Board on similar research in other countries prior to the approval of the project (see also paragraph 452 above).

482. The Board highly appreciates the vigorous actions taken by the German law enforcement authorities to prevent illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and the diversion of precursors. The relationship of the Board with the drug regulatory authorities has been excellent for many years. The control in Germany over licit activities related to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances has been exemplary.

483. At the invitation of the Government of Hungary, a mission of the Board visited that country in October 1999 to discuss, *inter alia*, the matter of transactions involving purportedly seized opium from Tajikistan. The Board notes with satisfaction that the Government did not authorize the purchase of seized or illicitly cultivated opium from other countries and will not do so in the future. Following the privatization of the manufacture of narcotic drugs, the Board urges the Government to ensure complete control over poppy straw cultivation and production which was previously in the hands of a State-owned enterprise.

484. The Government of Hungary is to be commended for its commitment to tackling the drug problem and for the creation of a new Interministerial Coordinating Committee on Drug Affairs, attached to the recently established Ministry of Youth and Sport Affairs. The Board trusts that the Coordinating Committee will become operational at the earliest opportunity and that it will give priority to finalizing the draft national drug control strategy.

485. The Board sent a mission to Italy in April 1999. In the opinion of the Board, the decriminalization of drug possession and abuse, which was introduced in Italy following a referendum in 1993, is not in line with several provisions of the 1961 Convention and the 1988 Convention. The Board welcomes the commitment of the Government of Italy to international drug control and its rejection of measures that could lead to further decriminalization of drug abuse. The Board invites the Government to enhance the collection of data on the extent, patterns and trends of the abuse of and trafficking in illicit drugs, in particular cannabis, in order to determine whether any increases in such abuse of and trafficking are linked to the decriminalization of drug possession and abuse.

486. In Italy, programmes for preventing drug abuse cover, in many cases, the prevention of alcohol and tobacco abuse, as well as drug abuse. The Board commends the Government of Italy for introducing this all-inclusive approach and for establishing an extensive network of institutions for the prevention of drug abuse and the treatment and rehabilitation of drug abusers. The Board fully supports the efforts by the Government to enlist the media in the fight against drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking.

487. The Board remains concerned about the low level of consumption of morphine for medical purposes in Italy, which may be indicative of insufficient availability of the drug for pain management purposes.

488. The Board commends the Government of Italy for its vigorous efforts in fighting organized crime in all its forms, and its efforts to combat the linkage between the Albanian and Italian organized crime.

489. The Board sent a mission to the United Kingdom in October 1999. Insofar as the general drug control policy in that country is concerned, as reflected in the Ten-Year Strategy for Tackling Drugs and the Annual Report and National Plan 1999/2000 of the United Kingdom Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator, there is shared concern and commitment at all levels of the relevant authorities in charge of drug control. In particular, the Board has noted that efforts to link the criminal justice system and treatment programmes are under way. The Board appreciates the stance of the Government against the decriminalization of drugs.

490. The Board notes that, for more than 70 years, medical practitioners in the United Kingdom have been authorized to prescribe heroin legally. Nonetheless, the number of addicts who receive heroin on prescription has declined significantly over the years. Today, addicts receiving heroin on prescription account for only a very small proportion of the total estimated number of heroin addicts in the United Kingdom. This fact, which reflects the judgement of practising physicians, strongly suggests that they believe that heroin prescription for the treatment of opioid addiction is of very limited value. Governments should consider the long experience in the United Kingdom with heroin prescription before undertaking similar programmes.

491. As regards controls over the licit manufacture of and trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, the Board notes the firm commitment of the Home Office of the United Kingdom to addressing all issues that the Board had raised earlier and to act on the specific recommendations made to tighten such controls. The Board hopes that, once the necessary legislative changes have been effected and staff resources have been put in place, the competent authorities will be in a position to carry out all its recommendations. It also trusts that the Home Office, working closely with the Department of Health, will initiate the proposed practical steps to be taken in the meantime for ensuring controls and full reporting to the Board under the international drug control treaties.

