

Chapter III.

Analysis of the world situation

A. Global issues

1. Ensuring access to and availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes during the COVID-19 pandemic and the effect of the pandemic on drug trafficking and the illicit economy

Ensuring access to and availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes during the COVID-19 pandemic

306. Since the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought forth unprecedented challenges to the economies and public health systems of all countries. The lockdowns, border closures and social-distancing measures adopted by most countries to reduce the number of infections and contain the further spread of the virus have put to the test the ability of the international community to ensure adequate access to and availability of internationally controlled drugs for those in need.

307. The global supply chain of medicines has been affected since February 2020 as a result of both the disruption in the manufacturing of key starting materials of active pharmaceutical ingredients and of the ingredients themselves in some major manufacturing countries and the logistical challenges arising from border closures and other social-distancing policies adopted by a number of countries.

308. On top of challenges in sourcing active pharmaceutical ingredients for further processing and generic medicines for consumption, the surge in demand for medicines necessary for the treatment of patients with COVID-19 further reduced the availability of some medicines containing controlled substances. In particular, the Board was aware of and concerned about news regarding shortages of medicines containing controlled substances such as fentanyl and midazolam in some countries, largely driven by significant increases in the need to provide pain relief and sedation for patients admitted into intensive care units with COVID-19.

309. In the light of lower supply and greater demand, a number of contingency measures have been put in place by some countries, including increasing stocks to provide a greater buffer, resorting to alternative drugs, implementing temporary export bans, which have in turn led to shortages of certain medicines in other countries, and importing medicines containing controlled substances registered in other countries.

310. The heightened demand for certain substances has been reflected in part by a number of requests by Governments since March 2020 to increase their estimates and assessments and by a greater number of countries deciding to issue electronic import and export authorizations instead of hard copies of such authorizations. Several Governments also permitted the electronic submission of applications for import and export authorizations for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substance and notifications of no objection for precursor chemicals.

311. Alongside the difficulties faced by most countries in the procurement and sourcing of controlled substances,

disruption in the treatment and service delivery for people with mental health problems and substance use disorders since the onset of COVID-19 warrants specific concern and attention. Based on the rapid assessment of WHO, more than 40 countries experienced disruption in their services for people with mental health problems and substance use disorders, including those related to life-saving emergencies. Community-based outpatient services, services to raise awareness of and prevent mental health problems, and services targeted at older adults and children were among those that were most adversely affected. The lack of access to such essential treatment services as a result of COVID-19 is extremely worrisome, as prolonged social distancing and the associated social isolation impose greater emotional strain on people with mental health problems and substance use disorders and may further increase the number of people suffering from such conditions.

312. Research from UNODC has further confirmed the impact and health consequences of COVID-19 on people who use drugs. Specifically, the mobility restrictions imposed by most Governments caused considerable disruption to access to drug treatment services, clean drug-using equipment and substitution therapy. The lack of access to treatment services and safe practices increased not only the risk of aggravating drug use disorders, but also risks with regard to the health and survival of drug users. For instance, heroin users who could not access opiate-substitution therapy were reported to have suffered severe withdrawal symptoms. Meanwhile, shortages in the supply of drugs also led to the use of alternative means of administration (e.g., injection) by some users, incurring additional risks such as the spread of blood-borne diseases (e.g., HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C).

Measures taken by the Board to ensure access to and availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes during the COVID-19 pandemic

313. In line with its mandate, the Board strives to raise awareness of the importance of ensuring the availability of medicines containing controlled substances during this challenging time. In April 2020, the President of INCB joined a call made in an article in *The Lancet* to extend palliative care during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. On 26 June 2020, to mark the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, he also emphasized the importance of Governments ensuring continued access to controlled medicines for all medical needs related to COVID-19. In addition to joining other

United Nations entities as part of the United Nations COVID-19 response, on 14 August 2020, the Board issued a statement, together with UNODC and WHO, on access to internationally controlled substances during the COVID-19 pandemic.

314. Since the beginning of the pandemic, INCB has conducted further research and enhanced its contact with competent national authorities to ensure the availability of controlled substances. In May 2020, the Board contacted major manufacturing countries to identify challenges encountered in the supply of controlled psychotropic substances. Several manufacturing countries noted a considerable increase in the demand for drugs containing controlled psychotropic substances and the logistical challenges involved in the international trade therein. Most of them, however, did not anticipate further disruptions to their manufacturing activities.

315. The Board also conducted a survey among users of PEN Online to ascertain the impact of the pandemic on legitimate activities related to precursors. Most respondents reported no major effect on the legitimate supply of such substances, apart from the general “lock-down” effect, such as border closures affecting trade in general. This is corroborated by the information available to the Board through the number of pre-export notifications submitted, which showed a decline of 17 per cent for the period January–June 2020 when compared with the same period in previous years.

316. Since March 2020, an increased number of supplementary estimates for narcotic drugs and modifications to assessments for psychotropic substances have been submitted by Governments as a result of COVID-19. They were processed expeditiously and the assessment system for psychotropic substances continues to be updated on a weekly basis. The INCB secretariat has also facilitated communication between importing and exporting countries and assisted in the verification of the legitimacy of import and export authorizations to ensure that international trade is unaffected as much as possible by measures put in place in response to the pandemic.

317. The Board has repeatedly expressed its commitment to supporting Governments in using I2ES and enhancing their knowledge of the international drug control framework through INCB Learning. Such activities have taken on heightened importance during the COVID-19 crisis, as paperless trade and online training become the norm.

318. Since the end of March 2020, Governments have been encouraged to share updates through the I2ES

forum on contingency measures taken as a result of COVID-19 so that trading partners are informed in a timely manner of the latest measures to minimize disruptions to trade. Furthermore, the secretariat conducted several webinars to strengthen the operational capacity of the I2ES community. Between March and June 2020, representatives of the competent national authorities of Bhutan, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Luxembourg, Mozambique, Oman and Panama attended a series of INCB Learning webinars to receive hands-on training on the technical reporting requirements of the international drug control conventions.

319. INCB has been in touch with Member States and international organizations to review the need to update the Model Guidelines for the International Provision of Controlled Medicines for Emergency Medical Care⁶⁹ as the impact of COVID-19 continues to unfold, casting uncertainties on the ability of the international community to ensure the adequate availability of medicines containing controlled substances during emergency and other crisis situations.

320. Looking ahead, the Board will continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on the availability of medicines containing internationally controlled substances and treatment services for mental health problems and substance use disorders, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. To ensure uninterrupted manufacturing and delivery of those medicines for the treatment of patients with COVID-19, and all others in urgent need of them, **the Board recommends that countries review their forecasts for the demand of medicines containing internationally controlled substances and streamline all the necessary administrative and logistical requirements. Countries are also urged to continue the provision of treatment services for mental health problems and substance use disorders as part of essential services. At the international level, the Board encourages all Member States to continue working closely with each other and the Board to ensure the global availability of medicines containing controlled substances, especially for those who are most in need during emergency situations.**

Effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on drug trafficking and the illicit economy

321. The measures introduced by Governments to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have inevitably influenced illicit drug markets, from the manufacture and movement

of drugs to the consumption thereof. Thus far, three developments in drug markets and, in particular, in international drug trafficking, can be identified: (a) a decrease in the availability of drugs and an increase in pricing; (b) an impact on law enforcement capacities; and (c) a change in the *modi operandi* of drug trafficking organizations.

Impact on the availability and pricing of drugs on the illicit market

322. Recent studies suggest that the measures implemented by Governments to address the COVID-19 pandemic have led (at least temporarily) to a shortage of numerous types of drugs at the retail level, coupled with an increase in prices. These impacts vary depending on the type of substance and the geographical location of production, but they affect in particular those substances that are transported alongside licit goods and services. The availability and prices of synthetic and semi-synthetic drugs are also affected by the availability of the requisite precursor chemicals. Wherever illicit drug manufacture is dependent on the cross-border and, in particular, inter-regional flow of precursors, the decline in international trade, which traffickers use to mask illicit shipments of precursors, will inevitably lead to lower availability of those substances and consequent drug manufacture.

323. Unsurprisingly, drug trafficking by air passengers decreased dramatically in the first months of 2020 as most planes for private passenger transport were grounded owing to COVID-19 restrictions. However, the transportation of commercial goods has not seen the same widespread disruption as passenger transport. Therefore, the trafficking of drugs by maritime shipping or commercial air freight has likely continued at similar levels to those before the outbreak of the pandemic. For example, there are indications that international trafficking in heroin, a substance that is primarily transported by land, has been disrupted more than, for instance, trafficking in cocaine, which relies to a large extent on sea routes. Seizures of relatively large amounts of cocaine in European ports confirm the ongoing international trafficking in cocaine.

324. Furthermore, some countries in the European Union noted an increase in drug distribution using post and parcel services. This increase is substantiated by the data uploaded from law enforcement authorities to IONICS, the Board's global intelligence exchange platform for synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances: of 3,298 seizures communicated within the first five months of 2020, 86 per cent were made in relation to postal

⁶⁹WHO, document WHO/PSA/96.17.

services, compared with 46 per cent the year before. Overall, within the European Union, the logistics of drug trafficking generally appear to be most affected in relation to the movement of bulk quantities of drugs between member States, owing to the introduction of border controls.

325. Information from community-based drug prevention and treatment workers suggests that there have been some shortages related to heroin that, in some cases, may have led to heroin being substituted with other dangerous substances. For instance, in Czechia, reports have emerged that heroin has fully disappeared from the street-level drug market owing to COVID-19, which has led to concerns of a potential increase in the use of fentanyl or alcohol in combination with benzodiazepines. Another consequence of these drug shortages is that, in some countries, the purity of local drug supplies has decreased over time as dealers add bulking agents in order to continue to meet persistently high demand. There are also instances where adulterants are used to artificially increase the perceived purity. The most common of these adulterants, in particular in North America, is fentanyl and its many analogues, which could significantly increase overdose and death rates. Some reports show that benzodiazepines have also been used as adulterants, in particular in Canada.

326. Thus, regarding the availability and pricing of drugs, there is evidence that the COVID-19 restrictions have, in some countries, led to a disruption in the availability of drugs and to an increase in prices. Depending on the substance, people who use drugs may have either reduced their overall consumption or switched to even more harmful substitutes. The consumption of drugs typically connected to nightlife and party scenes, such as “ecstasy”, has decreased, given the restrictions on gatherings and the closure of nightclubs and other venues imposed as a measure to control the pandemic.

Impact on law enforcement capacities

327. The shift in operational focus towards duties related to the enforcement of social-distancing requirements, border controls and the fight against falsified medical products has temporarily reduced the availability of law enforcement personnel to conduct investigations into other types of crimes. In countries with already limited law enforcement capacity, this change makes drug trafficking and manufacture less risky and therefore more attractive to criminal organizations.

328. During the first six months of 2020, the number of seizures of new psychoactive substances communicated through IONICS totalled 3,501, which was a decrease of 25 per cent compared with the same period in 2019, when 4,721 incidents were communicated. Similarly, with regard to precursors, the number of incidents communicated through PICS was about one third less in the same time period (the period most likely to have been affected by the pandemic) as compared with the same period in 2019.

Changes in the modi operandi of drug trafficking organizations

329. Evidence shows that one of the approaches of drug traffickers to dealing with challenges is to change existing trafficking routes, modi operandi and, in some cases, even substances, looking for ways to minimize cost and risk and maximize profit.

330. Several reports have revealed that criminals have used falsified certificates, commercial vehicles and corporate uniforms to impersonate food delivery and other key workers in order to deliver drugs. In April 2020, INTERPOL issued an alert warning that criminal organizations were using food delivery services to transport drugs, such as cocaine, cannabis, ketamine and “ecstasy”. Even the increasing demand for supplies such as gloves, masks and hand sanitizer has been exploited in that way by drug traffickers, perhaps in the belief that border controls for those types of goods may be less rigorous.

331. Moreover, open web and darknet markets, social media, secure encrypted communications applications and online forums seem to be playing a more prominent role in the sourcing of drugs at the user level. Home deliveries, less face-to-face dealing and less reliance on cash as a form of payment seem to be trends in individual transactions and it is possible that these behavioural changes, once established, will persist over the longer term. Although the rapid devaluation of cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin at the beginning of the pandemic caused some vendors to pull out of darknet marketplaces, according to the National Cyber-Forensics and Training Alliance of the United States, listings in almost all darknet marketplaces increased between the end of March and the end of April 2020. Drug traffickers and trafficking organizations remain resilient and are adapting their modi operandi to the current situation in many ways, further exploiting online and secure communication channels, as well as adapting transportation modes and trafficking routes.

Measures taken by the Board to counter current developments on the illicit drug market

332. As a practical response to the COVID-19 pandemic and utilizing opportunities for increased connectivity while moving to online work environments, the Board hosted, *inter alia*, a series of interactive hybrid (in-person and online) webinars, discussion sessions and expert group meetings to raise awareness of the new trafficking trends outlined above, exchange experiences and provide practical approaches for law and regulatory enforcement focal points, information exchange being vital for joint efforts to tackle current challenges in drug trafficking.

333. Given that pandemic-related measures are likely to persist for the foreseeable future, accompanied by uncertainty in circumstances affecting both domestic and international travel and an increase in express consignments and home deliveries for vital supplies, which provide ample opportunities for traffickers to hide substances, it has been proved vital for law enforcement authorities to utilize new strategies for dangerous substance interdiction, which the Board's GRIDS programme provides. Evaluation statistics relating to the GRIDS Programme webinars on trafficking trends and approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic, held in May 2020, showed that, overall, 87 per cent of the participants considered the event to be highly valuable for their work in combating global drug trafficking.

334. As drug manufacturers, traffickers and distributors seem to gradually overcome the difficulties initially caused by COVID-19, it is of great importance that law enforcement authorities, which have already been operating with limited counter-narcotics resources during the pandemic, identify these developments and find new ways to counter changes in the nature of trafficking in dangerous substances.

2. Effective drug control as a means of fostering peace and security

335. INCB, within its mandates, continues to support Member States in the implementation of the three international drug control conventions in a comprehensive, integrated and balanced way with a view to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 16 (Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels).

336. In this regard, the Board notes that the provisions of the international drug control conventions related to supply reduction, which include measures and strategies to reduce the quantities of illicit drugs on illicit markets while ensuring the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific needs, together with the provisions of the conventions pertaining to reducing demand for illicit drugs, constitute some of the essential elements of such a comprehensive, integrated and balanced approach. The Board wishes to highlight that the provisions of the international drug control treaties related to criminal justice, covering issues such as penal provisions, international judicial and law enforcement cooperation, asset forfeiture and confiscation, can serve as effective legal instruments in addressing not only drug-related offences, but also any associated criminal activity, such as organized crime, corruption and money-laundering.

337. Target 16.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals is to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. In this regard, the Board recognizes that, under the pretext of the "war on drugs", policies in some countries have led to disproportionate and overly repressive responses without respect for due process and the rule of law. Such responses contribute to an increase in violence and related death rates. The Board has called, on numerous occasions, for national drug control systems to be based on the international drug control conventions, the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem and the Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening Our Actions at the National, Regional and International Levels to Accelerate the Implementation of Our Joint Commitments to Address and Counter the World Drug Problem, in all of which Member States expressed their commitment to implementing a comprehensive, integrated and balanced approach, principles of proportionality in the determination of penalties and response measures, shared responsibility and respect for human rights and liberties and the rule of law. The Board continues to engage in close dialogue with all Member States, as well as the non-governmental sector and academia, with a view to promoting those commitments.

338. Target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals is to significantly reduce, by 2030, illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime. The Security Council, in its resolution 2482 (2019), acknowledged that terrorists could benefit from organized crime, whether domestic or transnational, such as trafficking in drugs, and called upon Member States to strengthen their efforts, as well as international and

regional cooperation, to counter the threat to the international community posed by the illicit cultivation and production of, trafficking in and consumption of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, which could significantly contribute to the financial resources of terrorist groups, and to act in accordance with the principle of common and shared responsibility in addressing and countering the world drug problem, including through cooperation against trafficking in illicit drugs and precursor chemicals.

339. 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”, also reflects the international community’s commitment to addressing the links between drug-related crimes and other forms of organized crime, including money-laundering, corruption and other criminal activities, in line with the international drug control conventions and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the United Nations Convention against Corruption and the international instruments on countering terrorism. In the outcome document, Member States recommend improving the availability and quality of statistical information and analysis on illicit drug cultivation, production and manufacturing, drug trafficking, money-laundering and illicit financial flows, including for appropriate reflection in reports of UNODC and INCB, in order to better evaluate the impact of such crimes and further enhance the effectiveness of criminal justice responses in that regard.

340. In a statement on 18 December 2013 (S/PRST/2013/22), the President of the Security Council highlighted the Council’s concern over the increasing links between drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organized crime, including trafficking in arms and in persons, and terrorism, as well as its concern over the growing violence resulting from activities of criminal organizations involved in drug trafficking in West Africa and the Sahel region. The Council emphasized the need to enhance interregional cooperation and coordination in order to develop inclusive and effective strategies to combat, in a comprehensive and integrated manner, transnational organized crime, including trafficking in drugs and arms, and activities of terrorist groups. The Council called for increased international cooperation, including with UNODC and INCB, and encouraged Member States to ratify and implement the international drug control treaties.

341. In Colombia, despite the signature of the peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP) in 2017 and the

continued efforts of the national Government to combat drug trafficking, illicit coca bush cultivation continued, and with it the financing of illegal activities by criminal groups. Despite the efforts of national agencies, the country continues to face threats from other activities related to drug trafficking, such as trafficking in arms, terrorism, money-laundering and corruption. There has also been an increase in violence, resulting in the deterioration of the security situation in some cities of Colombia.

