

# Foreword

Precursor chemicals play a critical role in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. At the same time, the majority of these substances also play an important role in our daily lives, as they are used to produce commodities that are consumed licitly worldwide. Striking a balance between free trade and circulation for licit purposes and the need to prevent diversion for illicit purposes is at the core of the international control system established in accordance with articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988. The transition of illicit drug markets towards synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances, and its impact on the dynamics of markets for precursor chemicals challenge the achievements of the precursor control system and necessitate renewed joint efforts by the international community.

The control system established under the 1988 Convention has been very effective in limiting international diversion of controlled precursors while ensuring their uninterrupted licit international trade. An international network built on shared responsibilities and mutual respect reduces the space for traffickers, thus increasing the chances for law enforcement authorities to seize consignments and prosecute those responsible for the diversion. The current transition of illicit markets towards synthetic drugs is, however, characterized by a rising level of sophistication and innovation in illicit manufacture, as seen in the increasing use of non-scheduled chemicals, including designer precursors. Novel ways to market, acquire and deliver the required chemicals are increasingly being uncovered, with licit Internet-based (surface web) marketplaces emerging as unsuspecting allies of traffickers.

In this context, the worldwide demand for and supply of illicitly manufactured methamphetamine, new psychoactive substances and synthetic opioids shows the urgent need to further strengthen control measures. The scheduling of individual substances is often reactive in nature and does not always keep pace with the innovations seen in illicit manufacture, owing to the ability of illicit drug manufacturers to easily replace chemical precursors with analogues. The scheduling of individual substances as they are detected in illicit manufacture comes with the risk of producing long lists of controlled substances that have little or no use in licit sectors of the chemical industry. The most unfortunate aspect of this situation is the increase in overdose-related deaths and addiction rates all over the world.

To assist in our understanding of this challenge, I am pleased to present the report of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) for 2021 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention, or the “annual report on precursors”. The report sets out the most recent developments that have occurred in the area of precursor control. It also contains information on many of the initiatives that Member States, INCB and other stakeholders, including the private sector, have been taking.

If illicit drug manufacture is evolving, so should the institutional response. International efforts must leverage and channel the expertise and knowledge of different countries concerning the control of chemicals, relying on the provisions of the 1988 Convention beyond those contained in article 12. National voluntary measures and stronger cooperation by industry would support the growth of national responses and lead to shared international solutions.

As the guardian of the international treaty-based precursor control system, INCB will continue to support the international community through its specialized advice and services. I thank all the Governments that have supported the Board in its endeavours throughout the year, by meeting reporting obligations and participating in and supporting INCB activities, and cherish hopes of forging even stronger bonds of cooperation in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jagjit Pavadia". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent flourish at the end.

Jagjit Pavadia  
President of the International  
Narcotics Control Board