

Foreword

Each year, the complexity of the world drug situation increases. The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is tasked with monitoring States' implementation of the international drug control treaties and supporting Governments in ensuring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their diversion and abuse. Through evidence-based research and documentation, INCB strongly urges Governments to adopt humane and balanced drug policies that reflect a human rights-based approach, implementing the international drug control conventions and applying the principles of proportionality and adherence to the rule of law embedded in the treaties. Without due consideration of human rights, there are devastating consequences.

In commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, INCB recalls that human rights are the foundation of the mission and work of the United Nations. The anniversary provides an opportunity to explore the links between human rights and drug policy and discuss the implications for national responses to the drug problem. The outcome document of the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem",¹ places the treatment of drug use disorders, rehabilitation and social reintegration among the key operational objectives of its recommendations. In the light of the milestone anniversaries of several human rights instruments, INCB has put specific focus on human rights, which is included as a special topic in this year's annual report.

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights sets out the right to health as part of the right to an adequate standard of living. The thematic chapter of the present report focuses on treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration for drug use disorders as essential components of drug demand reduction. Here, we draw attention to the protection of the rights of people impacted by drug use disorders and emphasize the importance of non-discriminatory access to treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration services. We make a number of recommendations, which, if widely implemented, would contribute to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 3, relating to good health and well-being. These recommendations include investing in and providing multi-tier structures for the delivery of treatment services and ensuring multisectoral coordination in efforts to reduce supply and demand. INCB believes that if leaders, policymakers and the wider society follow the principles set out in that chapter and pay particular attention to treatment needs, it will have a significant impact on the public health of often-neglected groups.

In chapter II of the annual report, INCB reviews treaty compliance by States and highlights a number of substantive policy matters. In section F ("Special topics") of that chapter, we draw attention to matters that should be the focus of policymakers.

Under the special topic on the therapeutic use of cannabinoids, the Board carefully re-examines terminology and, drawing on the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, concludes that precision is required. Thus, we discuss the therapeutic use of cannabinoids and eschew the notion of "medical cannabis". This is done to ensure that when reference is made to medicinal products, it is understood to refer to products that have been appropriately tested, have passed a full scientific evaluation and clinical trials and are licensed as medicines. INCB notes that there have been anecdotal reports of some cannabinoids having therapeutic effects and that some jurisdictions have licensed such products even though there is still insufficient evidence of their therapeutic value and clinical trials are still ongoing. Therefore, the Board points out that when considering the possibility of using cannabis derivatives for the treatment of certain health conditions, it is most appropriate to speak about the therapeutic use of cannabinoids. We emphasize that in deciding to license

¹General Assembly resolution S-30/1, annex.

medicines, Governments should examine the results of scientific studies and clinical trials to ensure that prescription for medical use is performed with competent medical knowledge and supervision.

As expressed in our 2016 annual report² and the special report entitled *Availability of Internationally Controlled Drugs: Ensuring Adequate Access for Medical and Scientific Purposes — Indispensable, Adequately Available and Not Unduly Restricted*,³ billions of people around the world have limited or no access to medicines containing narcotic drugs. The imbalance in the availability of opioid analgesics disproportionately impacts low- and middle-income countries. As done in the past, I call upon States to close what I have termed the “global pain divide”.

As well as addressing the underuse of opioids, we also explore the opioid overdose epidemic in North America. Our report highlights the risks associated with long-term opioid use and advises Governments to be aware of the risks linked to the abuse of prescription drugs. Although the situation is particularly acute in one part of the world, the Board is directing its attention to this matter and recommends that other Governments learn from this crisis.

As recalled above, we are witnessing a binary opposition, the underuse and overuse of opioids. Both epidemics are the cause of much suffering worldwide. However, opioids are not to be feared; if administered and monitored properly, opioids are a vital tool for pain management and palliative care. In this year’s annual report, we call for the provision of training for health-care professionals and responsible authorities, for ensuring rational prescribing practices and for the implementation of the operational recommendations in this regard adopted at the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly. We believe that efforts by States are essential to confront these dual challenges.