342. Linkages between insurgency and terrorism and drug trafficking in Afghanistan have been repeatedly highlighted by the United Nations and the Board. Despite the fact that the gross value of the Afghan opiate economy fell by two thirds, from between \$4.1 billion and \$6.6 billion in 2017 to between \$1.2 billion and \$2.2 billion in 2018, the opiate economy still accounted for 6–11 per cent of the country’s gross domestic product and exceeded the value of its officially recorded licit exports of goods and services. With a view to supporting the efforts of Afghanistan to address the illicit drug economy and other drug-related challenges, and to mobilize global support in that regard, the Board invoked article 14 bis of the 1961 Convention as amended in May 2018, which allowed it to recommend to the competent United Nations organs and to the specialized agencies that technical or financial assistance, or both, be provided to the Government of Afghanistan in support of its efforts to carry out its obligations under that Convention.

343. The strong financial “incentives” offered by drug trafficking to organized criminal groups were highlighted by UNODC in its 2011 report entitled *Estimating Illicit Financial Flows Resulting from Drug Trafficking and Other Transnational Organized Crimes*. In that report, it was pointed out that the largest income for transnational organized criminal groups came from illicit drugs, which accounted for some 20 per cent of all crime proceeds, about half of transnational organized crime proceeds and 0.6–0.9 per cent of global gross domestic product. In turn, drug-related proceeds available for money-laundering through the financial system were equivalent to between 0.4 per cent and 0.6 per cent of global gross domestic product.

344. In its statements regarding the situation in Afghanistan, which are applicable to any country or region seriously affected by drug trafficking and use and associated criminality, the Board has highlighted the fact that drug control is a cross-cutting issue and that, unless local, national, regional and international efforts to address it are effectively pursued, poverty, insurgency, terrorism and obstacles to development will remain unaddressed.

345. In this regard, the Board wishes to call upon Member States to counter drug trafficking and related violence through comprehensive and balanced measures. These measures include effective prevention and criminal justice responses and alternative development initiatives. Member States should also ensure that responses to drug-related criminal conduct are proportionate and founded upon respect for human rights and dignity, in line with the three international drug control conventions, international human rights instruments and the rule of law.

3. Collective approaches to drug terminology

346. Strengthening international cooperation in drug control requires a collective understanding of common challenges and the identification of mutual approaches to key concepts and issues. Some challenges in promoting the consistent application of the international drug control treaties have resulted from shifts over time in the terminology used to describe issues related to drug control. The Board routinely takes note of changes to drug-related lexicons and developments in the terminology used by Member States, intergovernmental organizations, academia and civil society in relation to the world drug problem.

347. Since the drafting of the most recent international drug control convention, the 1988 Convention, there have been changes to the terminology commonly used to describe various aspects of the world drug problem. These changes have resulted from major advancements in science, as well as substantial societal developments and increased understanding of drug use and drug dependence.

348. Some terminology, although not found in the international drug control conventions, has been used by the international community and included in intergovernmental processes to reflect both advancements in science and evolving societal approaches to drug control, in particular from the perspectives of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. Changes to drug-related terminology have come from changes in the broader societal context, such as the increasing awareness of the importance of inclusivity in language. For example, although the preamble to the 1961 Convention includes a reference to concern for the health and welfare of mankind, the Board keeps within the full spirit of the Convention when it replaces the term “mankind” with “humankind” or “humanity”, which are also translations of the terms used in other languages in which the Convention was written. The principles in the conventions continue to be upheld,

even as certain word choices are avoided in the interests of gender-inclusive language.

349. The drug terminology used in resolutions and decisions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and in publications in the field of international drug control has changed over time. The Board notes that some changes to terminology have been based on new and evolving challenges or the need to better safeguard human rights protections and place people and their needs at the centre of drug control policies. The term “drug use”, for example, has been mostly preferred in recent publications over the term “drug abuse”, owing to perceptions that the word “abuse” can, in some instances, result in the further stigmatization of people who consume drugs.

350. The careful use of terminology can therefore aid in preventing the stigmatization of drug use and dependence. Those working in the field of drug control have had to take a cautious approach to the use of terms in order to be mindful of the possible effects of language on the protection of human rights. The Board takes note of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 61/11, entitled “Promoting non-stigmatizing attitudes to ensure the availability of, access to and delivery of health, care and social services for drug users”, and affirms the Commission’s guidance that Member States can prevent social marginalization and promote non-stigmatizing attitudes, including in the development and implementation of scientific evidence-based policies.

351. The Board regularly and carefully examines the use of drug-related concepts and other lexicons, such as the lexicon used by WHO. In its report for 2017, for example, the Board specifically indicated that precision was required in the use of terminology concerning the medical use of cannabinoids. Such precision and the collective aim of standardization can help the Board in the coming years with data collection across countries and periods of time and facilitate the effective monitoring of treaty compliance.

352. In line with the Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening Our Actions at the National, Regional and International Levels to Accelerate the Implementation of Our Joint Commitments to Address and Counter the World Drug Problem,⁷⁰ the Board seeks to promote the collection, analysis and sharing of quality and comparable data. This will require the continued identification of any scientific or legal ambiguities in the terminology chosen

⁷⁰See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2019, Supplement No. 8 (E/2019/28)*, chap. I, sect. B.

in the drafting of drug policies and laws. Member States draw distinctions in drug terminology on the basis of their own national and local understandings and interpretations of the conventions and public health priorities.

353. In this context, the Board urges Governments to continually examine any drug terminology that has ambiguous usage, or potentially stigmatizing effects, and that might have an impact on the ability of the international community to cooperate effectively on and jointly counter the world drug problem.

4. Genetic engineering and its implications for the cultivation of cannabis and production of cannabis derivatives in the context of the international drug control conventions

354. Selective breeding techniques have been used for centuries in the agricultural sector to maximize desirable traits in plants and animals. However, they require careful cultivation or breeding of multiple generations in order to maximize certain traits and minimize others. The rise of genetic engineering has, for several decades now, allowed the agricultural sector to modify crops to increase their yield, improve their resilience to pests and enable them to grow in harsh environments. Although many genetic engineering techniques may be unreliable, expensive or difficult to execute, recent advancements in genetic engineering technologies now allow for highly accurate, effective and cheaper genetic engineering of organisms. These new technologies are also being applied to the cannabis plant and the production of cannabinoids.

355. In article 1, paragraph 1 (b), of the 1961 Convention as amended, cannabis is defined as the flowering or fruiting top of the cannabis plant (excluding the seeds and leaves when not accompanied by the tops) from which the resin has not been extracted. These portions of the plant contain the most THC and other cannabinoids. Moreover, studies of the cannabis plant over the last few years have found that, beyond THC and CBD, over 100 cannabinoids are found naturally in the plant.

356. As more jurisdictions permit the cultivation and use of cannabis for medical purposes, researchers and the private sector are investigating the use of genetic engineering technologies to modify the cannabis plant to optimize industrial processes and more precisely adjust the yields of the types of cannabinoids being produced. Research is also being undertaken on modifying other

organisms to produce cannabinoids that they would not otherwise produce naturally.

357. As the flowering top represents only a fraction of the cannabis plant's biomass, cultivators are seeking ways to increase yields of cannabinoids from the plant. To this end, patents have already been filed using recently developed technologies to modify the cannabis plant to grow trichomes or produce cannabinoids in other parts of the plant beyond the flowering top, leaves or seeds, effectively making the entire cannabis plant a producer of cannabinoids.

358. In addition to the modification of the cannabis plant, some technologies may allow the production of cannabinoids without using the cannabis plant at all. Through initial research conducted in 2019, a method was found of modifying a kind of yeast that could allow for the large-scale fermentation of cannabinoids from simple sugars, independent of cannabis cultivation.

359. Research into both the genetic modification of the cannabis plant and the yeast-based method of cannabinoid production has also indicated the possibility of using these technologies to produce cannabinoids such as cannabigerol, cannabichromene and cannabinol in far larger quantities than can be produced through selective cultivation.

360. As the system of control established under the 1961 Convention as amended includes controls of the flowering top, with limited control on the leaves and seeds, these developments pose questions with regard to the control of the cannabis plant if it were modified to produce cannabinoids throughout the plant and beyond the flowering top.

361. Advances in technology also allow for the possibility for its abuse, in particular, through the misuse of these new genetic engineering technologies to illicitly produce drugs. The method of cannabinoid production through genetically modified yeast makes the need for large "grow houses" or clandestine cultivation of cannabis unnecessary.

362. The Board calls upon Governments to take note of the advances in genetic engineering and biotechnology in the cultivation of cannabis, as well as other technologies that can allow for the manufacture of cannabinoids through non-conventional means. The Board also calls upon Governments to ensure that these technologies are appropriately used with respect to the international drug control conventions and to take steps to prevent the misuse of such technologies in the illicit manufacture of drugs.

B. Africa

A growing number of countries in Africa are now permitting the cultivation and export of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes, and some countries have authorized the use of cannabis for medical purposes.

The lack of data from many countries in Africa on the trafficking in and use of drugs remains a major impediment to fully assessing the drug situation in the region and hinders the ability of countries and the international community to respond to these challenges.

1. Major developments

363. Four countries in Africa have estimates approved by INCB on the cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes. Some other countries in Africa have enacted legislative and policy changes with regard to cannabis. Most of those changes would allow for the cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes, although in some cases only for export, not domestic use. In addition, some countries have modified their schedules of control to reduce or remove restrictions on the use of certain cannabis-based preparations for medical purposes.

364. **The Board wishes to recall that Governments that permit the cultivation of cannabis have an obligation to establish control measures in accordance with the 1961 Convention as amended. Such measures include the establishment of an agency responsible for designating areas and issuing licences for cultivating, purchasing and taking physical possession of such crops as soon as possible and having the exclusive right of importing, exporting and wholesale trading and maintaining stocks other than those held by manufacturers.**

365. ECOWAS released the report of the West African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use in late 2019, the first-ever report on drug trafficking and drug use in West Africa, with the support of UNODC and the European Union. The report provides an analysis of drug trafficking and drug use data provided by the Network's focal points for the period 2014–2017.

366. The Ministry of Health of Morocco released a national protocol to address drug overdoses by persons who inject drugs in the country. The protocol is aimed at providing information for health officials, officials outside the health sector and other relevant actors across the country who might have to deal with a drug overdose situation.

367. Following the adoption of the Narcotic Control Commission Bill 2019, Ghana has decriminalized some minor drug use offences and refocused its drug control efforts using a health-based approach for persons who use drugs.

368. In August 2020, the Government of South Africa submitted to the Parliament the Cannabis for Private Purposes Bill of 2020, amending its Drugs and Drug Trafficking Act (1992) to allow the cultivation and use of cannabis by adults for personal use following a 2018 decision of the country's Constitutional Court. Combined with the amendments made to the Medicines and Related Substances Act of 1965 in May 2020, the non-medical use and cultivation of cannabis by adults in private spaces is decriminalized in South Africa. Public use of and trafficking in cannabis remain punishable offences.

369. Despite the lack of data from many countries, the information that is available suggests that Africa continues to face major challenges regarding trafficking in drugs. Countries in West and North Africa continue to seize shipments of cocaine trafficked from South America destined for Europe. Cannabis continues to be widely trafficked within Africa, while cannabis resin is heavily trafficked in North Africa, both for sale in the subregion and for trafficking onward to Europe. Trafficking in heroin remains a major concern for African countries in the Indian Ocean region, whereas countries in other parts of Africa seize only small quantities of the drug. While no major seizures of illicitly manufactured or falsified tramadol have been reported in the region, available drug use prevalence data suggest that the substance continues to be trafficked.

370. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of countries and international organizations took measures to ensure that persons affected by drug use disorders were able to continue receiving treatment and to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission during such treatment.

371. In Nigeria, UNODC partnered with health workers across the country, establishing a network to provide assistance by telephone to drug users. In addition, the European Union, through the UNODC project entitled "Response to drugs and related organized crime", provided personal protective equipment to 25 drug treatment centres across Nigeria to ensure that health workers and patients were protected while services are provided.

372. The Ministry of Health of Algeria, in cooperation with UNODC and UNAIDS, provided material support, including personal protective equipment, to several non-governmental organizations, allowing them to reach drug

users individually while minimizing their risk of contracting COVID-19 at hospitals and treatment centres. Similarly, UNODC supplied personal protective equipment to a major drug treatment centre in Dakar so that patients were protected while receiving treatment.

373. The Government of Kenya opened an additional methadone dispensary in Shimo Le Tewa Prison to relieve congestion and reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission among prisoners being treated for drug use. The Moroccan Association of Addictology issued guidelines for drug treatment professionals to ensure that drug treatment services continued during the COVID pandemic.

2. Regional cooperation

374. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union, at its 905th meeting, in January 2020, issued a statement regarding the political and security situation in Guinea-Bissau. While noting the political progress made in the country, the Council appealed to the international community to support Guinea-Bissau in confronting drug trafficking, which could threaten efforts to ensure stability, democratic governance and the rule of law in the country.

375. As part of a review of the political and security situation in Guinea-Bissau, the Security Council, on 28 February 2020, adopted resolution 2512 (2020), in which, *inter alia*, it called upon authorities in the country and the international community at large to step up efforts to combat drug trafficking and other transnational crimes. In that resolution, the Council also requested the Secretary-General, through collaboration with international donors, to ensure that the UNODC country office in Guinea-Bissau be sufficiently resourced in order to assist the country in its efforts to counter drug trafficking following the withdrawal of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau.

376. As of February 2020, three additional countries had signed the treaty for the establishment of the African Medicines Agency, bringing the number of signatories of the treaty to 14 countries, 1 less than the 15 required for the treaty to enter into force. Once established, the Agency is expected to coordinate the regulatory system for medicines and drugs among States members of the African Union, provide regulatory guidance to countries and facilitate further cooperation among countries to ensure access to safe and effective medical products in the region.

377. The third annual meeting of the African Medicines Quality Forum took place in Abuja from

25 to 28 February 2020. The meeting was hosted by the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control of Nigeria in collaboration with the African Union and other international organizations. The meeting brought together drug control organizations from many African countries and scientists and stakeholders from various health- and drug-related agencies to deliberate on a quality-assurance model for drugs and medicines for countries in Africa.

378. During the second half of 2020, INCB coordinated access to IONICS and GRIDS intelligence and conducted 10 training sessions for law and regulatory enforcement officers from 11 countries in the region. A total of 113 officers from Benin, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ghana, Libya, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, the Sudan and Tunisia participated in training on monitoring new psychoactive substances and emerging synthetic opioids, as well as training in the safe handling of fentanyl-related substances and interdiction approaches. The officials also received practical training on the Board's secure communications platforms that allow for the exchange of information on dangerous substances that are not internationally controlled.

3. National legislation, policy and action

379. Several countries in Africa have revised their national legislation to permit the cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes for export or to permit the import and use of certain cannabis preparations for medical use. In some cases, control measures for cannabis plant have changed, and some countries have changed the placement of THC and CBD in their schedules of control.

380. In addition to cannabis-related legislative and policy reforms, several countries have launched new national drug control plans to better address their respective drug control problems. Further, Ghana has updated its legislation, revising its penal code to decriminalize minor drug use offences.

381. At the end of 2019, Togo launched a new five-year plan for the period 2020–2024 to counter drug use and trafficking in the country, allocating financing to implement the plan. The plan is aimed at strengthening coordination among drug control bodies in the country and enabling authorities to freeze and seize the assets of criminal organizations.

382. The President of Seychelles launched the country's new National Drug Control Master Plan 2019–2023 in

December 2019. The plan is focused on improving the well-being and safety of the population at large. The President noted that demand reduction and treatment for persons who use drugs were of critical importance in combating the country's drug problem.

383. In February 2020, the Government of Seychelles adopted the Misuse of Drugs (Cannabidiol-based Products for Medical Purposes) Regulations 2020, amending the country's drug control legislation to permit the use of CBD for medical purposes. Under the amendment, duly authorized medical practitioners are permitted to prescribe CBD-based medicines for qualifying medical conditions. The amendment does not specify which qualifying medical conditions may be treated with CBD but empowers the country's Public Health Commissioner to determine them by decree.

384. The Parliament of Malawi approved the Cannabis Regulation Bill of 2020, in February 2020, permitting the cultivation of cannabis for medical, industrial and scientific purposes. The bill also establishes a national cannabis agency to issue licences to cultivate cannabis and regulate the industry within Malawi. According to official reports, the cultivation of cannabis under the framework of the Cannabis Regulation Bill could be permitted as early as 2021.

385. In March 2020, the Parliament of Ghana approved the Narcotics Control Commission Bill 2019, which introduces a major overhaul of the country's drug control legislation and policy. Under the bill, a health-based approach is emphasized in addressing drug use, and some minor drug use offences are decriminalized. In addition, the bill alters the country's institutional framework for drug control by giving the country's Narcotics Control Board the status of a Commission, with enhanced powers. Also under the bill, the cultivation of cannabis for the production of CBD for medical purposes is permitted, and CBD is removed from national control.

386. In an official communication to the Board in April 2020, Uganda reported that it had begun permitting the cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes. The Government had drafted guidelines to assist the Minister of Health in determining which cultivators should be granted licences to cultivate cannabis. However, final approval of the guidelines and the establishment of the national cannabis agency were delayed due to lockdown measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

387. In May 2020, the Minister of Health of South Africa issued Notice R586, further amending the schedules

of the country's Medicines and Related Substances Act of 1965 and codifying changes in the control of cannabis-related substances made by the Minister in May 2019. Under the Notice, cannabis plant, THC and dronabinol were removed from schedule 7 (the country's highest level of control) of the Act. Certain low-dose CBD preparations from raw plant material were descheduled entirely. Also under Notice R586, cannabis plant raw material was descheduled if it is cultivated, possessed or consumed by an adult, in private for personal consumption. According to the Ministry of Health, those amendments bring the Act into line with a 2018 decision of the Constitutional Court of South Africa.

