

Foreword

The annual report of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) for 2013 marks a particular milestone: the 45th annual report of the Board since it was established in 1968 in accordance with the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961.¹ Over that period, there have been significant emerging challenges and efforts made in addressing the global drug problem. Notably, the 1961 Convention is adhered to by almost all States, illustrating the commitment of Governments to the principle of shared responsibility in ensuring the availability of narcotic drugs for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their diversion and abuse. To address subsequent drug control challenges such as the abuse of psychotropic substances while ensuring their availability for medical purposes, the use of chemicals in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, and drug trafficking, States created and adopted the two other international drug control conventions in force today: the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971² and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.³ Those conventions too enjoy almost universal adherence.

Over the period that began with the Board's establishment, the international community has affirmed and strengthened its commitment to shared responsibility in drug control, for instance at the twentieth special session of the General Assembly and through the adoption in 2009, by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the General Assembly, of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation Towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem. Now, the international community is about to conduct, in March 2014, the high-level review of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action, to which INCB will contribute, on the basis of its work in monitoring and promoting the implementation of the three drug control conventions. In addition, preparations are under way for the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem to be held in 2016, which will draw renewed, high-level attention to the issue and guide the way forward.

The INCB annual reports, accompanied by the annual reports on precursor chemicals and the technical publications on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, serve as a "stock-taking" of achievements made, challenges faced and additional efforts required. The present annual report for 2013 concludes with a chapter containing recommendations for Governments and international and regional organizations aimed at improving the implementation of the conventions and ultimately aimed at ensuring availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing diversion to illicit channels, illicit manufacture, trafficking and abuse.

In view of the upcoming high-level review and preparations for the special session of the General Assembly, INCB has decided to include in this report a thematic chapter on the economic consequences of drug abuse. Considering drug abuse from that perspective provides a useful way of analysing the impacts of drug abuse. Drug abuse is in no way an independent variable and, indeed, is often part of a vicious cycle, as addressed by the Board in the thematic chapter on social cohesion in its annual report for 2011.⁴ Nevertheless, in planning, developing and implementing measures to prevent and treat drug abuse, it is valuable to consider the impacts of drug abuse and understand their economic consequences.

Thus, chapter I reviews the economic consequences of drug abuse in the areas of health, public safety, crime, productivity and governance and discusses how investments in prevention, treatment and rehabilitation can lead to significant benefits in terms of the health-care and crime-related costs avoided, not to mention alleviating the immeasurable suffering experienced by drug-dependent

¹United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 520, No. 7515.

²*Ibid.*, vol. 1019, No. 14956.

³*Ibid.*, vol. 1582, No. 27627.

⁴E/INCB/2011/1.

individuals, and their families and loved ones. However, estimates suggest that only one in six problem drug users worldwide receives the treatment they need—with significant regional variance. In addition to the drug-related deaths and increased morbidity arising, for instance, from the transmission of infectious disease through injecting drug use, people under the influence of drugs can pose safety risks, for example, through drug-related accidents.

Crimes are often committed by people under the influence of drugs, to support drug addiction, and crime forms part of the violence between organized criminal groups involved in the trafficking of drugs, as seen in Central America, but also on every other continent. The economic consequences of drug-related crime include not only those directly resulting from the criminal act itself but also the associated costs of law enforcement, the judicial system and incarceration. Drug-related corruption can weaken governance, which in turn can be associated with increased illicit drug crop cultivation and illicit drug production, manufacture and trafficking—part of a vicious cycle—as explored in detail in the INCB annual report for 2010.⁵

Drug abuse also has environmental consequences. Illicit cultivation of coca bush and opium poppy results in deforestation and loss of biodiversity, as well as the loss of agricultural land that could otherwise be put to productive use. Environmental contamination can be caused by the precursor chemicals used in the illicit manufacture process and by the substance itself, and the aerial spraying of illicit drug crops can also have negative effects. In addition, productivity losses can occur when people are unable to engage in employment while under the influence of drugs or while in treatment or incarcerated.

Drug abuse causes a disproportionate amount of harm to those most vulnerable: children, whose right to be protected from drug abuse is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁶ Prenatal exposure to drugs can cause emotional, psychological and physical disorders, and even death. In economic terms, this manifests itself in additional costs for care. Children exposed to drugs—whether through actual consumption or by living in an environment of drug abuse—may be exposed to a higher risk of physical and sexual abuse and are more likely to suffer anxiety and depression, have educational and attention problems, commit delinquent acts and become involved in crime and drug abuse. Urgent action must be taken to protect society’s most precious resource—its children—from drug abuse and its effects.

Chapter I concludes with a selection of best practices and recommendations to reduce the economic consequences of drug abuse, thereby improving social welfare. That brings us full circle to the underlying principle of the international drug control system and the three conventions upon which it is founded: concern for the health and welfare of humankind.

Drug abuse and the associated illicit cultivation, manufacture and trafficking cause an untold amount of suffering. The three drug control conventions set out the critical requirements for preventing and reducing drug-related suffering and for ensuring access to essential controlled medicines, which have been assessed to be of therapeutic value despite their potential to create dependence. Those measures are founded upon a balanced approach to drug control, which requires due attention to both demand reduction—through prevention, treatment and rehabilitation—and supply reduction—through law enforcement and judicial measures founded upon the principle of proportionality and respect for human rights.

The commitment of States parties to implementing the conventions must be translated into tangible action and measurable results. Governments must ensure the sustainability of their prevention, treatment and rehabilitation programmes and their regulatory control systems. Even in times of financial austerity, such investment must be maintained. The alternative—losing the potential of citizens—could be the worst “investment choice” of all.

⁵E/INCB/2010/1.

⁶United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

The international drug control system is founded upon the principle of shared responsibility—between countries and at all levels of government within countries. Drug traffickers will choose the path of least resistance; so, it is essential that global efforts to tackle the drug problem are unified. INCB is concerned about some initiatives aimed at the legalization of the non-medical and non-scientific use of cannabis. Such initiatives, if pursued, would pose a grave danger to public health and well-being, the very things the States, in designing the conventions, intended to protect. INCB looks forward to maintaining an ongoing dialogue with all countries, including those where such misguided initiatives are being pursued, with a view to ensuring the full implementation of the conventions and protecting public health.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized initials 'RY' followed by a horizontal line.

Raymond Yans
President
International Narcotics Control Board