

Foreword

Each year, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) reports on the functioning of the international drug control system and developments in international drug control. Based on its findings, the Board makes recommendations to Governments and regional and international organizations to improve various aspects of drug control. Often, a cross-cutting aspect of the Board's recommendations is international or regional cooperation.

International cooperation to address the global drug problem is founded upon the principle of shared responsibility, a mutual commitment to common goals and a commitment to complementary policy and joint action. The overwhelming majority of States have developed and acceded to the three international drug control conventions that make up the international drug control system, which in turn is built upon the principle of shared responsibility. Those conventions are the best available tools for addressing the global drug problem and for protecting humanity from drug abuse and the impact of trafficking in and illicit cultivation and production of drugs. The conventions are based upon the fact that drugs can flow across borders and between continents, from producer to trafficker, from one society to another, and from trafficking to abuse. In signing the conventions, Governments agreed that this global problem requires a global solution and committed themselves to meeting their individual obligations under those conventions.

Given the importance of shared responsibility in drug control efforts, INCB has decided to highlight that principle in chapter I of the present report. That chapter describes the evolution and achievements of shared responsibility in drug control and presents examples of good practice in applying the principle of shared responsibility to drug control efforts in areas such as demand reduction, supply reduction, judicial cooperation and the control of licit trade in drugs. In the context of shared responsibility, all levels of government, civil society, local communities and the private sector must work together to ensure that the health and well-being of citizens are not undermined by drug abuse or by the impact of trafficking in or illicit cultivation and production of drugs, such as drug-related crime and violence. The Board's recommendations in this regard include, inter alia, the need to maintain the delicate balance between supply and demand reduction efforts; the necessity of establishing comprehensive programmes for the prevention and treatment of drug abuse, as well as for reintegration; and the importance of coordination between the authorities responsible for health, education, justice, economic development and law enforcement, together with civil society and the private sector.

The principle of shared responsibility for the global drug problem is also reflected in the global debate on drug policy that is under way between Governments at the regional level and also within Governments. INCB welcomes and supports initiatives of Governments aimed at further strengthening international drug control within the framework of the international drug control conventions. We note with concern, however, that in this debate, some declarations and initiatives have included proposals for the legalization of the possession of drugs for non-medical and non-scientific use, that is, for "recreational" use, that would allow the cultivation and consumption of cannabis for non-medical purposes. Any such initiatives, if implemented, would violate the international drug control conventions and could undermine the noble objectives of the entire drug control system, which are to ensure the availability of drugs for medical purposes while preventing their abuse. Proponents of such initiatives ignore the commitment that all Governments have made to promote the health and well-being of their communities, and such initiatives run counter to the growing body of scientific evidence documenting the harm associated with drug abuse, including occasional use, particularly among young people during their formative years. Furthermore, such initiatives would create a false sense of security and would send a false message to the public, in particular children, regarding the health impact of abuse of drugs. Some have argued that these proposals would eliminate the illicit markets and organized crime associated with drugs

of abuse. Yet, even if such initiatives were implemented, organized criminal groups would get even more deeply involved, for instance by creating a black market for the illicit supply of newly legalized drugs to young people. To target the organized crime and violence associated with the illicit trade in drugs, the most effective tool is primary prevention of drug abuse, coupled with treatment and rehabilitation, and complemented by supply reduction measures, as provided for in the conventions.

Primary prevention is also the key means of preventing the abuse of new psychoactive substances, which the Board addresses as a special topic in chapter II of the report. Controls are being circumvented by the manufacture and sale of substances that have been designed to be chemically different from controlled substances but have similar psychoactive effects. National controls, including generic controls, of such substances can help to address this growing phenomenon, as can monitoring and the exchange of information on trends of abuse. But ultimately, demand reduction is the most effective approach. A similar challenge is seen in the control of precursor chemicals, with the increasing use of non-scheduled chemicals as “pre-precursors” in the illicit manufacture of drugs. Illegal sales of controlled substances, as well as non-controlled substances of abuse, through Internet pharmacies is another growing problem. The present report outlines how this issue can be remedied through proper registration, licensing and supervision of such pharmacies at the national level, as well as international cooperation between Internet registrars and national regulatory authorities.

Strengthening the capacity of the competent authorities is essential to achieve the key objective of the international drug control conventions: ensure the availability of controlled medicines for the treatment of pain and suffering associated with illness, including mental disorders, and prevent their abuse. While the medical use of cannabis is permitted by the treaties under specific conditions, it poses a major challenge in some countries. If not adequately regulated, such “medical cannabis” schemes can contribute to increasing levels of abuse of the substance. That issue is elaborated on in this report.

While shared responsibility in international drug control is essential to addressing the global drug problem, so too is the responsibility of States to fulfil their obligations at the national level, as set out in the conventions. A prerequisite to effectively fulfilling these obligations at the national level is the adequate capacity of national drug regulatory authorities. Governments must ensure that their competent authorities have the appropriate resources and staff, and INCB calls on Governments and the international community, as appropriate, to provide technical assistance in this area so as to promote effective and sustainable national regulatory control of drugs for licit purposes.

Ultimately, we all have a shared responsibility to address the global drug problem, whether it be at the individual, community, governmental or international level. We must continue to strive to prevent and minimize the suffering and loss of potential caused by drug abuse and drug-related crime and violence.



Raymond Yans
President
International Narcotics Control Board