388. In a related development, on 5 August 2020, the South African Cabinet submitted to Parliament the Cannabis for Private Purposes Bill of 2020. The bill, together with the above-mentioned changes made to the Medicines and Related Substances Act of 1965, amends the country's Drugs and Drug Trafficking Act of 1992 (Act No. 140 of 1992) in relation to the personal cultivation of cannabis. The Cannabis for Private Purposes Bill of 2020 is aimed at bringing the country's drug control legislation into line with a decision by the Constitutional Court of South Africa in 2018 that struck down portions of that legislation. The Court suspended its ruling for 24 months to give the Government time to amend the country's drug control laws to permit the private cultivation and consumption of cannabis by adults. At present, private personal cultivation and consumption of cannabis is decriminalized in South Africa. The sale of cannabis and consumption of the drug in public remain illegal and subject to punishable offences.

389. In June 2020, South Africa launched the country's new National Drug Master Plan for the period 2019–2024, the fourth such plan put into effect in the country. The Plan was developed following an evaluation of the country's plan for the period 2013–2017, which had led to recommendations for key authorities at several levels of government in the country to be strengthened and for a focus on evidence-based interventions to prevent and treat substance use. The National Drug Master Plan includes seven goals to address the country's drug problem, including ensuring the availability of controlled substances for licit medical use and countering the expanding use of new psychoactive substances. In addition, the Master Plan contains a reference to the 2018 ruling by the Constitutional Court of South Africa permitting the private use of cannabis, and it is noted therein that, while the Government would modify national legislation to comply with the ruling, the Master Plan remained a framework to curb cannabis use in the country.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

390. Available information suggests that Africa remains a major transit region for drug trafficking, as well as a growing market for drugs. Seizure data suggest that, as has been the trend in recent years, West and North Africa continue to be a key hub for the trafficking of cocaine from South America to Europe. Seizures of cannabis and cannabis resin are reported by all countries for which data are available, and there is significant trafficking in those drugs in North Africa, both for sale within the subregion and for trafficking onward to Europe. The seizures of falsified and non-pharmaceutical tramadol, an opioid analgesic not under international control, reported by some countries in West Africa suggest that the trafficking in that drug continues to be a challenge for the subregion.

391. Law enforcement authorities in Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Morocco and Tunisia each reported multiple seizures of cocaine in 2020, seizures being effected in ports or on ships in their territorial waters. In one significant seizure in February 2020, the naval forces of Côte d'Ivoire seized more than 400 kg of cocaine from a ship in the country's coastal waters. Several other countries in other parts of Africa also reported seizures in the first part of 2020, although of small quantities. In comparison with 2019, when Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia provided official reports regarding their seizures of cocaine, the lack of seizure data for 2020 from some parts of Africa has made it difficult to determine the trend for trafficking in cocaine. Notably, although several significant seizures were made in West and North Africa in 2020, they were not as large as the multi-ton seizures of cocaine effected by the authorities of Cabo Verde in January and August 2019.

392. Cannabis continues to be the most-trafficked drug in Africa and is also trafficked to Europe, mostly from North Africa, with reports that in some cases the trafficking route goes through countries of the western Sahel. As in previous years, most trafficking in cannabis resin occurred in North Africa, with Morocco reporting seizing a total of more than 75 tons of that substance, the result of numerous interdictions in the first half of 2020. Similarly, authorities in Algeria conducted several interdictions, seizing a total of more than 18 tons of cannabis resin since late 2019. Senegal reported a significant seizure of 5.1 tons of cannabis resin. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency of Nigeria reported seizing a total of 7.4 tons of cannabis in 2020. Regarding trafficking in cannabis herb, Benin, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, Senegal, Seychelles, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia

reported seizures ranging from several hundred kilograms to hundreds of tons, quantities that are comparable to those seized in previous years.

393. Seizure data suggest that trafficking in heroin continues to be a major issue in African countries of the Indian Ocean region, including Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles and the United Republic of Tanzania, but trafficking in that drug is reported in other parts of Africa as well. Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Morocco all reported total seizures of heroin ranging from a few kilograms to several hundred kilograms in 2019. The lack of data makes it difficult to determine year-to-year trends in the trafficking in heroin in Africa, as the amounts seized have risen somewhat in a few countries but fallen in others.

394. For countries in the region, there are only very limited official data on trafficking in other drugs for the present reporting period. Several countries in Africa reported seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants, related precursor chemicals and other substances, although in smaller quantities than the other drugs discussed above. Seizures of "ecstasy" and other hallucinogens were reported by Morocco and Tunisia.

395. Trafficking in tramadol, a synthetic opioid not under international control, including illicitly manufactured non-pharmaceutical preparations containing that substance, continues to pose a challenge for the region. Few official data are available regarding trafficking in tramadol during the reporting period. However, data on the prevalence of use of tramadol, both pharmaceutical and falsified tramadol, suggest that trafficking in the substance remains an issue for the region.

5. Prevention and treatment

396. The lack of prevalence data and information on drug use in Africa continues to be an impediment to determining the extent of drug use. It also hinders Governments and the international community as they seek to respond effectively by means of evidence-based drug use prevention and treatment programmes. Nonetheless, on the basis of the limited information available, drug use in the region appears to be increasing, and some countries report drug use rates for some drugs that are higher than the global prevalence rate. Cannabis continues to be the main drug used in Africa, along with tramadol, which is used in some parts of Africa.

397. **The Board reiterates its call upon all States in the region to develop mechanisms to improve the collection of information on drug use prevalence with the aim of**

developing drug control and treatment strategies that are evidence-based and tailored to each country's specific needs.

398. In 2019, the Ministry of Health of Morocco released a national protocol to prevent and manage drug overdoses by persons who use drugs. The goal of the protocol is to provide guidance to health practitioners, emergency responders and non-health professionals who may be faced with an overdose situation. Implementation will be dependent on the provision of training for relevant people, information-sharing, the distribution of naloxone and the granting of authority for non-health-care professionals to administer naloxone in response to an overdose situation outside a hospital setting. The protocol is distributed to relevant stakeholders in Morocco, together with a supporting information kit. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Health modified the protocol in line with the guidelines of the Moroccan Association of Addictology to ensure ease of access to treatment services during the pandemic.

399. In late 2019, ECOWAS released the first-ever report of the West African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use, for the period 2014–2017, which was produced with the assistance and support of UNODC and the European Union. The report provides an analysis of the data provided by the Network's focal points on drug trafficking and drug use in States members of ECOWAS. As stated in the report, in the reporting period, 7 of every 10 persons accessing drug treatment services (not counting cases related to alcohol use) indicated that cannabis was their primary drug of use. Further, cocaine was the most common stimulant used. The rapid rise of opioid use in the subregion was also noted in the report, with tramadol use driving the phenomenon, along with significant use of heroin in some ECOWAS countries.

400. According to the *UNODC World Drug Report 2020*, cannabis is the most-used drug in Africa; approximately 45 million people have used the drug in the past year. Pharmaceutical opioids, in particular tramadol, constitute the next most-used category of substances; prevalence data are available only for North Africa but they show that approximately 7.4 million people in that subregion used tramadol in the past year. Despite major gaps in prevalence data, the *World Drug Report 2020* noted that cocaine, amphetamine, "ecstasy" and other drugs were used in the region, but in limited amounts compared with cannabis and tramadol.

401. In March 2020, the Ministry of Health of Ethiopia, in collaboration with UNODC, organized a workshop on the national implementation of drug policy commitments.

More than 40 participants, including high-level representatives of the federal Government and regional governments of Ethiopia and representatives of the Office of the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, the African Union, civil society and non-governmental organizations with mandates related to drugs and substance use. One important topic discussed during the meeting was the fact that Ethiopia was being targeted by drug traffickers as a destination and transit country for illicitly manufactured drugs. The workshop concluded with the establishment of a new national multisectoral technical working group on drugs, to be led by the Ethiopian Food and Drug Administration.

402. Burkina Faso strengthened its capacity to treat people who use drugs by deploying 20 specialists from its Ministry of Health and from civil society groups to each district in the country, in line with the ECOWAS Universal Treatment Curriculum of the Colombo Plan Drug Advisory Programme. The health authorities of Burkina Faso opened a new specialized unit for drug treatment in Yalgado Ouédraogo University Hospital in Ouagadougou.

403. Mauritius has been experiencing a rise in the use of synthetic drugs for several years. The number of offences related to synthetic drugs has doubled since 2015, reaching 1,059 cases in 2018. The most-used synthetic drugs in Mauritius include synthetic cannabinoids, seizures of which increased from approximately 1 kg in 2015 to 224 kg in 2018.

404. The United Republic of Tanzania reported that, by the end of 2019, the country had established eight opiate substitution therapy centres using methadone to treat people who inject drugs and 65 recovery homes to support people who use drugs. The Government is also in the process of establishing an opiate substitution therapy programme in the country's prisons, with the support of UNODC.

C. Americas

Central America and the Caribbean

The region of Central America and the Caribbean remains a transit route for cocaine being trafficked to North America, Europe and rest of the world. Crime and drug-related violence continue to be key issues of concern in Central American countries.

In addition to cocaine use, there is concern regarding the use of amphetamines and pharmaceutical stimulants by local communities.

1. Major developments

405. Central America and the Caribbean remains a major trans-shipment area for illicit drugs, in particular cocaine, trafficked from countries in South America to destination markets in North America and Europe. Owing to their geographical location along the cocaine route, countries in Central America have also been used for the refinement of cocaine.

406. Drug trafficking and other types of transnational crime continue to be a cause of corruption, violence and social and political instability in deprived areas in the region. In Central America, *maras* (street gangs) continue to be associated with drug trafficking. A criminal gang known as “Bagdad”, composed of a number of smaller criminal gangs, is expanding its criminal activities, including trafficking in illicit drugs, in Panama. In El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, the countries that make up the so-called “Northern Triangle”, the street gangs Mara Salvatrucha (MS13) and Barrio 18 have continued their illicit activities, including drug trafficking and the collection of extortion payments, which have a corrosive impact on the lives of citizens and the economies of the countries.

407. The restrictive measures implemented by Governments at the borders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in the disruption of drug trafficking routes by air, as well as a significant decrease in trafficking by land. Nonetheless, traffickers’ attempts to transport large amounts of cocaine by sea via Central America and the Caribbean have continued, as corroborated by significant seizures of the substance in the region in 2020.

408. To address the increasing presence of transnational criminal organizations and their alliances with local criminal groups in countries and territories of the Caribbean, drug control experts from the region point to the need to further increase maritime domain awareness in the Caribbean and enhance cooperation with international partners, as well as to the importance of developing and implementing national and regional maritime security strategies to counter drug trafficking and other related crimes.

409. Synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances that have become prevalent in Latin America and the Caribbean in the past decade now warrant the same level of monitoring and surveillance as cannabis, cocaine and other common drugs under international control. The Board noted that Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago have established national early warning systems to gather and disseminate information on emerging drugs and related drug threats and that other countries in the region, including Costa Rica and Jamaica, have taken steps towards the creation of their own early warning systems.

2. Regional cooperation

410. In October 2019, representatives of Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago were invited to attend the first Caribbean Youth Forum on Drug Use Prevention. The main aim of the Forum, hosted by the Executive Secretariat of CICAD, was to promote youth leadership in drug demand reduction by developing youth-led initiatives.

411. A number of countries from Central America and the Caribbean, including Belize, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, and Trinidad and Tobago, participated in the Orion V International Naval Campaign to Combat Drug Trafficking carried out in the Pacific, the Atlantic and the Caribbean in 2020.

412. In 2020, CICAD and UNODC continued providing a number of workshops and training sessions, including online courses, to the competent national authorities of the countries in the region. The training activities were focused, among others, on measures to care for front-line officers during the COVID-19 pandemic; the impact of COVID-19 on the structures of organized crime; illicit traffic using air cargo and courier services; and HIV prevention, treatment and support for people who use drugs.

413. In June 2020, under INCB Learning, regional online seminars were held on the assessment of national needs for internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes and overall implementation of the provisions of the international drug control conventions, including compliance with reporting requirements. The seminars, which form part of the ongoing dialogue between the Board and national competent authorities, were attended by representatives of eight countries from Central America and the Caribbean and South America (Belize, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras and Panama).

414. In July 2020, INCB coordinated access to and training on IONICS for intelligence officers from the Caribbean Community's regional communications centres, enhancing the exchange of information that supports international investigations into trafficking in dangerous substances. In August 2020, INCB provided training to over 240 law and regulatory enforcement officers from Central America and the Caribbean and South America (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago) on emerging new psychoactive substances, opioids and fentanyl-related substances, and precursors information exchange. In a separate event facilitated by the Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council, over 70 officers from Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Curaçao, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago received training about the changing situation with regard to trafficking in emerging new psychoactive substances, opioids and fentanyls and information exchange using the INCB global secure communication platforms.

415. In 2020, the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies II (COPOLAD II), financed by the European Commission, concluded its activities, which had spanned four and a half years and had been focused on the exchange of information, experiences, good practices and lessons learned, with the aim of consolidating effective policies on the basis of scientific evidence.

3. National legislation, policy and action

416. In 2019 and 2020, several countries in the region reviewed or adopted national drug control strategies. The Government of Antigua and Barbuda adopted the National Anti-Drug Strategy Plan for the period 2019–2023, the aims of which are to reduce demand for illicit drugs, delay the onset of drug use and strengthen cooperation between key stakeholders. To respond to drug use in the country, Barbados has revised its plan of action for the period 2020–2025. The Government of Costa Rica approved its National Strategy on Drugs and Associated Crimes for the period 2020–2030 and its National Plan on Drugs, Money-Laundering and Financing of Terrorism for the period 2020–2024. The Government of Saint Lucia has reviewed a new drug strategy for the period 2020–2024 that is aimed at discouraging the early onset of alcohol and drug use and to facilitate effective treatment for and the rehabilitation and reintegration of drug users. The Board noted that Trinidad and Tobago passed the Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Bill to amend the regulation of cannabis use for non-medical purposes.

417. In December 2019, the National Anti-Drug Commission of El Salvador released its National Strategy for Institutional Strengthening in the Interdiction of Drugs and Chemical Precursors. The strategy is aimed at strengthening compliance with the objectives and goals of the National Anti-Drug Strategy for the period 2016–2021. A new strategy for the strengthening of drug and precursor interdictions was also adopted by the Government of Costa Rica in 2019.

418. Several countries in Central America and the Caribbean, including Jamaica and Nicaragua, expressed concern with respect to the proliferation and marketing of illicit drugs and new psychoactive substances, as well as trafficking in precursors over the Internet, the dispatch of such substances in postal services, and the use of cryptocurrencies to pay for them. The importance of assessing the risk posed by e-commerce enterprises to international trade in the context of preventing drug trafficking was noted. In that regard, the Board noted efforts by Antigua and Barbuda to develop national legislation to regulate the use of virtual currencies to comply with recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

419. Since 2015, a number of countries in Central America and the Caribbean, including the Bahamas, Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras,

Nicaragua, and Trinidad and Tobago, have reported outdoor illicit cannabis cultivation in their territories. In Guatemala, the methods used to grow cannabis have been refined in recent years, which has resulted in a higher quality of the drug, as well as an increased price on the black market. In Honduras, cannabis is often cultivated by farmers with a low level of education who are recruited by criminal organizations. Locally produced cannabis herb is mostly trafficked and consumed within the region. In recent years, the most frequently mentioned country of origin, departure and transit of seized cannabis herb within Central America was Guatemala. In the Caribbean, it was Jamaica. In 2019, seizures of cannabis herb were reported by Costa Rica (16.8 tons), Honduras (16 tons), Panama (12.9 tons), Nicaragua (3.6 tons), Guatemala (1.9 tons) and El Salvador (1.3 tons). Costa Rica reported the eradication of a total of 11.6 ha of illicit cannabis cultivation in 2019, which was approximately the same as that eradicated in 2018.

420. According to the National Strategy for Institutional Strengthening in the Interdiction of Drugs and Chemical Precursors of El Salvador, about 84 per cent of the cocaine (base and hydrochloride) produced in South America is transported from south to north on the eastern Pacific Ocean. The main destinations for drugs transported by sea are the coasts of Guatemala and Mexico or Costa Rica and Panama, before their final overland transport to the United States. In the Caribbean, fast boats continue to be the primary method of trafficking in drugs. According to authorities in El Salvador, trafficking in cocaine by land in the country is minimal.

421. In 2019, the eradication of small areas under illicit cultivation of coca bush and opium poppy (totalling 37.3 ha) and the destruction of six clandestine cocaine-processing laboratories were reported by Guatemala. Small areas under coca bush cultivation (2.3 ha) were also eradicated in Honduras.

422. In 2018, seizures of cocaine in Panama and Costa Rica accounted for 4 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively, of a total of 1,311 tons of cocaine seized worldwide. By contrast, the amounts reported seized by countries in the Caribbean accounted for 0.5 per cent of the total global quantity of cocaine intercepted, mostly reflecting seizures made by the Dominican Republic.

423. In 2019, Costa Rica seized 31.1 tons of cocaine, an increase of 10 per cent compared with 2018. Seizures of cocaine in Nicaragua nearly doubled in 2019 compared with 2018, reaching 5.9 tons. Panama seized 78 tons of cocaine in 2019, 20.4 tons more than in 2018. In 2019, seizures of cocaine were also reported by Guatemala

(18.9 tons), Honduras (2.8 tons) and El Salvador (0.1 tons). The National Directorate for Drug Control of the Dominican Republic reported that the total amount of illicit drugs seized in the country in the first five months in 2020 amounted to almost 3.4 tons (2.3 tons of cocaine and 1.1 tons of cannabis herb), an increase of 18 per cent compared with the same period in 2019.

424. Container vessels continued to be used by traffickers to transport large amounts of cocaine, as evidenced by a seizure of 5 tons of cocaine in Costa Rica in February 2020. Seizures of 5 tons of unspecified illicit drugs and 0.7 tons of cocaine from semi-submersibles in Panama in February and June 2020, respectively, confirmed the increased use of non-conventional vessels reported by CICAD member States.

