

I. OVERVIEW

1. During the last two decades, the world has witnessed the "globalization" of the drug abuse problem and the situation has worsened drastically. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs no longer discusses individual situations such as the smuggling of heroin into China, the illicit traffic in opium from Turkey to Egypt or the supply of heroin to New York through the "French Connection". Some decades ago, the abuse problem was the concern of only a limited number of countries, but today countries that are not suffering from the harmful consequences of drug abuse are the exception rather than the rule.

2. The economic power and political influence of drug cartels are rising. While drug abuse has been "globalized", internationalization and cooperation among drug cartels have also increased. There is also clear evidence that trafficking organizations barter different types of drugs among themselves. Drug trafficking syndicates are increasingly becoming involved in other forms of organized and violent crime, making use of sophisticated technical aids and modern communication systems. Criminal organizations control drugs from the cultivation and production phases to the storage and distribution phases. Large amounts of drugs are stored at staging posts in certain countries to take advantage of weak or ineffective laws in those countries. There is evidence that drug trafficking organizations frequently make use of the territories of countries (a) that are not parties to the international drug control treaties; (b) that have formally ratified conventions without implementing their provisions; (c) that suffer from civil war, terrorist activities, political instability, ethnic conflict, economic depression or social tension; (d) that are not in a position to ensure governmental control over some parts of their territories; (e) and that are not able to maintain adequate law enforcement, customs and pharmaceutical control services.

3. More and more Governments are beginning to realize that international cooperation in drug control, which in the past was an expression of solidarity, has now become a matter of urgent self-defence. The International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, held at Vienna from 17 to 26 June 1987, was an important sign of the changing philosophy of the international community. It was followed in 1990 by the adoption by the General Assembly, in its resolution S-17/2, of the Global Programme of Action, an instrument facilitating international action through voluntary cooperation between sovereign States and international organizations.

4. The United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988¹ is an even more important instrument. It created a global mechanism against international drug-related criminal activities by extending the scope of the international drug control treaties from basic drug control measures to concrete provisions against the activities of criminal organizations. The increasing number of countries that are becoming parties to the 1988 Convention is a reflection of the growing commitment of Governments to its compulsory application. It is not by chance that initiatives leading to the adoption of that Convention were taken by those countries in South America that are the main targets of criminal organizations.

5. In 1993, Governments have demonstrated again that the closest international cooperation possible is required to fight the worldwide scourge of drug abuse and illicit trafficking. The General Assembly therefore convened five high-level plenary sessions to examine the status of such international cooperation. Its adoption in October 1993, of resolution 48/12, on measures to strengthen international cooperation against the illicit production, sale, demand, traffic and distribution of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and related activities, may prove to be a significant step towards the further development of a common strategy and international machinery against drug abuse and illicit traffic. General Assembly resolution 48/12 is a clear manifestation of the determination of Governments to

