

Foreword

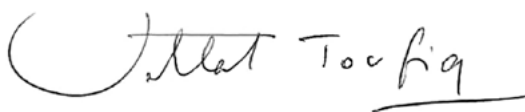
Illicit drug markets are experiencing a dramatic period of change. Synthetic drugs, including amphetamines, cathinones, opioids, synthetic cannabinoids and other new psychoactive substances, are spreading worldwide, altering illicit drug markets. Technological advances are extending to plant-based drugs, with the illicit manufacture of cocaine, both in the original production sites in South America and in clandestine laboratories in western Europe, resulting in improved outputs. The illicit laboratories manufacturing or producing these drugs have been found to be increasingly sophisticated and frequently of an industrial scale, requiring both chemicals and specialized equipment, including pressurized reaction vessels and made-to-order glassware. Furthermore, with illicit drugs increasingly being marketed in the form of tablets and pills, there is a growing need for cutting agents and excipients, as well as punches, dies and tableting or encapsulation machines. As many of the chemicals, equipment and materials required for illicit manufacture have both legal and illegal uses, these items are offered and traded worldwide through the surface web with only a small portion being diverted for the illicit manufacture of drugs, making controls difficult to develop and implement.

Information in PICS, the Board's information- and intelligence-sharing platform, illustrates the current dynamics: of the 147 different chemicals reported in the more than 500 incidents communicated through PICS during the reporting period, less than 15 per cent were chemicals under international control. The challenges posed by the evolution of illicit drug manufacture and production therefore require innovative, proactive responses to support and strengthen the aims of the international control system established by the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.

During 2024, the Board endeavoured to introduce steps to address these challenges. This included developing and disseminating a number of tools to support Governments in addressing the diversion of non-scheduled chemicals, including designer precursors, such as a list of possible substitutes for chemicals in the tables of the 1988 Convention, lists of frequently seen precursors of new psychoactive substances and cutting agents, adulterants and excipients, and information on control measures applied by Governments to chemicals that are not in Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention but that may be used in illicit drug manufacture. It also included the further promotion of the use of the PEN Online Light system for the voluntary exchange of information on shipments involving chemicals not under international control but known to be used in illicit drug manufacture. Presently, 66 importing Governments are regularly notified of shipments of such chemicals to their territories. Steps were also taken to develop an integrated approach to address all facets of illicit drug manufacture, ranging from precursor chemicals to specialized equipment and materials, including excipients, and by expanding engagement with relevant external partners, including the International Association of Judges, to create an environment conducive to addressing the dynamics of today's illicit drug markets.

Engagement with the chemical and related industries and the monitoring of virtual markets where chemicals and specialized equipment are traded are indispensable components of this approach. In 2024, INCB continued its initiative aimed at strengthening public-private partnerships through the mapping of national industry landscapes in several countries to help identify those industries that manufacture, consume or in any way deal with chemicals which could also be used for illicit drug manufacture. Lastly, efforts also commenced to monitor virtual markets for suspicious postings of precursor chemicals. These activities complement the portfolio of well-established services provided by INCB to Member States, which include the PEN Online and PEN Online Light and the PICS electronic platforms, as well as the continuously updated limited international special surveillance list of non-scheduled substances.

I would like to thank Governments for supporting the Board's activities throughout 2024 and look forward to even stronger cooperation in the future.



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Narcotics Control Board