425. In 2019, Guatemala seized a total of 16.9 tons of amphetamine. The drug was allegedly destined for local markets and Mexico. In addition, authorities in Guatemala seized sizeable amounts of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which are precursors of methamphetamine. The country has also been mentioned as a source of methamphetamine seized in El Salvador. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances can be found in the report of the Board for 2020 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

5. Prevention and treatment

426. In 2018, the annual prevalence of use of cocaine in Central America and the Caribbean was 0.66 per cent and 0.63 per cent, respectively. Those rates were below the average in North America (2.13 per cent), Western and Central Europe (1.36 per cent) and South America (0.96 per cent).

427. The annual prevalence of cannabis use in the Caribbean (3.39 per cent) in 2018 was similar to that in South America (3.49 per cent) and considerably lower than that in North America (14.56 per cent).

428. Cannabis continued to be the drug most commonly used by the school-aged population, in particular boys, in El Salvador. According to a drug situation report published by the National Drug Commission of El Salvador in December 2019, the average age of first-time use ranged from 13 to 15.

429. Cannabis was the primary drug for which people sought treatment in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras;

in Costa Rica, it was cocaine. In Honduras, among persons receiving treatment for cannabis use, 90 per cent were receiving treatment for the first time.

430. In contrast to the use of cocaine, the annual prevalence of use of amphetamine, methamphetamine and pharmaceutical stimulants in Central America (0.98 per cent) and the Caribbean (0.9 per cent) was considerably higher than that of South America (0.27 per cent). In several Central American countries, the non-medical use of pharmaceutical stimulants, including weight loss pills, was reportedly more common than the use of other amphetamines, in particular among women.

431. The Board noted the continued efforts of the countries of Central America and the Caribbean to establish systematic monitoring of new psychoactive substances. While the total number of alerts on the emergence and presence of new psychoactive substances in Central America and the Caribbean and South America may currently be comparatively small, there is an increasing awareness by Governments in the region of the problems related to those substances and the associated adverse health effects of the use of those drugs.

432. According to the best estimates from the latest UNODC data, published in 2020, about 20,000 people in Central America and 100,000 people aged 15–64 in the Caribbean inject drugs. The joint 2018 UNODC/WHO/UNAIDS/World Bank estimate of the global prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs was 12.6 per cent. In Central America and the Caribbean, where HIV prevalence data were available for one third of all people who inject drugs, this prevalence was estimated at 3.4 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively.

433. People who use drugs may be particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 owing to underlying health issues, stigma, social marginalization and higher economic and social vulnerabilities, including a lack of access to housing and health care. The Board wishes to encourage all competent national authorities to continue providing comprehensive prevention and treatment services for those with a drug use disorder during difficult times, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

North America

During the COVID-19 pandemic, North America suffered from an increased number of overdose deaths and challenges in providing treatment to people who use drugs.

Cannabis legalization measures and decriminalization initiatives in North America continued to evolve and shape the regional market for cannabis.

1. Major developments

434. Deaths from illicit drug use are increasing in North America. Use of and trafficking in fentanyl, cocaine and methamphetamine increased in the past year, which had an impact on the lethality of drug overdoses in North America, owing in part to the use of fentanyl in many drugs sold on the region's illicit markets.

435. The public health emergencies surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic altered the region's drug trafficking landscape and affected the ability of Governments to respond to drug use threats and provide treatment for people who use drugs, including access to medications for opioid use disorders.

436. Mexico reported that it is undergoing a national drug policy transition on the basis of the principles of public health, scientific evidence and respect for human rights, based in the National Development Plan for the period 2019–2024. The Government of Mexico has indicated that new policies are designed to take a preventive and responsive approach to the needs of vulnerable populations, especially those in prison settings, women and adolescents, and other groups disproportionately affected by drug use and associated health conditions.

2. Regional cooperation

437. North American cooperation on drug control is focused on addressing the complex problems pertaining to trafficking, the opioid crisis and the multifaceted regional drug crisis. The trilateral efforts are embodied in the Annual North American Drug Dialogue, the fourth iteration of which was held in December 2019. The discussions among law enforcement and health officials solidified the region's collective understanding that efforts to combat synthetic drugs, including fentanyl and methamphetamine, should be intensified.

438. In December 2019, a bilateral meeting was held between Mexico and the United States to advance security

collaboration. Officials from the two countries agreed to strengthen the United States-Mexico High-level Security Group to combat organized crime and cross-border crime. The Group has a drug policy sub-group that focuses on counter-narcotics issues including maritime container control, the mail-based fentanyl supply chain and the tracking and safe destruction of precursor chemicals.

439. Officials from the Governments of Canada and the United States held a meeting in Washington, D.C., on 31 January 2020 on their Joint Action Plan on Opioids. The Steering Committee of the Joint Action Plan on Opioids established working groups and a framework for bilateral exchanges on the law enforcement, border security and health challenges facing the two countries.

3. National legislation, policy and action

440. In February 2020, the United States Office of National Drug Control Policy released the National Drug Control Strategy for 2020. The Strategy is focused on three areas: (a) preventing initiates to drug use through education and evidence-based prevention; (b) lowering barriers to treatment services; and (c) reducing the availability of illicit drugs through law enforcement and cooperation with international partners. It was confirmed in the strategy that the top priority for the Government was addressing the current opioid crisis and reducing the number of people in the United States dying from synthetic opioid overdoses.

441. The Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States released the *2019 National Drug Threat Assessment* in February 2020. The assessment contains an outline of the threats faced by the United States from domestic and international drug trafficking, including the opioid threat, which is described as continuing at ever-increasing epidemic levels. According to the assessment, threats from methamphetamine and cocaine are also increasing. Fentanyl-involved overdose deaths are highest in the Great Lakes, Midwest and north-east regions, with Ohio having among the highest age-adjusted rates of fentanyl-involved overdose deaths. The availability and new varieties of new psychoactive substances continue to be a challenge; and the domestic cannabis situation is evolving as legalization of cannabis for medical and non-medical purposes at the state level continues to spread.

442. In February 2020, the United States Office of National Drug Control Policy issued the Northern Border Counternarcotics Strategy, which contains specific goals

for reducing the availability of illicit drugs in the United States. It is explained in the Strategy that the border between the United States and Canada, the longest in the world between two countries, offers many opportunities for transnational criminal organizations to traffic drugs, including through exploitation of the mountain valleys in the States of Washington and Idaho, as well as the waterways on the border that are conducive to moving contraband. Implementation of the Strategy will include coordinated drug interdiction efforts driven by improvements to information-sharing processes, procedures and technology. Stakeholders from the two countries will be integrated into the law enforcement operations of the other, with coordinated investigative and operational efforts.

443. The Justice in Policing Act of 2020 was passed on 25 June 2020 by the House of Representatives of the United States, although it remained under consideration in the Senate. The legislation includes a section prohibiting so-called “no-knock warrants” in federal drug cases. This would amend section 509 of the Controlled Substances Act to include that a search warrant authorized under that section may be executed by a law enforcement officer only after providing notice of his or her authority and purpose. Law enforcement funding would also be conditioned on state and local prohibitions on “no-knock warrants”. While no action was taken on the legislation before the end of 2020, the bill could still form the framework for legal changes that take place during 2021.

444. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States has taken efforts to support more flexible prescribing practices, such as through telemedicine and without an in-person medical evaluation. The Drug Enforcement Administration has reported that it is working with its federal United States partners to ensure an adequate supply of controlled substances and medications during the pandemic. For example, owing to the public health emergency, authorized practitioners were granted the authority to prescribe buprenorphine for opiate use disorder by telemedicine, without conducting in-person examinations of the patient.

445. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were reports in the United States of shortages of critical medicines needed for placing patients on ventilators and of other essential prescription drugs. According to a December 2019 report from the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, even before the pandemic affected the supply chain, the number and duration of drug shortages in the United States had continued to rise in 2019. It was noted

in the report that more than 80 per cent of the active pharmaceutical ingredients for prescription drugs sold in the United States came primarily from China and India. The American Hospital Association released information in June 2020 explaining that, owing to COVID-19 treatments, the demand for certain drugs such as sedatives had increased, but the supply of those drugs had decreased, at least partly as a result of a fracturing of the supply chains.

446. Local and national governments in North America continued to adopt new measures for the legalization and decriminalization of the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes. In Mexico, the Supreme Court granted an extension to the Congress to approve draft legislation on a cannabis law, which would amend the cannabis regulations and permit consumption for non-medical purposes.

447. In Canada, as of 1 January 2020, the legal age to buy or possess cannabis in Quebec was raised to 21. The province amended its regulations to prohibit possession of cannabis for non-medical purposes by anyone under 21, and individuals younger than 21 are not permitted on any premises where cannabis is sold. The government of Quebec further banned food items containing cannabis that could be considered attractive to people under the age of 21. In addition, it is forbidden in Quebec to smoke or vape cannabis in any public place, whether indoors or outdoors.

448. In July 2020, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police released a report of its special purpose committee on the decriminalization of illicit drugs. The findings of the committee include the recognition of substance use disorder as a public health issue and the recommendation that decriminalization of simple possession of drugs would be an effective way to reduce the negative health consequences of drug use. Also in the report, the Association endorsed alternatives to criminal sanctions for simple possession and access to diversion measures.

449. Under the 2018 United States Farm Bill, the commercial production of hemp, limited to no more than 0.3 per cent of THC, was legalized and the United States Department of Agriculture was directed to establish a national regulatory framework for hemp production. Hemp and hemp seeds were removed from the schedules of the Controlled Substances Act. Through an interim rule that became effective on 31 October 2019, the Agricultural Marketing Service established provisions for the approval of the plans of states and Indian tribes related to the domestic production of hemp, including use of the plant to extract cannabidiol. **In this**

connection, the Board calls upon States parties to ensure that the cultivation of cannabis for industrial purposes is undertaken in line with the requirements of the 1961 Convention as amended, which limits the cultivation of cannabis for industrial purposes to fibre and seed.

450. The Commonwealth of Virginia passed a law to decriminalize the simple possession of cannabis that provided for a civil penalty of no more than \$25. The law came into force on 1 July 2020. Violations of the law would result in a summons, in the same way as a motor vehicle law violation, with no liability for court costs for the offender. In addition, a working group was established under the law to study the potential impact of the legalization of cannabis for personal, non-medical use.

451. On 7 October 2020, the Governor of the State of Vermont allowed legislation on the commercial regulation of cannabis to go into effect. The law allows for the creation of a regulated market for the sale of cannabis for non-medical purposes. The legislation requires cities and towns to take further action before retail establishments may open and ensures that local zoning applies to cannabis cultivation and production. Up to 30 per cent of the tax revenue collected from commercial sales will go towards substance use education and prevention programming.

452. Following the elections of 3 November 2020 in the United States, in which a number of ballot measures were voted upon, there are now 34 states in which the use of cannabis for medical purposes is permitted and 11 states, in addition to Washington, D.C., in which cannabis possession and use for non-medical purposes have been legalized.

453. As a result of the 2020 ballot measures, the States of Arizona, Montana, New Jersey and South Dakota legalized the possession and use of cannabis by adults for non-medical purposes. In the States of Mississippi and South Dakota, measures were approved by voters to permit the use of cannabis for medical purposes.

454. In the State of Oregon, two ballot measures pertaining to drug control were approved by voters during the 2020 election. Measure 109 was approved to create a programme to permit licensed service providers to administer psilocybin-producing mushroom and fungi products to individuals aged 21 or older. Measure 110, which was also approved by voters in the State of Oregon, will decriminalize possession of all currently controlled substances and reclassifies the penalties for possession offences from a misdemeanor crime to a violation, subjecting offenders to a \$100 fine or a health assessment.

The manufacture and distribution of controlled substances in Oregon will continue to be subject to criminal penalties.

455. In Washington, D.C., voters approved, in the November 2020 election, a ballot measure that makes the investigation and arrest of adults for the non-commercial planting, cultivating, purchasing, transporting or possession of or engaging in practices with entheogenic plants and fungi among the lowest law enforcement priorities of the area's police department. These species of plants and fungi are defined as containing ibogaine, dimethyltryptamine, mescaline, psilocybin or psilocyn.

456. **The Board is concerned that legalization measures or regulations that permit the use of any controlled substance, including cannabis, for non-medical purposes are inconsistent with the obligations of States parties, in particular those included in article 4, paragraph (c), of the 1961 Convention as amended. The Board calls upon all States to respect their Convention obligations in the development of their national drug control policies.**

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

457. Illicit drug supply and trafficking patterns in North America have changed over the course of 2020 owing to the impacts of COVID-19. The social-distancing measures and societal challenges caused by the pandemic have led to shifting drug trafficking patterns and changes in illicit drug manufacturing.

458. According to preliminary research from the Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use, undertaken on the basis of information collected between 31 March 2020 and 10 May 2020, the illegal drug supply in Canada has been affected by business closures, border closures and social distancing. A decrease in the availability of different drugs, increased prices of drugs and increased drug adulteration were all noted. The full impact of COVID-19 on the illicit cultivation, production and manufacture of and trafficking in drugs in Canada continues to be a subject of research and analysis.

459. In Mexico, the COVID-19 pandemic and the related health emergency has had profound impacts on society and the economy. The pandemic is expected to affect the way in which transnational organized crime and illicit markets operate. Changes to the way in which organized criminal activity affects the economy could have long-term consequences, based on the Government's identification of three significant impacts: (a) an increase

in armed violence linked to organized crime; (b) diversification of criminal acts owing to a reduction in income from the drug market; and (c) a strengthening of criminal groups.

460. In July 2020, during a visit to the Port Complex of Manzanillo, one of the ports through which a large amount of precursors and fentanyl is trafficked to Mexico from Asia, the President of Mexico announced that, in response to the violence and corruption resulting from trafficking in drugs and precursors at ports in Mexico, the country's armed forces would be responsible for customs and addressing the problem of insecurity and drug trafficking at ports.

461. The Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States explained, in an intelligence report published in January 2020, that the flow of illicitly manufactured fentanyl into the United States had become more diverse since the start of the opioid crisis, in 2014, with new source and transit countries emerging. It was noted in the report that India was emerging as a source for finished fentanyl powder and chemicals used for illicit fentanyl manufacture, alongside the identified primary source countries of China and Mexico. The explanation provided in the report for the shift of production from China to India was the restrictions in China on the illicit manufacturing of all forms of fentanyl. The change in legislation in China in 2019, to place all fentanyl analogues under control, has resulted in substantially fewer detections at the border of fentanyl entering the United States from China.

462. In November 2019, the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States issued a warning over counterfeit prescription pills containing fentanyl that were being trafficked from Mexico. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, drug trafficking organizations were sending bulk shipments of counterfeit pills mixed with fentanyl that were disguised as real pharmaceutical products to the United States. Furthermore, the results of "Project Python", an operation targeting the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, were announced in March 2020 by the Department of Justice of the United States. According to the Department, the cartel was responsible for moving tons of cocaine, methamphetamine and fentanyl-laced heroin into the United States. Methamphetamine labs operated by the cartel are reportedly procuring precursors from China and India, as well as producing their own precursors.

463. In April 2020, the Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use published a bulletin describing the content of drugs on the illicit market in

Canada. According to the bulletin, fentanyl and its analogues are common in the country's illicit drug supply and were present in nearly two thirds of samples containing opioids studied by the Drug Analysis Service of Health Canada. Nationally, up to 3 per cent of samples containing stimulants contained fentanyl or its analogues. Data from the Province of British Columbia included in the bulletin suggested that between 14 and 36 per cent of fentanyl exposure was unknown or unintentional. The British Columbia Coroners Service in Canada reported extremely high fentanyl concentrations in post-mortem toxicology results from April to June 2020 compared with previous months.

464. In 2019, the INCB Operation Fast Forward identified interdictions of new pre-precursors (*N*-phenylpiperidin-4-amine and 4-piperidone), which could be used in the illicit manufacture of fentanyl. The substances were seized by Mexico arriving from China and India by express post and courier services. Operation Fast Forward, launched in January 2019, was aimed at identifying key sources and redistribution points involving fentanyl, fentanyl analogues and related substances trafficked using international post, express mail and courier services. The operation involved 45 Governments and two international agencies and resulted in 53 communications on target substances, with seizures of more than 29 kg. It also resulted in the identification and subsequent dismantling of a fentanyl-distribution operation in Canada.

465. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in North America can be found in the report of the Board for 2020 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

466. Concurrently, a number of emerging, potent, fentanyl-like synthetic opioids are increasingly appearing, including isotonitazene. Isotonitazene is a highly potent synthetic opioid and one of several analogues of etonitazene. It is structurally different from fentanyl, but INCB open net monitoring found that it is being marketed online as a legal replacement for internationally scheduled opioids. In May 2020, a special notification on the substance was sent through the INCB GRIDS Programme to all Project Ion and OPIOIDS project focal points. Numerous communications related to seizures of the substance were subsequently received through IONICS. Through the GRIDS Programme, information relating to isotonitazene trafficking has been provided to the relevant focal points in North America. In June 2020, the United States added it to schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act under its emergency procedure.

467. In February 2020, the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States initiated Operation Crystal Shield to focus efforts on stopping the growing methamphetamine threat in the country, to reduce the supply of methamphetamine and to respond to the trafficking in methamphetamine across the south-west border. The operation was designed to focus enforcement efforts on eight methamphetamine distribution hubs throughout the country, namely Atlanta, Los Angeles, Phoenix, El Paso, Dallas, Houston, St. Louis and New Orleans. Those cities are reportedly used by Mexican drug trafficking organizations to distribute methamphetamine.

468. In a summary of findings related to methamphetamine published in March 2020 by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, significant increases were highlighted in the rates of criminal violations involving methamphetamine between 2010 and 2018. Violations for possession of methamphetamine increased by 626 per cent over that period, and there was an expansion in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine in small laboratories throughout North America.

469. In 2019, Public Safety Canada released a study entitled "Patterns in cannabis cryptomarkets in Canada in 2018". In that study it was noted that, following the legalization of cannabis for non-medical purposes in Canada, sales by Canadian dealers of cannabis on cryptomarkets appeared to be increasing in number. It was concluded that the increase was ostensibly owing to sales for the international market. When comparing cannabis sales on cryptomarkets from July 2018 with those from November 2018, it was noted in the study that Canada had moved from eighth to fourth position in the world.