492. There is a close working relationship between various law enforcement agencies in the United Kingdom, including the National Criminal Intelligence Agency, the National Crime Squad and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. The Board invites various United Kingdom law enforcement agencies to consider further deploying their experience in drug and chemical control and in gathering intelligence through, for instance, networks of drug liaison officers to assist law enforcement authorities of other countries, by using actual cases of common

concern. Such efforts would help establish a network for sharing relevant information particularly between the competent law enforcement authorities, which the Board has always promoted. The Board stands ready to assist in that endeavour.

Technical visits

493. The Board made a technical visit to Estonia in June 1999 to discuss the implementation of recommendations made to the Government following the 1996 mission of the Board to that country. The Board notes with satisfaction that resources set aside by the Government for activities to reduce illicit drug demand among youth and for the treatment of drug addicts have increased. The capacity of the police to intercept illicit drug consignments has been strengthened. The control system for licit narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors is in place and is functioning effectively. The Board trusts that the Government of Estonia will continue to strengthen its efforts to prevent drug abuse in response to the increasing availability of heroin on the illicit market in that country. The Board invites the Government to enhance the capacity of its customs services to prevent drug smuggling and to ensure the implementation of the new legislation against money-laundering. The Board encourages the Government to accede to the 1988 Convention without further delay. Estonia is the only country among those that are currently candidates for European Union membership that is not yet a party to the 1988 Convention.

E. Oceania

Major developments

494. In Australia, the average age of first-time use of heroin has fallen below 18 years of age, and in some areas the average age of first-time use of heroin by injection is in the mid-teens. The purity level of the heroin available on the street remains high and the heroin death rate is increasing. Domestic cultivation of cannabis is rising and local manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants has increased substantially in the states of New South Wales and Queensland. The Board notes the extensive public debate in Australia regarding the drug problem. The Board trusts that decision makers in Australia will carefully choose policies, programmes and projects that will reverse these trends and that those policies, programmes and projects will be in full compliance with the international drug control treaties to which that State is a party.

495. The Government of New Zealand passed in early 1999 national legislation introducing controls over benzodiazepines, thus bringing that State into full compliance with the provisions of the 1971 Convention.

496. The Board welcomes the completion in July 1999 of the rapid assessment survey of drug abuse in Papua New Guinea. The survey confirmed that, *inter alia*, the level of cannabis abuse in that country is quite high. The Board is confident that the results of the survey will assist in the elaboration of a national master plan for drug control in Papua New Guinea.

Treaty adherence

497. New Zealand became a party to the 1988 Convention at the end of 1998. Of the 14 States in Oceania, 9 are parties to the 1961 Convention, 8 are parties to the 1971 Convention and 4 are parties to the 1988 Convention. The Board notes that the rate of accession to each of those treaties continues to be slow in that region. The Board once again urges all States in the region that are not yet parties to the international drug control treaties to accede to them without delay.

Regional cooperation

498. Increasing attention has been given over the past year to the fact that some Pacific island States are vulnerable to being exploited as offshore financial centres in money-laundering operations. The Board notes the efforts to improve cooperation among the countries in Asia and the Pacific in the fight against money-laundering and trusts that appropriate legislation and systems will soon be in place.

499. The Board also notes the efforts of Pacific island States to deal with common social problems, including drug abuse, through the Pacific Forum.

National legislation, policy and action

500. The Board urges the Government of Australia not to permit the establishment and operation of drug injection rooms, or so-called "shooting galleries". In the view of the Board, such establishments would provide an outlet for illicit drug abuse and facilitate or encourage illicit drug trafficking, which, under the international drug control treaties, Governments are obliged to combat in all its forms (see paragraphs 176-177 above).

501. New Zealand released in March 1999 an updated national action plan on drugs. The Board commends the