Continued violence and extrajudicial acts against persons suspected of drug-related activities, be it simple use or criminal acts, undermine the rule of law and internationally recognized due process standards. INCB reminds States that extrajudicial actions of any kind are contrary to the international drug control treaties, a matter on which we elaborate in the report.

According to the World Tourism Organization, there were over 1.2 billion international tourist visits in 2016, a number that increases greatly when including those travelling on business or attending conferences. When travellers go abroad, many of them are undergoing medical treatment, which requires them in some cases to carry medicines containing substances under international control. INCB draws attention to this matter and calls upon Governments to make their requirements in this regard well known to potential visitors and relevant officials to ensure that visitors to their countries are not unduly delayed or importuned. Here, we ask Governments to help make it possible for travellers carrying medical preparations to continue their medical treatment while abroad.

The *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017*, published by the Afghan Ministry of Counter-Narcotics and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, revealed that the area under opium poppy cultivation has increased by 63 per cent since 2016, reaching a new record high. That matter is also discussed in the present report. The illicit drug economy in the country further exacerbates an environment of instability and increases funding to terrorist groups in Afghanistan and beyond. Aware of the challenges and difficulties faced by the Government and the people of Afghanistan effectively to address the extraordinary situation in the country, the Board once again calls upon the Government, in cooperation with local, regional, and international partners, to develop and implement a balanced, effective and comprehensive effort to address the issue. INCB stands ready and calls upon the international community and Afghanistan to work together to give high priority to redressing the situation.

²E/INCB/2016/1.

³E/INCB/2015/1/Supp.1.

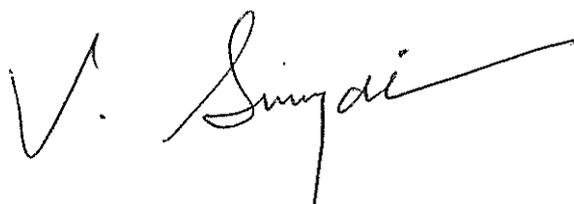
The annual report draws attention to other important developments that have an impact well beyond national boundaries. Thus, we note the record level of illicit coca bush cultivation in Colombia in 2016 and the signing of the peace accord between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) in November 2016. The peace accord contains commitments on drug control and is expected to have a positive impact on the eradication of illicit drug crop cultivation and trafficking in cocaine. The Board will continue closely to monitor developments in the Andean region.

INCB also highlights a number of tools and initiatives available to support Governments in the implementation of the treaties and the outcome document of the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly. Among those tools is INCB Learning, an initiative to build the capacity of national authorities to monitor the trade in controlled substances and promote their availability for medical use. Similarly, a new system to facilitate licit international trade in controlled substances, the International Import Export Authorization System (I2ES), has been put in place. It joins an array of tools developed by the Board, such as the Pre-Export Notification (PEN) Online system, the Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS) and more recent initiatives to counteract new psychoactive substances. In addition, the INCB International Drug Control System (IDS), a database platform used by the Board, acts as the backbone connecting the data supplied by Governments on meeting their regulatory obligations. IDS provides the basis for analysing the functioning of the system of licit international trade in controlled substances, providing the Board with the information needed to assist Governments. Today, IDS is in urgent need of modernization.

We aim to continue expanding our analysis and support capacities to assist Governments around the world. INCB aims actively to contribute to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and the objectives adopted at the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly, within the areas of its mandate. For this, we will continue to rely on active dialogue with, and support from, all States.

Drug policies must follow an approach that seeks to promote the health and welfare of humankind. The three international drug control conventions provide ample scope for the international community to achieve this objective.

I hope that this year's annual report will further inspire cooperation, multilayered strategies, multisectoral efforts and action by States and the international community. Together, we can move closer to improving the well-being of individuals around the world and contribute to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. Sumyai', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Viroj Sumyai
President
International Narcotics Control Board