470. According to Statistics Canada, the price gap between cannabis for non-medical purposes purchased legally and illegally is increasing, with overall price increases attributable to the higher costs of cannabis sold legally. Based on data released by Statistics Canada on 21 February 2020, sales of cannabis totalled 1.2 billion Canadian dollars in 2019. Following a statistical analysis of voluntary responses to the National Cannabis Survey on the effects of legalization, Statistics Canada reported that, after the Cannabis Act, more consumers obtained cannabis from legal sources and fewer reported obtaining it from illegal sources or from family and friends.

471. In March 2020, officials from Colombia and the United States developed a bilateral agenda and joint action plan to reduce the levels of coca bush cultivation and cocaine manufacture by 50 per cent by the end of 2023; the levels of coca bush cultivation and cocaine

manufacture in Colombia stabilized in 2018 and 2019 for the first time since 2012.

472. In March 2020, UNODC and the Government of Mexico published the third technical monitoring report on illicit opium poppy cultivation following a study conducted between July 2017 and June 2018. The area under opium poppy cultivation in Mexico was estimated at 28,000 ha, with a statistical range of 21,200 to 34,800 ha. Compared with the period 2016–2017, the area under opium poppy cultivation decreased slightly, by 9 per cent, or 2,600 ha. The national average yield of opium gum was estimated at 16.1 kg per hectare; the potential national production of dry opium gum was estimated at 450 metric tons; and the morphine concentration in opium gum during the reporting period was 16.2 per cent.

5. Prevention and treatment

473. North America continued to be affected by opioid-related harms and deaths in 2019. In June 2020, the Public Health Agency of Canada reported that there had been more than 21,000 suspected opioid-related overdoses between January and December 2019. There had been 3,823 opioid-related deaths during the same period, of which 94 per cent were unintentional; 77 per cent of the cases involved fentanyl or fentanyl analogues. The COVID-19 pandemic has reportedly exacerbated the vulnerability of drug users to negative health impacts, with higher levels of concern about the drug supply and the quality, degree of contamination, potency and cost of drugs.

474. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, in response to the opioid overdose crisis, the Government of Canada issued a temporary exemption to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to facilitate prescribing through flexible treatment options, creating an alternative and safer supply than the illicit drugs available to users. The exemption has been extended until 30 September 2021. Prescription-grade heroin (diacetylmorphine) was added to the List of Drugs for an Urgent Public Health Need and safer supply pilot projects have been developed in cities across Canada. According to Health Canada, the early findings from the pilot projects have shown that using pharmaceutical-grade medications such as hydromorphone and diacetylmorphine can help save lives and improve outcomes for people at risk of overdose.

475. In April 2020, the United States National Center for Health Statistics published data showing that deaths from drug overdoses were an increasing public health burden in the United States. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the United

States has stated that it expects the COVID-19 crisis to contribute to increasing numbers of people struggling with mental health problems and substance use, coupled with corresponding increases in depression, anxiety, trauma and grief.

476. In Canada, on 21 May 2020, as a result of the increased toxicity of illicitly manufactured drugs, British Columbia issued a provincial overdose alert following an increase in fatal and non-fatal overdoses resulting from smoking and injecting illicit drugs. According to the British Columbia Coroners Service, 170 people died of illicit drug overdoses in May 2020, compared with 76 in February 2020. In May 2020, a new resource was launched, called the “Lifeguard App”, to help respond to the overdose crisis. The application is designed to be activated before a person administers a dose of drugs. An alarm will be sounded after 50 seconds and, if user does not respond after 75 seconds, emergency medical services are alerted to a potential overdose.

477. According to provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the United States that were available as at 8 June 2020, there were 3 per cent more drug overdose deaths in the United States during the period November 2018–November 2019 than during the year before.

478. The Director of the United States National Institute on Drug Abuse has raised concerns about the impacts of COVID-19 and the potentially heightened risks and complications for people who smoke, vape or use opioids or methamphetamine. In an article in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, the Director wrote that people with substance use disorder may be especially susceptible to COVID-19 and find it harder to get care. Social distancing during the pandemic could further increase the possibility of opioid overdoses if there are fewer people available to administer naloxone.

479. The potential health risks associated with using methamphetamine during the COVID-19 pandemic were outlined in an evidence brief issued by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. In the light of increases in Canada of methamphetamine-related visits to emergency departments, hospitalizations and overdose deaths, it was noted that people who regularly use drugs, including methamphetamine, may be at higher risk of COVID-19 infection.

480. The United States “Monitoring the Future Survey” for the period 1975–2019 found a dramatic increase in vaping among adolescents, including vaping of concentrated cannabis. During the period 2017–2019, the 30-day

prevalence of vaping of cannabis rose among students in the twelfth grade (usually 17- and 18-year olds), from 4.9 per cent in 2017 to 14.0 per cent in 2019. The rate of past-year prevalence of cannabis vaping among twelfth graders was 20.8 per cent. Daily cannabis use rates increased significantly in some grades, rising to 4.8 per cent among tenth graders and 1.3 per cent among eighth graders. These figures represent an increase of 85.7 per cent compared with 2018.

481. According to the National Drug Control Strategy of the United States for 2020, prior to COVID-19, the historically low prices for some synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine, had led to increasing trends of poly-drug use across the country. Addressing the increasing availability and use of cocaine in the United States is called for in the Strategy. Also in the Strategy, efforts are outlined to strengthen the capacity of state, local and tribal communities to identify and prevent substance misuse. The enhancement of research and the development of evidence-based prevention programmes, including through the “Drug Free Communities Support Program”, which is aimed at preventing youth substance use at the community level, are also called for.

482. In Mexico, there are indications of a growing methamphetamine epidemic. At the sixty-sixth regular session of CICAD, held in Miami, United States, from 19 to 21 November 2019, the National Commissioner against Addictions of Mexico stated that lifetime prevalence of methamphetamine use had increased from 0.1 per cent to 0.9 per cent of the general population between 2002 and 2016. Cannabis remained the main drug for which people sought treatment in Mexico. The National Commissioner noted that treatment in Mexico should respond better to the needs of women and youth and that hospital and forensic medical service registration systems needed improvement.

483. In a study, commissioned by the Government of Mexico, of heroin and crystalline methamphetamine users in the northern border cities of Mexico, tests of drug paraphernalia samples showed that 93 per cent of white powder heroin, 40 per cent of black tar heroin and 100 per cent of “speedball” (a combination of heroin and crystalline methamphetamine) contained fentanyl. The drug users who provided the paraphernalia were unaware that their drugs were combined with fentanyl. Therefore, although heroin use in Mexico is not high, except for in marginalized communities on the northern border, heroin users in Mexico have been unknowingly exposed to fentanyl. These findings also explain the overdoses among drug users in parts of Mexico in recent years.

484. In June 2020, the Department of Health and Human Services of the United States published a guide on the treatment of stimulant use disorders. The Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use explains in the guide that stimulant use, including misuse of prescription stimulants, is on the rise in the United States. The risk of overdose and death has increased substantially owing to illicitly manufactured stimulants containing unknown amounts of fentanyl. The treatment guide is meant to address a public health crisis involving cocaine and amphetamines, which have become more accessible, purer and cheaper.

485. In January 2020, the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services issued a report on the geographical disparities in the United States affecting access to buprenorphine services for opioid use disorder. According to the study, access to treatment is vital, but only a small percentage of people who need treatment in the United States actually receive it. The findings of the Inspector General concluded that 40 per cent of counties in the United States did not have a single health-care provider with a waiver permitting the prescription of buprenorphine in an office setting. The providers were also not necessarily located in the areas in which the need for such medication-assisted treatment was most critical.

486. Facing challenges of drug use, manufacture and trafficking in rural areas, the United States launched the Rural Community Toolbox in June 2020 to connect rural leaders with funding, data and information from 16 federal government departments. The aim of the Toolbox is to provide rural communities with the resources needed to overcome the opioid epidemic and drug use crisis through evidence-based prevention and treatment services. It provides rural leaders with data about drug overdose deaths and factors that are driving drug use trends, such as those relating to education and unemployment levels. In January 2020, the Rural Community Action Guide was released, which contains recommended practices and action steps to increase the stability of rural communities.

487. In October 2020, the Department of Justice of the United States announced the resolution of its criminal and civil investigations into the opioid manufacturer Purdue Pharma and the conclusion of its civil investigations into the company’s individual shareholders. Purdue Pharma agreed to plead guilty in federal court to charges of conspiracy to violate the Federal Anti-Kickback Statute, with a criminal fine of over \$3.5 billion and \$2 billion in criminal forfeiture. A settlement in the amount of \$2.8 billion will resolve the civil liability under the False

Claims Act for opioid prescription practices that were unsafe, ineffective and medically unnecessary, resulting in abuse and diversion. The resolution does not resolve other claims that states may have against the company.

488. In 2020, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction published a report on the costs and harms associated with substance use during the period 2015–2017. It contains updates to the previous figures, from the period 2007–2014, found in the 2018 report. As set out in the latest publication, substance use cost Canada almost 46 billion Canadian dollars in 2017 and led to over 275,000 hospitalizations. While nearly 63 per cent of the total costs were due to alcohol and tobacco use, opioids accounted for \$5.9 billion Canadian dollars, or 12.9 per cent of the total costs. Cocaine accounted for \$3.7 billion Canadian dollars, or 8.1 per cent of the total costs.

489. A socioeconomic review of supervised consumption sites in the Province of Alberta, Canada, was released in March 2020. Since 2019, the government of the province had frozen funding for any new supervised consumption sites until a review of the impact of existing sites was carried out. The Health Authority of the province advised the committee reviewing the sites that, since October 2017, there had been about 6,541 adverse events at the sites, and that death rates in their vicinity had increased. The committee was concerned about issues of transparency and accountability surrounding how overdose reversals were tracked and reported. Non-opioid substance use, such as methamphetamine, also reportedly increased at some of the sites and, in most areas, crime in the immediate vicinity increased.

490. On 6 January 2020, the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health of Canada issued a statement on cannabis extracts, edibles and topical products. Released through the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Council advised, in the statement, that cannabis was not harmless and that it carried risks. Evidence continued to emerge on the longer-term health effects of cannabis use, which highlighted the importance of ongoing research. It was further indicated in the statement that the safest approach for people who use cannabis was to avoid smoking or vaping cannabis extracts, and that side effects from cannabis products should be reported to Health Canada.

491. Mexico reported to the Board that, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Institute of Psychiatry had enacted a series of remote intervention programmes for drug users. Guidance is provided to people, at any time, over the Internet. Mexico reported on its drug abuse and depression assistance programme, which provides

brief online psychological treatment from a professional counsellor to encourage a reduction in drug use and address symptoms of depression. Mexico also reported on additional programmes that had been designed to strengthen social, emotional and parenting skills to help prevent the use of drugs.

South America

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected trafficking routes, supply of and demand for drugs, and microtrafficking modalities in South America.

Total cocaine manufacture potential in Colombia increased by 1.5 per cent in 2019 despite a decrease in the area under coca bush cultivation.

The manufacture and presence of synthetic drugs is on the rise in South America, in particular in Chile.

1. Major developments

492. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected South America, with significant repercussions for the cultivation and manufacture of, trafficking in and consumption of drugs in the region. As lockdowns of varying degrees were imposed across South America, criminal organizations again demonstrated their capacity to adapt to new circumstances. This was noted in particular with regard to the channels used for the illicit movement of drugs: alternative routes were created to circumvent border closures and road and air travel restrictions; maritime routes acquired a prominent role, with traffickers taking advantage of the limited capacity in some countries in the region to detect and seize controlled substances trafficked along river and sea routes; and there was an increase in the use of light aircraft, flown at low altitude to avoid radar, to transport drugs between Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil and Peru.

493. Changes in supply and demand as a result of border closures have also had an impact on drug prices in the region. In Brazil, there was an increase in cocaine prices and, in Colombia, a similar trend was observed with regard to the price of coca paste. No official data have been made available yet to calculate the exact increase in the price of cocaine for consumer markets. Between January and April 2020, the price of coca leaf dropped by 46 per cent in Peru and by 58 per cent in the valley of the rivers Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro, one of the major coca bush-growing areas in the country, as a

result of the impact of COVID-19 on demand for cocaine. The prices of cocaine hydrochloride and coca paste also decreased in Peru, by 25 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively.

494. Organized criminal groups that control more resources were better able to anticipate and overcome the repercussions of the lockdown on their illegal businesses by stockpiling drugs. Reduced economic activities and restrictions on transport also had an impact on the procurement of chemical precursors. As such, while some criminal organizations have relied on the reserves of chemicals that they had on hand to produce cocaine hydrochloride, others have tried to produce their own precursor chemicals. Although a trend towards self-reliance in the manufacture of cocaine was observed before the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions related to the pandemic have increased the interest of organized criminal groups in developing and manufacturing their own chemical precursors to sustain their production in difficult circumstances.

495. Lockdowns related to the COVID-19 pandemic have also prompted changes in microtrafficking practices across the region, with drug traffickers taking increased advantage of existing licit services, such as food delivery, Internet platforms and emergency services, or emulating such services as a cover for their operations. In July 2020, 24 people were detained in Chile for using a fake food delivery service as a front for delivering cocaine, cannabis and clonazepam. Other drug traffickers have taken advantage of the transportation of essential equipment during the pandemic to smuggle drugs. In March 2020, authorities in Brazil found 1.1 tons of cocaine hidden in surgical gloves that were being transported by truck, and police officers in Peru seized over 1 kg of drugs in boxes containing protective masks destined for Hong Kong, China.

496. In June 2020, the border between the city of Salvador Mazza in Argentina and the Plurinational State of Bolivia was closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and stop trafficking in goods and drugs between both countries. Controls at the border between the two countries have increased as drug traffickers appear to be taking advantage of the influx of people from the Plurinational State of Bolivia seeking medical assistance in Argentina to smuggle their drugs.

497. It is expected that the economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic will move the patterns of drug use and trafficking towards cheaper and more addictive substances. The Chilean Observatory on Drugs has noted a possible increase in the illicit market of synthetic drugs that are cheaper to manufacture and easier to transport

and distribute. This comes at a time when the presence of synthetic drugs such as “ecstasy” is becoming more evident in the region.

498. The pandemic has also evidenced the role that cartels and organized criminal groups have in the region. At times, they have filled the void left by Governments by implementing lockdown measures when and where the Government was not acting or was unable to enforce such measures.

499. According to a report from Fundación Paz y Reconciliación (Peace and Reconciliation Foundation), the presence of cartels and drug trafficking groups from Mexico has increased in Colombia. Although their presence dates back to previous decades, their activity has become more prominent. They have increased the funding and arming of Colombian drug trafficking groups, presumably to ensure that cocaine continues to reach Mexico as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army (FARC-EP) relinquishes control of drug-producing areas in Colombia.

500. In March 2020, the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, together with government officials and members of FARC, were indicted in the United States on counts of narco-terrorism and international cocaine trafficking. The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela immediately denounced the charges against its President as baseless, highlighting the aggressive action it had taken to fight drug trafficking and condemning what it considered attacks against its country. In April 2020, in response to the occurrence of maritime drug smuggling from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Government of the United States launched a counter-narcotics operation in the Caribbean Sea, which involved the deployment of warships.

501. In the Andean region, the area under illegal coca bush cultivation has been increasing since 2016, together with the potential for cocaine manufacture. Until 2017, the Board and other United Nations entities could carry out comparative analyses of the trends in illicit coca bush cultivation and cocaine manufacture in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia and Peru on the basis of the crop monitoring activities carried out by UNODC and the Governments concerned. While reports for Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Colombia continued to be published, since 2017 there have been no official figures for Peru. This absence of updated information impairs the comprehensive assessment of coca cultivation trends in the Andean region. **The Board expresses its concern about the lack of measurement of the area under illegal coca bush cultivation in Peru during 2018**

and 2019 and urges the country to complete and present the studies for the missing years and to renew its long-standing commitment to crop monitoring activities and to the promotion of comprehensive and sustainable alternative development.

2. Regional cooperation

502. In 2020, several new initiatives were developed to overcome the challenges that drugs pose to the region. On 4 and 5 March 2020, the first meeting of the intelligence agencies of Latin America was held in La Paz, with the participation of Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and the United States. Participating countries agreed to cooperate and exchange information to identify the persons involved and the *modi operandi* used in the production and manufacture of and trafficking in drugs in each country.

503. From 1 April to 15 May 2020, 26 countries from Europe and the Americas, including Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Uruguay, collaborated in the Orion V International Naval Campaign to Combat Drug Trafficking, the operational aspects of which were coordinated by Colombia. As a result of the campaign, 50.3 tons of cocaine, 7.3 tons of cannabis, 10 kg of heroin, 12 kg of amphetamines, 10 kg of “ecstasy” and 13 kg of methamphetamine were seized. Also as part of the operation, 38 vessels, two submarines and four aircraft were seized and 72 laboratories were dismantled. Activities under the Orion V naval campaign were initiated in 2018; from January to May 2020, a total of 180.3 tons of cocaine and 22.6 tons of cannabis were seized as part of it.

504. In April 2020, CICAD published the first information bulletin of the newly established early warning system for the Americas. The system was created in 2019 in the context of a growing need to monitor the presence of new psychoactive drugs in the States members of OAS. The system collects information from national early warning systems in the region. As of April 2020, Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay had operationalized their national early warning systems for emerging drugs and related threats, while Brazil, Paraguay and Peru had taken steps toward the creation of such systems.

505. Between 28 September and 1 October 2020, officials of the competent national authorities of Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Ecuador and Peru participated in the webinars delivered by the INCB Learning project. The webinars provided an opportunity

to enhance participants’ understanding of the drug control and reporting requirements as established by the international drug control conventions and offered a platform for the exchange of best practices among South American authorities.

