

Foreword

The publication of the report of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) for 2018 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Board, pursuant to the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961.¹ Since the adoption by the Board of its first annual report half a century ago, global drug control challenges have evolved. To meet those challenges, States adopted two further conventions, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971² and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988,³ expanding the responsibilities of the Board. In 2016, at the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem, Member States unanimously reaffirmed their commitment to the goals and objectives of the three international drug control conventions.

Without the cooperation of Member States, the Board would not be able to fulfil its mandate of ensuring that the three international drug control conventions are implemented in accordance with the objectives and requirements that were established by States parties when they drafted and signed the conventions. To mark its fiftieth anniversary, the Board decided to deepen that cooperation by holding a meeting with representatives of Member States during its 123rd session, held in Vienna in November 2018, to consider the challenges currently faced in drug control and initiatives to address those challenges.

A major challenge is the disparate access to and availability of internationally controlled medications. People in many countries experience untreated pain and surgery without anaesthesia, including in emergency situations; in other regions, the non-rational prescription of opioid-based pain medications has contributed to a public health crisis and an increasing number of overdose deaths. Despite evidence of effectiveness, the use of internationally controlled methadone and buprenorphine for the treatment of opioid dependence is limited in some countries, including countries where there are significant levels of opioid dependence. In addition, the apparent oversupply of benzodiazepines in some countries represents a heightened risk of diversion to illicit channels. To support Governments in addressing the situation, the Board's report for 2018 is accompanied by a supplement entitled *Progress in ensuring adequate access to internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes*.⁴ That special report contains a review of the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations on availability of and access to internationally controlled substances as set out in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly and in the supplement to the INCB annual report for 2015.⁵ It offers guidance to Governments on making progress towards alleviating suffering and realizing Sustainable Development Goal 3, on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages.

The legalization of the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes in some countries represents a challenge to the universal implementation of the treaties, a challenge to public health and well-being, particularly among young people, and a challenge to the States parties to the treaties. INCB reiterates that the conventions limit the use of controlled substances, including cannabis, exclusively to medical and scientific purposes, and remains engaged in continuous dialogue with the Governments of countries in which the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes has been legalized.

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

² *Ibid.*, vol. 1019, No. 14956.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 1582, No. 27627.

⁴ E/INCB/2018/1/Supp.1.

⁵ *Availability of Internationally Controlled Drugs: Ensuring Adequate Access for Medical and Scientific Purposes—Indispensable, Adequately Available and Not Unduly Restricted* (E/INCB/2015/Supp.1).

The thematic chapter of the annual report for 2018 is on the risks and benefits of medical, scientific and “recreational” use of cannabis and cannabinoids. In several countries, poorly regulated medical cannabis programmes and the associated lower perception of risk of cannabis use may have contributed to the legalization of non-medical cannabis use. In addition, medical cannabis programmes that are not regulated in accordance with the conventions can result in diversion to non-medical use. In the thematic chapter, the control requirements for cannabis and cannabinoids are set out, an overview of the medical uses of cannabinoids and associated pharmaceutical registration systems is provided, and the adverse effects of both short-term and long-term cannabis use are highlighted.

In 2017, the illicit opiate economy of Afghanistan exceeded the value of the total national licit exports of goods and services. The Board remains very concerned about the impact of illicit opium production on the health and welfare of people in Afghanistan and beyond. We therefore call upon the relevant United Nations bodies and agencies to provide further technical and financial assistance to address the drug control challenges in Afghanistan.

We are also concerned about the increase in illicit coca bush cultivation and cocaine manufacture in Colombia.

The fundamental goal of the three international drug control conventions, namely, to safeguard the health and welfare of humanity, includes ensuring the full enjoyment of human rights. The present report includes recommendations concerning criminal justice responses to drug-related crime that take the principle of proportionality into account. We call upon States to develop effective strategies for the prevention of drug use and the provision of treatment, rehabilitation, aftercare and social reintegration services.

2018 also represents 30 years of precursor control, being the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the 1988 Convention. Significant results have been achieved in those 30 years, namely that there is virtually no diversion of scheduled precursor chemicals from licit international trade to illicit channels. However, non-scheduled chemicals, such as substitute chemicals and pre-precursors, pose a challenge to international drug control. There is a need for a policy discussion at the international level to identify a way forward to address that challenge, building upon the successful precursor control measures that are already in place. Governments should also build on such measures to address the emergence of new psychoactive substances, and to prevent those potentially harmful substances from reaching people. In 2018, the Board assessed three amphetamine-type stimulant precursors and recommended their inclusion in Table I of the 1988 Convention. Those recommendations will be voted upon by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in March 2019. The report of the Board for 2018 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention⁶ addresses those issues in depth. Details of the Board’s work concerning the control of licit trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are found in the technical publications for 2018 on those subjects.⁷

To support Member States in safeguarding the well-being of their citizens through effective implementation of the international drug control conventions, INCB has developed a suite of tools that are available free of charge to national authorities. Those tools include the International Import and Export Authorization System (I2ES), the Pre-Export Notification Online system (PEN Online), the Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS), the Project Ion Incident Communication System (IONICS), INCB Learning and the global Operational Partnerships to Interdict Opioids’

⁶*Precursors and Chemicals Frequently Used in the Illicit Manufacture of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances: Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2018 on the Implementation of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988* (E/INCB/2018/4).

⁷*Narcotic Drugs: Estimated World Requirements for 2019 — Statistics for 2017* (E/INCB/2018/2) and *Psychotropic Substances: Statistics for 2017 — Assessments of Annual Medical and Scientific Requirements for Substances in Schedules II, III and IV of the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971* (E/INCB/2018/3).

Illicit Distribution and Sales (OPIOIDS) Project, which are, in turn, dependent on the ongoing participation and support of Governments.

As we work together to address the challenges faced and to promote public health and well-being through effective drug control, I wish to highlight that the three international drug control treaties enjoy near universal adherence and that there is virtually no diversion of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors from licit international trade to illicit channels.

The drug control challenges faced may seem daunting, and their impact on public health and well-being wide reaching. Yet, over the past century and since the first intergovernmental meeting on drug control, in 1909, such challenges have been effectively surmounted through cooperative efforts and political will. The same spirit and commitment are needed today. I urge you to study and implement the recommendations contained in the present annual report, the supplement to the report and the report for 2018 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention. INCB stands ready to support Member States with its independent expertise and experience, accumulated over half a century.

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

Viroj Sumyai
President
International Narcotics Control Board