

Foreword

For centuries, drug abuse has been an international problem because it has not been possible to confine drugs to their places of origin. Modern methods of transport and communication have increased and facilitated the dissemination of all drugs of abuse, both licit and illicit. Although attention has tended to be focused on the illicit spread and use of heroin, cocaine and cannabis, there is also a vast global trade in legal, recreational drugs such as tobacco and alcohol, as well as in products such as tranquillizers and hypnotics, which have legitimate medical uses but which are also drugs of abuse and dependence.

The scale of global drug problems generated concern as long ago as 1909, when the first international conference on narcotic drugs was held at Shanghai. Since then, there has been an extensive international programme of legislation, more recently under the auspices of the United Nations; 12 multilateral drug control treaties were concluded between 1912 and 1972. The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, that Convention as amended by the 1972 Protocol, and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 extended the drug control system to newer, synthetic psychoactive drugs. Those conventions are aimed at reducing drug abuse by controlling strictly the supply side of the drug economy: they license the production, manufacture, prescribing and storage of, as well as the domestic and international trade in, the substances covered so that legitimate trade and production are limited to the required amounts, and diversion into illicit channels is prevented. Although this sort of control is undoubtedly necessary, it has become apparent that controlling international supply is not a sufficient response and that prevention, or at least reduction, of the illicit demand for drugs of abuse is also essential. Those measures, although obligatory, are only dealt with in general terms in the conventions; it appears that Governments have, for a long time, paid less attention to them.

The urgent need for a policy of demand reduction has been accentuated by the arrival of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Because there is no effective treatment for AIDS, and no vaccine against it, it poses a serious public health problem. Thus, for the first time, in many countries it is in the public interest to fight drug abuse using all available means. Previously, drug abuse and drug dependence had been perceived only as personal problems, the individual concerned being seen at best as an unfortunate victim and often, because of the perceived volitional component of drug-taking, as suffering the deserved consequences of earlier folly. Now, because of the threat to public health, there is far greater determination to attack drug dependence, and the political will to act against it has increased. That was reflected in the convening of the International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking at Vienna in 1987. In addition to the traditional concern with controlling the drug supply and suppressing illicit traffic, the Conference had a much broader mandate: to intensify and extend the scope of international cooperation into new areas such as demand reduction and the treatment and rehabilitation of drug abusers.

The globalization of drug abuse, the expansion of illicit traffic and the growing ingenuity and power of organized criminal groups have been part of a trend that has lasted over two decades. The worldwide drug abuse and illicit trafficking situation, accompanied by violence and corruption, has led to a questioning of the validity and appropriateness of the internationally agreed conventions and resolutions on drug control.

The explanation for the global epidemic of drug abuse and related problems is not simple, but a few key factors can be identified. International travel is no longer only for a few privileged individuals; today, many different populations are in contact with each other. Although those contacts may have benefits they also bring problems such as the spread of drug abuse throughout the world. The increase in other forms of global communication has also had an impact in recent years. The instantaneous reporting of events around the world through the mass media is the hallmark of modern times. That and a relaxation of traditional social and cultural constraints, an increased range of acceptable behaviour, and advances in technology, pharmacology and agriculture

are among the many factors responsible for the ever-increasing drug abuse problems.

The last decade of the twentieth century poses great challenges to many societies and Governments. The development of effective drug control is one such challenge. Relations between countries have become closer. Many national economies and public administrations have undergone radical changes, adopting new philosophies and new ways of approaching problems. More recently, the changes following the end of the cold war, including the opening of international borders, together with the development of market economies and privatization in many countries, have increased drug trafficking activities and associated problems.

The International Narcotics Control Board and its predecessors were established to limit, in cooperation with Governments, the cultivation, production, manufacture and use of drugs to an adequate amount required for medical and scientific purposes and to ensure their availability for such purposes. The Board is thus the built-in monitoring instrument of the international drug control treaties.

Both the international drug control system and national drug policies have been subject to constant review and have been questioned in an increasing number of countries. On the one hand, this includes suggestions on how to better implement present strategies and instruments, as well as proposals to improve policies. On the other hand, there has been a complete rejection of the present system. The Board, in a process of continuous review, identifies and highlights new trends in drug abuse and illicit trafficking, persisting loopholes in national and international control systems, and various threats to the maintenance of adequate control safeguards, such as corruption.

The Board works in cooperation with Governments in attempting to prevent illicit drug cultivation, production, manufacture trafficking and use. It assesses the impact of the international drug control treaties with regard to the overall objective of curtailing illicit traffic and drug abuse. In doing so, the Board is determined not to shy away from highlighting, where necessary, the shortcomings of the present system. Over the years, the Board, making use of the experience it has gained in monitoring the control of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors and the supply of and demand for drugs for medical purposes, has developed evaluation methods and techniques that enable it to analyse the world situation, as well as regional situations.

In recent years, the Board, in addition to analysing various trends in drug control policies and strategies, has each year chosen a topic to be discussed in chapter I of its annual report, in an attempt to shed light on certain issues. The legalization debate was covered in its report for 1992 and the importance of demand reduction was discussed in its report for 1993. The Board has decided to devote chapter I of its report for 1994 to an evaluation of the impact of the international drug control treaties. The General Assembly, in its resolution 48/12, requested the Commission on Narcotic Drugs to undertake, in cooperation with the Board and with the support of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, an evaluation of action taken at the national and international levels in implementing the international drug control instruments. This is, therefore, an opportune moment for the Board to examine the issue in detail, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/12.

The evaluation of various aspects of the international drug control treaties and compliance by Governments is an ongoing process and an examination of the annual reports of the Board bears testimony to that. The present report refers to some of the major elements in those reports. It is a supplement to the report of the Board for 1994 and is summarized in chapter I of that report. The present report constitutes one of the responses to General Assembly resolution 48/12. No attempt has been made to emphasize the many successes of the international drug control treaties; instead, the areas in need of strengthening are highlighted.

In the present report, some of the fundamental issues in relation to the success or failure of national and international policies and strategies and of the conventions are discussed. The report should be read together with the report of the Board for 1994 and the technical reports on narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, and precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

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EXPLANATORY NOTES

The following abbreviations have been used in this report:

CICAD	Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission
LSD	lysergic acid diethylamide
THC	tetrahydrocannabinol
UNDCP	United Nations International Drug Control Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

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