506. In November 2019, INCB participated in the International Conference on Synthetic Drugs in Santiago, which strengthened the capacity of law enforcement agencies to identify and interdict new psychoactive substances and non-medical synthetic opioids and to exchange intelligence on trafficking in those substances. More than 130 international experts and front-line officers from Brazil, Chile, China, Germany, Italy, New Zealand and Spain, as well as representatives of INTERPOL and INCB, participated in the event, which was hosted by the Government of Chile. Following the event, INCB provided training to 21 officials from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Public Health, the police and the postal and customs agencies of Chile on awareness-raising and safe-handling approaches for emerging substances and information exchange using IONICS. In August 2020, as part of its public-private partnership initiatives to counter trafficking in dangerous substances, the GRIDS programme participated in an online regional event organized by the Postal Union of the Americas, Spain and Portugal, during which 150 postal security officers from 18 countries received awareness-raising training on emerging new psychoactive substances, non-medical synthetic opioids and fentanyl-related substances trafficked through the international mail and express mail services.

3. National legislation, policy and action

507. On 28 February 2020, the National Council on the Fight against Illicit Drug Trafficking of the Plurinational State of Bolivia released the 2020–2025 National Strategy Against Drug Trafficking and the Illicit Drug Economy, under the slogan “United, Free of Drugs”. The strategy is composed of six thematic areas: (a) public health; (b) socioeconomic inclusion; (c) sustainable development; (d) regional and international cooperation; (e) tackling the financial foundations of drug organizations; and (f) enhancing the rule of law and governance on counter-narcotics. This strategy moves away from the “social control” approach of the previous Government and embraces direct coca bush eradication techniques. It is acknowledged in the strategy that the Plurinational State of Bolivia is not only a producing country, but also part of the drug market, with traffickers connected to regional and international networks involved in trafficking in drugs and gold, as well as trafficking in persons.

508. In March 2020, eight police officers were detained in the Plurinational State of Bolivia for involvement in the smuggling of cocaine that had been seized during an operation. The interim Government began investigating members of the former Administration for their involvement in drug trafficking and other illegal activities in the country. The former Minister of the Interior and the former National Director of the Special Force to Combat Drug Trafficking were placed under investigation for drug trafficking and corruption.

509. In June 2020, Peru adopted its Strategic Institutional Plan for the period 2020–2024. The Plan is aimed at, among other things, combating the criminal networks operating in the country. One of the objectives of the Plan is reducing trafficking in drugs.

510. In June 2020, the Government of Chile presented a draft bill to increase penalties related to drug trafficking, in particular for individuals who involve children under the age of 14 in activities related to drug trafficking, and to enable the use of seized assets for the national fight against drugs.

511. In June 2020, the National Assembly of Ecuador approved a bill on combating the consumption of and microtrafficking in drugs. The bill introduces administrative sanctions such as fines and community work for drug use in public spaces and at public events. It allows the placement of video cameras in and around educational institutions and, where not possible, the presence of law enforcement officers outside such institutions at peak hours, to ensure the security of students. Higher education institutions will have to include compulsory programmes on drug prevention in their curricula. The bill also creates a National Fund for the Comprehensive Prevention of Drugs, which will be partially financed by assets seized as part of prosecutions for drug trafficking and will support treatment and rehabilitation programmes for drug users.

512. Some Governments in South America have progressed further in regulating the cultivation and production of and trade in cannabis for medical and scientific purposes. In December 2019, the Brazilian regulatory agency for medicine issued new regulations on the use, production, commercialization, prescription, dispensing, monitoring and control of cannabis derivatives for medical purposes. Under the regulations, the cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes is not authorized in the country.

513. On 7 and 8 January 2020, the Government of Uruguay published two new laws (law No. 19845 and law

No. 19847) on the use of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes. Law No. 19845 is focused on the promotion of scientific research on cannabis and it establishes a national research centre on cannabis to contribute to research, technology transfer and training. The law also establishes a national research fund for cannabis, which will be partially funded by revenue obtained from the sale of cannabis for non-medical purposes. Law No. 19847 was passed to protect, promote and improve public health through quality-controlled cannabis-based products. It provides for the creation of a national programme to access cannabis for medical and therapeutic purposes, a commission to integrate cannabis businesses into the banking system of Uruguay and a commission to promote small and medium-sized manufacturers of cannabis.

514. In February 2020, the first licences to cultivate and manufacture medicinal cannabis were granted to 12 companies in Paraguay. The Government has stipulated that 2 per cent of the amount produced is to be transferred to the Ministry of Health, which will distribute the cannabis products free of charge to patients with a medical prescription. Paraguay, together with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Uruguay, currently allows the use of cannabis for medical purposes.

515. In March 2020, the National Council on the Fight against Illicit Drug Trafficking of the Plurinational State of Bolivia announced that the Secretary of the Committee for the Fight Against Drug Trafficking of the Chamber of Deputies had produced a draft bill to permit the use of cannabis for medical purposes, with the ultimate intention of permitting the production of medical cannabis-based products in the country.

516. Through its resolution 315 of March 2020, the Ministry of Health of Colombia updated its list of scheduled substances and established a mechanism to allow the National Narcotics Fund to authorize new activities, such as research and development, involving internationally controlled substances. The resolution also includes provisions under which medicines containing cannabinoids can be sold. Medicines containing more than 2 mg of *delta-9-THC* are subject to control and monitoring by the National Narcotics Fund. According to information from the Ministry of Health, an inter-institutional project is currently being developed to reformulate the regulatory framework in relation to safe and informed access to cannabis for medical and scientific purposes.

517. Suriname has also begun talks to address the use of cannabis for medical purposes. In May 2020, the Surinamese Standards Bureau shared with other ministries its cannabis standards for medical and scientific

purposes, which are aimed at regulating the cannabis industry for medical and scientific purposes.

518. The Board reiterates its view that, while the cultivation, production and use of cannabis for medical purposes are permitted by the 1961 Convention as amended, such activities must be carried out in a manner that is consistent with articles 23 and 28 of that Convention.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

519. Colombia, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia accounted for 70 per cent, 20 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively, of the global area under coca cultivation in 2017, the latest year for which comparable estimates are available. According to the *UNODC World Drug Report 2020*, following an increasing trend during the period 2013–2017, the total area under coca bush cultivation remained stable in 2018.

520. According to UNODC, Colombia reported a decrease of 9 per cent in the total area under coca cultivation, from 169,000 ha in 2018 to 154,000 ha in 2019, a continuation of the decreasing trend observed in the previous year. In spite of this decrease, the total manufacture potential of pure cocaine hydrochloride was 1,137 tons, which represents an increase of 1.5 per cent in relation to 2018. This increase could be explained by improvements in cultivation techniques, which have resulted in an increase in the size of the coca leaf harvest, and the higher performance of cocaine manufacture sites. Estimated coca leaf production in 2019 was 993,107 tons, representing an increase of 1.6 per cent compared with 2018.

521. Increasingly sophisticated efforts by drug traffickers in terms of the illicit manufacture of cocaine could also explain the increase in the manufacture of cocaine hydrochloride in Colombia. In recent years, drug traffickers appear to be becoming more self-sufficient by producing their own chemical precursors, such as potassium permanganate. This goes against a previously observed trend of some drug traffickers moving the manufacture of cocaine hydrochloride outside Colombia.

522. In 2018, the Government of Colombia proposed a zoning system based on the characteristics of the territories affected by coca bush cultivation, to design public policy in a way that was more responsive to local conditions. UNODC noticed that 48 per cent of the coca detected in 2019 was concentrated in 3 of the 12 zones: (a) forest reserve areas (18 per cent); (b) black community

land (16 per cent); and (c) areas of strategic interest for productive integration (14 per cent).

523. According to data from the Ministry of Defence of Colombia, from 1 January to 12 July 2020, 44,905 ha under illicit cultivation had been eradicated. The eradication target for 2020 is 130,000 ha of coca bush, 30 per cent higher than that of 2019. After a meeting between the President of Colombia and the President of the United States in March 2020, discussions were launched on the use of aerial spraying of glyphosate to increase the effectiveness of the eradication plan. Colombia had suspended aerial spraying in 2015, following a recommendation by WHO indicating that its use could have serious repercussions for human health and the environment. The Colombian Constitutional Court has blocked aerial spraying until the Government can meet various health and environmental requirements, including undertaking an inclusive consultation process with all affected communities. Given COVID-19 prevention requirements, the consultations were to have taken place online, but many of the affected communities have limited or non-existent Internet access. In 2019, 94,606 ha of illicit crops were manually eradicated. This represents an increase of 58 per cent compared with 2018, when a total of 59,978 ha were manually eradicated.

524. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the 5.7 per cent decrease in the area under coca bush cultivation from 2017 to 2018 was reversed in 2019, when the area under cultivation increased by 8.2 per cent, to 25,000 ha, from 23,100 ha in 2018. Political instability in 2019, border permeability and the country's location near the largest consumers and manufacturers of illicit drugs in South America are factors that could have led to the increase in cultivation.

525. As a consequence, the Plurinational State of Bolivia registered an increase in cocaine manufacture that could also have been caused by the large amount of coca leaf circulating on the illegal market. In 2018, an estimated 55,168 tons of coca leaf were produced in the country, according to the Directorate-General for Coca Leaf Commercialization and Industrialization. UNODC reported that, in 2019, authorities in the country dismantled 50 illicit cocaine laboratories and 841 factories. In 2018, authorities recorded an increase in the number of cocaine laboratories in remote, difficult-to-access areas in the eastern part of the country.

526. In October 2020, the National Drug Directorate of the Peruvian National Police published a report on trends in criminal drug trafficking networks in Peru. The report was based on available data from national anti-drug

operations, the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States, the European Union and UNODC, and validated the estimates, made by the United States Office of National Drug Control Policy, of 52,100 ha under illicit coca cultivation in 2018. This would represent an increase of 4.4 per cent in the area under cultivation in the country compared with 2017.

527. In July 2020, authorities in Peru dismantled six laboratories used to process coca paste and disabled 17 clandestine airstrips intended for use in drug trafficking. The laboratories served an area of over 70 ha of coca leaf cultivation and some 16 tons of coca leaf debris were seized. According to data from the Government of Peru released in May 2020, 25,526.31 ha under illicit coca bush cultivation were eradicated in 2019, surpassing the target for the year by 2.11 per cent. For 2020, the eradication goal remains 25,000 ha.

528. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the number of clandestine airstrips and suspected drug flights increased in 2019. The Government reported the confiscation of 23 light aircraft and the destruction of 36 clandestine airstrips in 2019. Most of the country's clandestine airstrips are located in the State of Zulia, which borders the Catatumbo region in Colombia, a significant area for cocaine manufacture. However, the number of airstrips in Zulia might be bigger. According to reports from various organizations monitoring the matter, some 400 airstrips have been identified for the landing and departure of aircraft bound for the Caribbean islands and Central America. It appears that drugs flown from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela are primarily bound for El Salvador and Honduras. The Mexican cartel Sinaloa has also been detected in Zulia, where it has taken advantage of the airstrips to build centres of transit and collection of narcotic drugs with the support of the Colombian National Liberation Army, which has expanded its activities in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

529. Uruguay reported two historic seizures of cocaine and coca paste in 2019 and 2020. In December 2019, 6 tons of cocaine were seized at the Port of Montevideo in containers bound for Togo. In February 2020, Operation Bagdad-Bangui resulted in the record seizure of 347 kg of coca paste and 206 kg of cocaine that had been smuggled by light aircraft, a recurring and increasingly common technique used by drug traffickers. Uruguay is gradually becoming a country for the trans-shipment of illicit drugs. In 2019, the country seized 12 tons of cocaine, the highest amount reported to date and a considerable increase from 2018, when only 782 kg of cocaine were seized. At the same time, the corruption of law

enforcement officers by drug traffickers is becoming more visible as the country plays an increasingly significant role in the international market for illicit drugs. In January 2020, four Uruguayan navy officers were accused of assisting drug trafficking organizations.

530. Brazil remains a significant transit hub and a key departure point for the cocaine that enters Asia and Africa. In April 2020, 555 kg of cocaine destined for Côte d'Ivoire were seized in the Port of Paranagua. Data from UNODC show that, between 2014 and 2018, most of the cocaine trafficked to Africa and smuggled onwards to Europe had departed from Brazil.

531. In May 2020, in the course of Operation Tsunami, authorities in Ecuador seized 3 tons of sodium hydroxide, a chemical controlled in Ecuador that can be used for the processing of cocaine, in the Province of Esmeraldas. Esmeraldas has seen a rise in the presence of drug trafficking organizations from Colombia in recent years. In the past decade, Ecuador has become a significant exporter of cocaine that is produced primarily in southern Colombia. The drug is usually bound for Europe and for Central America, from where it is trafficked onwards to North America.

532. In May 2020, Paraguay reported an increase in the amount of cocaine seized. In the first few months of 2020, the amount seized totalled approximately 4,300 kg. According to the National Anti-Drug Secretariat, that was a record amount for the country: in recent years, the annual average has been approximately 1,500 kg.

533. In 2018, South America accounted for 43 per cent of the quantity of cannabis herb seized globally. In May 2020, authorities in the Plurinational State of Bolivia destroyed over 46 tons of cannabis plant. In November 2019, a joint operation between Brazil and Paraguay (Operation Alianza 21), in the territory of the latter, led to the dismantling of 85 cannabis cultivation and production sites, the eradication of 160 ha of cannabis plant and the seizure of 19,480 kg of dried cannabis and 377 kg of pressed cannabis. In August 2020, the continued cooperation of the two countries under Operation Alianza 22 led to the dismantling of 63 cannabis sites, the eradication of 127 ha of cannabis plant and the seizure of 89.6 tons of chopped and processed cannabis. Brazil reported the seizure of 261 tons of cannabis herb in 2019 and, between January and May 2020, 141 tons of cannabis herb were seized. In May 2020, the Federal Police of Brazil carried out the biggest drug seizure in the country to date: 28 tons of cannabis herb being transported in a truck were intercepted in a city on the border with Paraguay.

534. Different cannabis varieties are appearing on the illicit cannabis market in Chile. Seizures of “creepy” cannabis, a genetically modified cannabis variety that contains high levels of THC and is popular among drug traffickers for its profitability, have increased sevenfold in the country in the past three years.

535. The overwhelming presence of cannabis and cocaine in the region often overshadows the presence of synthetic drugs. According to the UNODC *World Drug Report 2020*, the quantities of “ecstasy” seized in South America declined between 2017 and 2018. Nonetheless, a growing presence of the drug has been noted in the region since 2019. At the end of 2019, the Plurinational State of Bolivia announced the seizure of 1.5 kg of “ecstasy” tablets that had come from Spain. The most recent seizure of “ecstasy” in the country prior to that had been in 2006.

536. Chile also experienced a worrying influx of synthetic drugs in 2019. In 2010, the country reported the seizure of some 2,000 doses but, by 2019, the number had increased to up to 1.5 million. Chilean authorities are alarmed by the increasing presence of these drugs, a growing trend that can also be observed in the number of seizures and of laboratories dismantled. In 2010, the number of “ecstasy”-type substances seizures was 7 (1,501 doses) and by 2019 it was 444 (456,741 doses). The latest data from the Chilean Observatory on Drugs show that, in 2019, 15 clandestine drug manufacturing laboratories, largely dedicated to the manufacture of synthetic drugs, were discovered.

537. Brazil has reported an increase since 2019 in the domestic manufacture of “ecstasy”. Between 2018 and 2020, at least eight clandestine laboratories for the manufacture of the substance were dismantled. According to the UNODC regional office in Brazil, this is a new phenomenon in the country. Previously dismantled facilities were usually focused on the cutting and retableting of imported “ecstasy”; however, recently discovered laboratories in south Brazil have been dedicated to the entire manufacturing chain.

5. Prevention and treatment

538. Consistent with past years, cannabis and cocaine continue to be the most-used drugs in South America according to UNODC. The region has witnessed a steady increase in the use of cannabis, which appears to be more predominant among people from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds. UNODC reported that, in 2018, 2 per cent of the population of the Plurinational State of Bolivia

were past-year users of cannabis, compared with 1.3 per cent in 2014.

539. In Uruguay, 8.9 per cent of the population aged between 15 and 65 reported past-month cannabis use in 2018. Since 2011, the country has witnessed a rise in the number of regular and frequent cannabis users, to the extent that more than a third of those users were considered to be dependent. According to the seventh national survey of Uruguay on drug use in the general population, undertaken in 2019, the average age of first cannabis use is 20, an increase from previous years that has been attributed to the increased number of adults using cannabis. In 2011, the age of first use was 18.3 and by 2018 it had reached 20.1. In the ninth regulated cannabis market report, published by the Institute for the Regulation and Control of Cannabis in February 2020, it was reported that, as at 29 February 2020, a total of 53,399 people were authorized to access cannabis: 40,604 people had registered to acquire cannabis from pharmacies, 8,120 had registered for domestic cultivation and 4,675 had a membership of a cannabis club. UNODC, in the *World Drug Report 2020*, noted that users who accessed cannabis only through authorized means represented a small proportion of the cannabis users in the country.

540. The Board notes the efforts of the Government of Uruguay to monitor and provide information on the manufacture, distribution and consumption of cannabis for non-medical purposes. However, the Board expresses concern regarding the increase of cannabis consumption as reported by the Government of Uruguay and wishes to reiterate that legalization measures or regulations that permit the use of any controlled substance, including cannabis, for non-medical purposes are inconsistent with the obligations of States parties, namely those included in article 4, paragraph (c), of the 1961 Convention as amended. The Board calls upon all States to respect their international legal obligations in the development of their national drug control policies.

541. Treatment for substance use disorder in which cocaine is the primary drug of concern represents a large share of drug treatment in South America. It was estimated that, in 2018, 2.8 million people aged 15–64 were past-year users of cocaine in South America. In particular, in 2018 in Uruguay, 2 per cent of the adult population were past-year users of cocaine, 43 per cent of whom were suffering from cocaine use disorder.

542. In addition, a growing pattern of use of coca paste has been observed in the region. While the use of cocaine seems to be more prevalent among young adults from high- and middle-income backgrounds, coca paste is

more widespread among older users (36–45) from low-income groups. Uruguay has reported a decline in the use of cocaine base paste among young adults but an increase in such use among adults, as the users who initiated use at the age of 18 during the period 2002–2004 have continued using the drug over the years.

543. In the past, the use of coca paste predominantly took place in the countries where cocaine was manufactured. However, according to UNODC, it has spread to other countries in South America where the manufacture of cocaine does not take place. Nevertheless, it is difficult to provide accurate estimates on such use as cocaine base paste is commonly consumed by marginalized groups, which are not reached by treatment services and national surveys.

544. During the coronavirus pandemic, access to drugs such as cocaine has been limited because of a lack of movement across borders and a considerable rise in prices owing to limited stocks. However, this has not halted the consumption of cocaine or cannabis. On 14 July 2020, the Service for the Prevention and Treatment of Drug and Alcohol Use in Chile presented the results of an online survey on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the use of alcohol and other drugs in the country. According to the survey, cannabis consumption has remained more stable than cocaine during the pandemic. Since the beginning of the pandemic, respondents had had more access to cannabis (84.3 per cent) than cocaine (5.5 per cent). One third (33.3 per cent) of the participants said that they had consumed more cannabis during the pandemic, whereas 27.7 per cent said that they had consumed less. By contrast, 29.9 per cent said that they had consumed more cocaine during the pandemic and 49.2 per cent had reduced their consumption of cocaine.

545. A report published by CICAD and the Uruguayan National Drug Board in February 2020 showed a marginal prevalence of opioid use in the population (0.9 per cent lifetime use and 0.3 per cent in the past 12 months). This is consistent with the limited presence of opioids on the illicit market in Uruguay. However, the Government has noted that continued monitoring of this trend is required.

546. UNODC and WHO estimate that only 1 in 11 people in Latin America have access to drug treatment programmes. Reports from the Plurinational State of Bolivia indicate a general lack of public treatment centres; the centres that do exist are located only in urban areas. In its recently published national strategy on combating drug trafficking and the illegal economy for drugs, the Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia noted

that there were only two drug dependence treatment facilities managed by the Government.

547. Brazil is the largest cocaine market in South America, according to information from the *World Drug Report 2020*. In July 2020, resolution 03/2020 was issued by the Ministry of Health of Brazil allowing therapeutic communities to provide treatment to adolescents (aged 12–18) suffering from drug use disorders. According to a national study from 2017, 95 per cent of such therapeutic communities use non-evidence-based approaches to treat patients. In June 2019, the Government approved law No. 13840, to enable the compulsory hospitalization of drug users. This law modifies federal law No. 11343 of August 2006, which established the National System of Public Policy on Drugs. Under the new law, treatment of patients suffering from drug use disorders could take place without the consent of the patient, at the request of a family member or legal guardian or, in the absolute absence of a guardian, a public servant in the field of health who verifies the existence of reasons that justify the measure.

548. **The Board discourages the use of compulsory treatment for the rehabilitation of patients suffering from drug use disorders and recalls the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health submitted to the Human Rights Council at its forty-fourth session, held from 30 June to 17 July 2020 (A/HRC/44/48), in which the Special Rapporteur warned that medical rationales should never be used as a defence or justification for policies and practices that violate the dignity and rights of people who use drugs. The Board calls upon the Government of Brazil to implement voluntary, evidence-based treatment services with due respect for patients' human rights, in line with the UNODC-WHO *International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders and Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolutions 46/1 and 59/4.***

549. Governments of the region have continued to work on raising awareness among youth of the adverse consequences of drug consumption and on the prevention of drug use. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior signed a memorandum of understanding in June 2020 to address the prevention of and fight against the use of drugs in schools by providing information materials for students, educators and families through the country's schools.

550. Taking note of the heavy toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the most vulnerable sectors of society, especially people suffering from drug use disorders, Argentina and Uruguay developed action plans to assist those populations. In Argentina, the Secretariat for Comprehensive Drug Policies activated a contingency plan to guarantee the provision of essential services through community structures and call centres that are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In Uruguay, the National Drug Board started the implementation of Project Paradores, which offers places in daytime shelters to people living on the street who have a high risk of marginalization and social exclusion. National data from Uruguay show that 87 per cent of its citizens living on the streets consume some type of illicit drug. As such, Project Paradores has been promoted as part of a comprehensive initiative: while focusing on the prevention and containment of the transmission of COVID-19, trained personnel assist people with drug dependence issues.

551. While the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to lead to an increase in rates of substance use disorder, spending on drug prevention and treatment services is in long-term decline in the region. Access to drug treatment services might be disrupted as Governments divert their attention to address the economic crisis in the aftermath of the global pandemic.

D. Asia

East and South-East Asia

The continued increase in the illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of synthetic drugs, in particular methamphetamine in increasingly purer forms, remained a major concern for East and South-East Asia. The drug problem has had serious health, human rights, security and economic implications for the countries of the region.

It seems that the decision by China in 2019 to schedule fentanyl-related substances as a class-wide group has, over the course of the year, resulted in a sharp drop in the amount of those substances of alleged Chinese origin seized globally. However, it also seems that traffickers have now moved to fentanyl precursors as a way of manufacturing these substances, which calls for greater collaboration to deal with this trafficking challenge.

The Board has repeatedly expressed its concerns over serious human rights violations, especially with regard to extrajudicial actions, committed in purported pursuit of drug control objectives. These violations contravene internationally recognized human rights standards and are inconsistent with the obligations of Governments under the three international drug control conventions.

1. Major developments

552. More than any other part of the world, the countries in East and South-East Asia continue to see an increase in the illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of synthetic drugs, in particular methamphetamine. The price of methamphetamine decreased to its lowest in a decade, while purity remained stable or increased. UNODC estimates that the manufacture of and trafficking in methamphetamine and heroin in the region generated annual revenues of more than \$54 billion, with methamphetamine accounting for \$44.9 billion.

553. In early 2020, major seizures of synthetic drugs took place in a number of countries of the region, including China, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand.

554. In its annual report for 2019, the Board noted that, to further strengthen its drug control system, China had decided to schedule, as a class-wide group, all fentanyl-related substances as of 1 May 2019. Available data by the end of 2019, including as reflected in presentations by representatives of national agencies at INCB-hosted seminars for subject-matter experts, suggested that the number of interdictions of fentanyl-related substances of alleged Chinese origin had dropped markedly.

555. Effective regulatory mechanisms, as well as border management and control and forensic capacity with regard to precursors and other chemicals frequently used in illicit drug manufacture, continue to be of particular importance given that the chemical industry has a substantial presence in the region and the region's increasingly improved infrastructure has further enhanced connectivity among countries. Effective regional cooperation among the countries of the region through collaboration, joint operations and the sharing of information remains crucial. In particular, given the apparent effectiveness of the decision by China to schedule fentanyl-related substances as a class, traffickers have moved to precursors as a way of continuing to provide those substances to illicit markets, a development described in the Board's report on precursors for 2019, which gives even greater impetus to the need to work regionally to deal with this trafficking challenge.

556. Most countries continue to lack comprehensive drug use prevalence data and evidence-based drug dependence treatment programmes. In particular, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, attention should be paid, and resources devoted, to continued drug use prevention and treatment efforts, in order to sustain progress made and to prevent an increase in additional vulnerabilities among the region's population.

2. Regional cooperation

557. The countries of the region have a long-standing history of cooperation, bilaterally as well as regionally. In November 2019, signatories to the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on drug control (Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam and UNODC) endorsed the Bangkok Declaration on effectively responding to the drug problem in the Mekong. In addition, the signatories endorsed their eleventh subregional action plan on drug control (May 2019–May 2021), in which the joint commitment of signatory countries to addressing the subregion's drug problem was reaffirmed. The action plan comprises four key areas of cooperation: drugs and health; law enforcement cooperation; legal and judicial cooperation; and sustainable alternative development.

558. In December 2019, ASEAN agreed to add the Food and Drug Administration of the Philippines to its current list of inspection services, which also includes similar authorities in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Under the ASEAN Sectoral Mutual Recognition Arrangement for Good Manufacturing Practice, certificates on good manufacturing practices are mandatory for the registration of medicinal products in each ASEAN member State.

559. To complement the Board's treaty-mandated programme of work on precursors, which is further described in the Board's 2020 report on precursors, countries in the region agreed to increase cooperation on precursor control. In December 2019 and February 2020, with the assistance of UNODC, intelligence specialists from East, South and South-East Asia, as well as Australia, Canada and the United States, met in China and Myanmar, respectively, to exchange information on recent diversion and trafficking cases.

560. In Hanoi in December 2019, INCB hosted its second international workshop on public-private partnerships preventing exploitation of legitimate e-commerce. Participants discussed voluntary partnerships with industry to make the marketing and sale of non-medical

fentanyl and other dangerous substances more difficult throughout the region. Seventy participants from 21 countries and territories and four international organizations and nine representatives from private-sector partners exchanged experiences and practical advice on building legitimate e-commerce while addressing trafficking in dangerous substances over the Internet. In addition, in-person and online training was delivered to law and regulatory enforcement officers in the region on countering trafficking, including through awareness-raising on emerging new psychoactive substances, non-medical synthetic opioids and safe handling approaches to fentanyl, and on information exchange, in partnership with international partners.

561. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of regional meetings were postponed. Others, such as the third meeting of the Advisory Council on Dangerous Drugs of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, were held online. Countries participating in that meeting adopted a resolution entitled "Turning words into actions towards a drug-free ASEAN community", defining the scope of future activities within the Council.

3. National legislation, policy and action

562. In 2020, the Government of Thailand initiated a legislative amendment to the Narcotics Act which would remove kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*), a plant-based psychoactive substance not under international control, from category V of the country's list of narcotics. In contrast, Indonesian authorities are considering whether to place kratom under national control as a category I narcotic, which would make it illegal in the country. Before taking such a decision, during the period 2020–2024, Indonesia will undertake further research on the issues, including health, sociological, socioeconomic, ecological and alternative development considerations, surrounding such a scheduling decision.

563. The Government of Thailand is considering a proposal to remove cannabis from the narcotics list by means of a ministerial regulation of the Ministry of Public Health, under which research would be conducted on the effects of cannabis in medicines, cosmetics and herbs, in line with the Government's policy of boosting the country's competitiveness in the production of cannabis-based products. This regulation would allow for the cultivation of the cannabis plants specified in the regulation by individuals and corporations, subject to conditions on trade and possession. The Food and Drug Administration of Thailand joined the country's national network of medical

cannabis cultivators to organize a training course on planting techniques for farmers, community enterprise groups and agricultural cooperatives.

564. The President of Indonesia mandated the National Narcotics Agency to implement a new national action plan for the prevention and eradication of narcotic drug abuse and circulation for the period 2020–2024. The action plan builds upon the previous one, which was implemented during the period 2018–2019. Actions included in the plan are the provision and dissemination of information related to the dangers of drugs, the establishment of an anti-drug task force and the inclusion of relevant topics in educational materials and training materials for officials. The plan is to be implemented in cooperation with various ministries and authorities in the country.

565. In January 2020, the Government of Indonesia adopted a 15-action point resolution addressing the drugs situation in correctional facilities in the country. The action points include the provision of medical assistance and social rehabilitation to over 21,000 prisoners who use drugs, as well as addressing overcrowding in order to prevent the circulation of illegal drugs within prisons.

566. The Ministry of Home Affairs of Indonesia issued ministerial regulation No. 12, 2019 (replacing a previous regulation from 2013), pursuant to which provincial and local governments and village heads are permitted to conduct demand-reduction activities within their jurisdictions. Such activities may be focused on raising awareness, early detection, community empowerment or providing medical treatment and/or rehabilitation services.

567. In the Philippines, allowing the use of cannabidiol-based medications with no more than 0.1 per cent THC content is being considered for the treatment of certain forms of epilepsy, such as Lennox-Gastaut and Dravet syndrome. The national Dangerous Drugs Board informed the public that cannabis use remained illegal in the country for both recreational and medical use.

568. In June 2020, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 41/2, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a comprehensive report on the situation of human rights in the Philippines (A/HRC/44/22). In the report, the High Commissioner concluded that the heavy focus on countering national security threats and drug use in the country had resulted in serious human rights violations, including killings and arbitrary detentions, as well as in impunity for those killings, and a failure of domestic mechanisms to ensure accountability thus far. Also in the report, the High Commissioner stressed the need for independent, impartial and effective investigations

into all allegations of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in The Hague is undertaking a preliminary examination of the situation in the Philippines, analysing crimes allegedly committed in the country in the context of its “war on drugs” since 1 July 2016.

569. The Board reminds all Governments that extra-judicial action, taken in purported pursuit of drug control objectives, is inconsistent with their obligations under the three international drug control conventions. All drug control actions taken to comply with these obligations should be taken with full respect for the rule of law and due process of law.

570. In February 2020, the Prime Minister of Viet Nam announced measures to address the drug situation in the country, outlining nine key tasks. As part of those measures, attention and priority should be given to drug use prevention, including at the family, commune and district levels and among high-risk groups. Viet Nam will focus on enhancing the detection of large-scale, transborder drug trafficking, preventing Viet Nam from becoming a transit country, and will introduce strict controls on the import, export and manufacture of controlled substances and precursors. Viet Nam intends to collect data on the number of people with drug use disorders in order to prepare resources for early intervention and improve the effectiveness of treatment and rehabilitation programmes, as well as to draft legal documents on drug prevention and control and related legislative amendments. Cooperation among the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs and other relevant agencies was outlined as crucial.

571. In line with that, in March 2020, the Ministry of Public Security of Viet Nam introduced amendments to the national law on drug prevention and control, with a view to improving the effectiveness of the State’s management of drug prevention and control, as well as of compulsory and voluntary rehabilitation. Other aims of the amendments were to improve and ensure safety in society and decrease the number of deaths and illnesses caused by crime and drug use. The Ministry of Health requested its agencies to enhance the implementation of activities for drug prevention and control and to set up plans and programmes in that regard. June was declared the national action month for drug use prevention and control.

572. The Government of Myanmar adopted a new national strategic plan for the period 2020–2024 and is in the process of developing a two-year action plan for

the states and regions of the country in order to implement the national drug policy that was formally approved in 2018. The national policy was seen as a move from a law enforcement to a health-oriented approach, with areas covering supply reduction and alternative development, demand reduction, international cooperation, research and analysis, and compliance with human rights. For the first time, the Government of Myanmar formally included in its national policy measures to reduce the negative consequences of drug use.

573. Effective in May 2020, Singapore expanded the national list of controlled substances by adding 17 new psychoactive substances to its schedules. Currently, Singapore classifies 12 generic groups of new psychoactive substances and 160 individually listed new psychoactive substances as class A drugs. In addition, three non-fentanyl novel synthetic opioids were added to the country's national schedules of controlled substances on the basis of literature reviews from overseas science journals in which the presence of those substances on illicit drug markets and their structural similarities to substances shown to be liable to abuse and with limited licit use had been highlighted. In April 2020, seven precursors were put under national control in Myanmar.

574. Following reports of increased drug trafficking in Cambodia, in 2020, the Government adopted a seven-point strategy to combat illegal drugs. The strategy includes education and dissemination of information related to the negative consequences of drug use among the population, monitoring drug use and continued construction of treatment and rehabilitation centres. The strategy is also aimed at encouraging private sector support for the country's national movement to combat drugs and drug-related crime, including in its border areas.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

575. The illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of heroin, which is reported as the second most-frequently trafficked drug in South-East Asia, continued to pose challenges for most countries in the region, although most illicit manufacture of heroin in the region takes place in northern Myanmar.

576. In the UNODC Myanmar opium survey for 2019, the total area under opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar in 2019 was estimated at 33,100 ha, representing a decrease of 11 per cent in comparison with 2018, continuing a downward trend that started in 2014. Despite decreasing demand for opiates, the estimated domestic

heroin consumption of 6 tons was valued at between \$152 million and \$290 million, while exports to neighbouring countries were estimated to have generated \$1 billion.

577. Countries of the region have been seizing an increasing amount of methamphetamine over the last 10 years, more than in any other part of the world. According to UNODC, marked increases in the amounts seized were seen in Thailand, although they also decreased in China, where wastewater analysis showed a significant decline in methamphetamine consumption.

578. The quantities of methamphetamine seized annually by the Republic of Korea remained high in 2019, and nearly 80 per cent of the total amount seized was being trafficked by air travellers. The amount of crystalline methamphetamine seized was the second largest on record in 2019, while seizures of methamphetamine tablets and cocaine reached a record high in that year.

579. Also in 2019, a record amount (2.3 tons) of crystalline methamphetamine was seized in Japan, driven mainly by maritime interdictions by the national authorities of large amounts. Similarly, seizures of "ecstasy" tablets increased sixfold between 2018 and 2019, reaching a record high. In 2018, over 71 per cent of arrests for alleged drug-related offences were related to methamphetamine and over 63 per cent of all smuggling cases were cases of smuggling by air travellers. The number of cannabis-related arrests in 2018 in Japan reached a record high, accounting for over 25 per cent of all drug-related arrests in the country.

580. Methamphetamine in its crystalline form has been more persistent recently on the illicit market, with higher purity and a lower price. In Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam, retail prices of methamphetamine more than halved while, at the same time, the purity of the drug rose to around 95 per cent in 2019 in Thailand. Similar developments were seen in other countries of the region.

581. The discrepancy between the amount of methamphetamine seized and the comparatively low amount of key precursors and pre-precursors seized continues to characterize the situation in the region. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances can be found in the report of the Board for 2020 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

582. **The Board expresses its concern over the continuous increases in the illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and**

use of synthetic drugs, in particular methamphetamine, and urges countries of the region to take further action at the domestic and regional levels to address this alarming situation.

583. According to UNODC, by the end of 2019, a total of 461 different new psychoactive substances had been reported by countries in East and South-East Asia, almost half of the total number reported at the global level. Japan reported the largest number (366 substances), followed by China (201), Singapore (118) and the Republic of Korea (93).

584. In Viet Nam, during the first half of 2020, over 11,000 drug-related cases were investigated, with nearly 16,000 arrests and 235 kg of heroin seized, in addition to nearly 1.6 tons and 850,000 tablets of synthetic drugs, according to the Counter-Narcotics Police Department of the Ministry of Public Security. While the quantity of drugs seized decreased in comparison with the same period in 2019, there was an increase of nearly 10 per cent in the number of drug-related cases, despite the lockdown in place over part of the period owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

585. According to the Government of China, Yunnan Province remained the main transit point for overseas drugs being trafficked inland, commonly through express delivery services, owing to the low costs and low risks. Online drug trafficking has been emerging, with a total of nearly 7,000 drug-related cyber cases in 2019. The increasing use of the Internet for illicit trade and drug-related activities has also been reported by other countries of the region. The Government also reported that new forms and new types of drugs had been emerging. In the course of 2019, 41 new psychoactive substances were detected in the country, of which 5 were newly detected.

5. Prevention and treatment

586. Many countries in the region continue to lack a mechanism for gathering information on the scope and nature of drug use. Systematic and quantitative data would allow for the development of an evidence-based drug policy tailored to each country's specific needs.

587. For a number of years, the primary drug of use within the region has been methamphetamine. According to the *World Drug Report 2020*, in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore, the majority of people seeking treatment for drug use sought such treatment for the use of crystalline methamphetamine, while in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and

Thailand, the majority were primarily seeking treatment for the use of methamphetamine tablets. Overall, people receiving treatment for the use of methamphetamine account for more than three quarters of those in treatment in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

588. The Government of China estimated that, in 2019, there were 2.14 million drug users registered in the country, accounting for 0.16 per cent of the total population of China, slightly less than the year before. Methamphetamine remained the primary drug of use (accounting for 55.2 per cent, or 1.18 million drug users), followed by heroin (37.5 per cent of users) and ketamine (2.3 per cent of all drug users). The number of cannabis users remained stable in comparison with 2018. In 2019, the Government reported that 220,000 persons had undergone compulsory treatment and that 300,000 persons had received community-based treatment and rehabilitation.

589. In Indonesia, according to the 2019 national survey on drug abuse and illegal trafficking, which had been undertaken by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences in cooperation with the National Narcotics Agency and covered all 34 provinces of the country, the rate of past-year drug use in the country reached 1.80 per cent, equivalent to approximately 3.5 million people aged 15–64, of whom 3.2 per cent were students. The most widely used drugs were crystalline methamphetamine, cannabis, amphetamine-type stimulants and other psychotropic substances.

590. In 2020, the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand opened a series of cannabis clinics, providing patients with access to cannabis oil for medical treatment. Four types of preparations, containing different combinations of CBD and THC, were given to patients to treat migraine, insomnia, neck pain and muscle stiffness.

591. In 2019, a total of 232 patients underwent inpatient treatment at the Al-Islah Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre, the only approved centre for the treatment of drug use disorders in Brunei Darussalam. Of those, 201 (87 per cent) were men. Of the total patients, 209 were first-time patients, 50 per cent of whom were admitted on the basis of a minister's order following a failed urine test, 34 per cent on the basis of a court order and 16 per cent on a voluntary basis.

592. According to the National Anti-Drugs Agency of Malaysia, the most-used drug in the country in 2019 was methamphetamine (nearly 60 per cent), followed by heroin

(28 per cent) and other amphetamines (10 per cent). The majority of users were people aged between 19 and 39. Approximately 4,000 cases of crystalline methamphetamine use were recorded in the country in 2014, but nearly 14,000 were recorded in 2019. In addition, the use of amphetamine-type stimulants more than doubled, from 1,152 cases registered in 2018 to 2,872 in 2019.

593. In June 2020, the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs of Viet Nam issued a plan for the review of detoxification and post-detoxification management activities undertaken during the period 2016–2020. The plan was aimed at reviewing the implementation and outcomes of measures put in place during that period, with a view to proposing new measures for the period 2021–2025. According to the Ministry, as of November 2019, there were over 200,000 people with a drug use disorder, representing an increase of more than 10,000 in comparison with 2018. As of April 2020, a total of 97 public treatment facilities and 16 centres for treatment on a voluntary basis had been licensed to operate, providing treatment for nearly 35,000 people. The existing opioid substitution therapy programme, using both methadone and buprenorphine, has provided services for 54,000 patients to date. In addition, opioid substitution therapy programmes using methadone have been implemented in compulsory settings in two provinces and piloted in a prison setting.

594. The National Authority for Combating Drugs of Cambodia, in cooperation with relevant ministries and provincial drug control committees, continued to work on reducing the negative consequences of drug use and provided opioid substitution therapy with methadone maintenance services to 108 people, including 17 women, in two hospitals. In addition, the national programme on the exchange of syringes was used by 668 people who inject drugs in 2019. Cambodia had 20,091 registered drug users, a small increase in comparison with 2018. The increase was attributed by the national authorities to an increase in admissions to treatment centres on a voluntary basis.

595. In 2019, the 29 treatment centres and 56 clinics in Myanmar treated over 10,000 people, over 80 per cent of whom were using heroin. Altogether, 11 treatment centres, operating under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, provide services to reintegrate people who have undergone treatment for drug use.

596. The Drug Dependence Treatment and Research Unit of the Ministry of Health and Sports of Myanmar has taken measures to ensure the continuity of medically assisted treatment services for people who use drugs since March 2020, including the provision of take-home doses

of methadone for extended periods of time, the provision of hygiene measures at centres and education for service providers and the use of online communication tools by clinicians. In 2019, over 7,000 drug users were provided opioid substitution therapy with methadone.

597. As part of a campaign launched by the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand in June 2020, free HIV tests are being made available, including for youth under the age of 18. Under the new measures, people can voluntarily request free HIV testing twice a year at all hospitals that provide services under the national health coverage scheme.

598. Drug use in Singapore continues to be measured by the number of people arrested for using drugs. In 2019, the Central Narcotics Bureau arrested 3,526 people for drug use (representing 41 per cent of all arrests), of whom 62 per cent were aged under 30. While there was a decrease in the number of persons arrested for heroin use, there was an increase in those arrested for use of new psychoactive substances (12 per cent of arrests) and methamphetamine (63 per cent of arrests). Throughout the year, the Central Narcotics Bureau has continued to enhance preventive drug education efforts, using augmented reality technology, social media, schools, parents and anti-drug advocates to reach out to the country's young people.

599. The 2019 nationwide survey on the nature and extent of drug abuse in the Philippines was undertaken by the Dangerous Drugs Board, in cooperation with the Department of Social Welfare and Development. Altogether, 55 facilities (53 residential and 2 outpatient) participated in the survey, and reported a total of nearly 5,300 admissions for 2019, representing a decrease of 4 per cent compared with 2018. The decrease could be attributed to the community-based drug rehabilitation programme in place. A total of 89 per cent of the patients were men, with a mean age of 32. According to the survey, the most commonly used drug was methamphetamine hydrochloride, which was the main drug of use for 94 per cent of the patients.

South Asia

South Asia continued to experience a rise in drug trafficking over the reporting period, as evidenced by significant increases in the amounts of opiates and cannabis herb seized in the region, as well as an increase in the use of methamphetamine pills (“yaba”). From early 2020, the challenges related to combating such trafficking and use were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Internet, in combination with postal and courier parcel services, is being exploited more and more for drug trafficking within South Asia, in particular for trafficking in psychotropic substances.

Trafficking in heroin and methamphetamine is increasing, in particular along the maritime routes in South Asia.

1. Major developments

600. Major drug-related challenges facing South Asia include increased trafficking in heroin and methamphetamine, especially along maritime routes. During the reporting period, a shift from trafficking in narcotic drugs to trafficking in synthetic drugs, including amphetamine-type stimulants, and chemical precursors was reported. The smuggling of heroin from Afghanistan over land and subsequently along maritime routes continued. An increased use of courier services, as well as the darknet and Internet pharmacies, was also reported.

601. South Asia has been identified as a major supplier of pharmaceutical preparations containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which are substances that are diverted and used in the clandestine manufacture of methamphetamine within the region and in other countries in Asia.

602. In the UNODC *World Drug Report 2020*, a global rise in substance use disorders was noted, both in overall numbers and in the proportion of the world’s population. Drug use increased more rapidly in developing countries over the period 2000–2018. Adolescents and young adults account for the largest share of those using drugs and are also the most vulnerable to the negative health effects of drugs. This trend is mirrored in South Asia, where youth constitute about 50 per cent of the region’s population.

2. Regional cooperation

603. In October 2019, UNODC convened a regional workshop in Manipur, India, for senior drug law enforcement officials and policymakers from South Asian

countries, to foster collective action and develop recommendations to counter trafficking in opiates and amphetamines in South Asia. The consultation was attended by officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

604. In December 2019, UNODC participated in and presented key areas of concern on drug trafficking and money-laundering at the regional customs enforcement meeting attended by customs administrators from 21 countries of the Asia-Pacific region and by representatives of INTERPOL.

605. In February 2020, the high-level National Conference on Combating Drug Trafficking and Abuse of Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation⁷¹ was held in New Delhi. UNODC was invited to convene a special session on interdictions related to drug trafficking involving the darknet and postal and courier services.

606. In May 2020, the UNODC Regional Office for South Asia organized an online training session for doctors and technical staff from Bangladesh and India on preventing and responding to drug overdose.

3. National legislation, policy and action

607. Addressing challenges in the prison sector in Sri Lanka, UNODC provided materials to support the refurbishment of a specialized voluntary drug rehabilitation centre designed to reduce concentration in the overall prison population. On 26 June 2020, the UNODC Regional Office for South Asia participated in an event to mark the launch of the Nawadiganthaya drug treatment facility in Colombo, which was also attended by high-level representatives of the Ministry of Defence, the National Dangerous Drugs Control Board, the Sri Lanka Navy, the Sri Lanka Police and the State Intelligence Service.

608. Also on 26 June 2020 (International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking), the Ministry of Social

⁷¹The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation is a regional organization comprising seven member States located in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal. Five member States (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) are located in South Asia and two (Myanmar and Thailand) are located in South-East Asia. The Initiative provides a communication platform for countries in South and South-East Asia and enables the sharing of information and techniques to counter the drug problem affecting countries of those regions.

Justice and Empowerment of India launched a campaign called “*Nasha Mukht Bharat*” (Addiction-free India). The campaign was aimed at providing information regarding drug use and related problems across the 272 districts of India that had been identified by the Narcotics Control Bureau of India, on the basis of the findings of the most recent national survey on substance use, as the districts most affected by drug use.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

609. Methamphetamine remains the main drug of concern in many countries in the region. In 2020, Bangladesh continued to see significant seizures of “Yaba” tablets, which are a mix of methamphetamine and caffeine and come in different flavours and colours, despite a ban on pseudoephedrine, the main substance used to manufacture them, being in place since 2017. According to UNODC, the average annual quantity of amphetamine-type stimulants, mainly methamphetamines, seized in South Asia during the period 2014–2018 was 2 tons.

610. South Asia, in particular, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka, has seen an increase in the number of seizures and the amount of heroin seized owing to the growing use by drug traffickers of the southern route, which goes from Afghanistan, through the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan and then by sea or air either directly to Europe or through South Asia, Africa and/or the Gulf States: 218 kg of heroin were seized along the western coast of India in May 2019; 155 kg were seized in Sri Lanka in July and August 2019; 70 kg were seized in Maldives in October 2019; and 224 kg were seized in Sri Lanka in November 2019. All of those seizures were made on boats, some of which were on their way from Pakistan, as part of maritime operations that were largely joint operations by law enforcement agencies of India, Maldives and Sri Lanka. During the reporting period, a considerable increase in maritime trafficking in heroin was reported by South Asian countries.

611. Law enforcement authorities in India seized more than 3,212 kg of heroin in 2019, mostly in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, along the southern route. Areas close to the international borders in the north-western and north-eastern parts of India have reported a far higher prevalence of heroin use than the national average.

612. Another concerning trend in the reporting period was the increase in trafficking in heroin from Myanmar to India. In March 2019, 44.5 kg heroin sourced from

Myanmar was seized in Delhi and, in April 2019, 50 kg of heroin, also sourced from Myanmar, was seized in Delhi.

613. Trafficking in methamphetamine tablets from Myanmar to Bangladesh and India was reported during 2019. In September 2019, the Indian Coast Guard intercepted a boat in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands that had come from Myanmar and had 1.1 tons of methamphetamine onboard. Another seizure of 370 kg of methamphetamine and ketamine took place in December 2019 in the same area, from a boat also coming from Myanmar. Methamphetamine precursor trafficking flows from India into Myanmar have also been reported. In June 2020, about 78 kg of crystalline methamphetamine washed ashore in the State of Tamil Nadu, in southern India. The methamphetamine in its crystalline form had been concealed in packaging bearing the label of a Chinese tea brand and sealed inside a drum.

614. A large amount of methamphetamine originating in Myanmar was seized in Bangladesh during 2019, by virtue of the two countries being neighbours and the regular movement across their shared border. According to the Government of Myanmar, about one third of all methamphetamine tablets seized in 2019 were found in Rakhine State, indicating large flows of the drug from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

615. Recent ketamine manufacturing and trafficking cases indicate that Indian drug trafficking organizations may be playing an increasingly large role in the ketamine market in the East and South-East Asian regions. For instance, in June 2020, Indian authorities dismantled a synthetic drug laboratory in Chennai and seized about 110 kg of ketamine destined for Malaysia, together with 55.5 kg of pseudoephedrine.

616. The greater use of land routes and improved connectivity between Myanmar and north-east India has led to a rise in methamphetamine trafficking in the region. Indian police reported a seizure of 3.9 million tablets in February 2020. In February 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs reported increased use of digital platforms and darknet markets. Through further investigations following the seizure of 55 kg of cocaine, which had been trafficked to Australia concealed in a plasma cutting machine shipped from India, Australian authorities were able to seize another 200 kg of methamphetamine in Australia and Indian authorities were able to seize 20 kg of cocaine in India.

617. In 2019, in India, a total of 3,212 kg of heroin was seized, compared with 1,258 kg in 2018. Similarly, in 2019, the total amount of opium seized was 4,542 kg, which was marginally more than the 4,307 kg recorded

in 2018. In addition, an increase in the amount of cocaine seized, from 35 kg in 2018 to 62 kg in 2019, was recorded.

618. In 2019, 70 kg of heroin were seized from a vessel inside the Maldives exclusive economic zone during a controlled delivery operation. In March 2020, the Maldives Police Service seized 61.06 kg of heroin and arrested 11 Maldivians during one operation. Heroin worth approximately 72 million rufiyaa (\$466,900) was confiscated from a fishing vessel docked at Male in March 2020.

619. In Sri Lanka, 7,071 kg of cannabis herb, 15.16 kg of cannabis resin, 1,741 kg of heroin, 10.84 kg of cocaine and 35.45 kg of methamphetamine were seized in 2019. The total number of persons arrested for drug-related crimes was 89,321 in the same year. Of those, 45,923 persons (51.41 per cent) were detained for cannabis possession, 40,970 persons (45.87 per cent) for crimes related to heroin possession and trafficking and 2,073 persons (2.32 per cent) for methamphetamine trafficking. The amount of drugs seized between 1 November 2019 and 30 June 2020, as reported by different law enforcement agencies in Sri Lanka, totalled 1,713 kg of heroin, 7,088.7 kg of cannabis, 1,389 kg of cocaine, 2,295 kg of cannabis resin and 775.2 kg of synthetic drugs (in capsule and tablet form).

620. During the 12-month reporting period 2019/20, seven export consignments, including 20.8 million tablets of tramadol, an opioid analgesic not under international control (equivalent to 2,980 kg of tramadol base), in four consignments were stopped by Indian authorities following the identification of forged import certificates.

621. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in South Asia can be found in the report of the Board for 2020 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

5. Prevention and treatment

622. Approximately 20 per cent of the world's population aged 15–64 live in South Asia and the region accounts for more than one third of the estimated number of opioid users worldwide. According to UNODC, in South Asia, among the population aged 15–64, the average annual prevalence in 2018 was 2.82 per cent for cannabis use, 2.04 per cent for opioid use, 0.1 per cent for cocaine use and 0.18 per cent for amphetamine and pharmaceutical stimulant use.

623. South Asian countries have also seen an increase in the use of inhalants among street children. This is a particularly concerning trend as abusing inhalants or other solvents in early stages of life increases vulnerability to the use of other illicit drugs later in life. As shown in the 2019 national survey on substance use in India, inhalants were the only category of substances for which the prevalence of current use among children and adolescents (1.17 per cent) was higher than that for adults (0.58 per cent). At the national level, an estimated 460,000 children and about 1.8 million adults need support for inhalant use disorders. Similar problems have been reported in Bangladesh and Nepal. In Bhutan, the use of solvents, particularly among school children, has been on the rise.

624. In South Asia, health systems and providers of substance use disorder treatment face challenges posed by the emergence of new drugs and polydrug use, for which treatment is not always readily available. Furthermore, there are difficulties in tackling comorbidities, such as HIV and hepatitis C, associated with drug use. The most noteworthy development in terms of data on drug use prevalence in South Asia during the reporting period was the publication of the results of the 2019 national survey on substance use in India. The survey was a combination of household sampling and respondent-driven sampling and had over 500,000 respondents from all states in the country. The survey found that there were 31 million cannabis users in the country among those aged 10–75, which translates into an annual prevalence of 2.83 per cent. The number of opiate users in that age group was reported to be 23 million (annual prevalence of 2.1 per cent). However, “problem use” was associated with opiates (7.7 million persons) more than cannabis (7.2 million persons).

625. India has a multipronged National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction. During the 12-month reporting period 2019/20, India conducted more than 1,300 awareness-raising programmes for 150,000 young people and conducted capacity-enhancement programmes for more than 1,500 specialized staff. School-based interventions, under the name “*Navchetna*”, or “New Awakening”, with a primary role given to teachers, peers and parents, were also created.

626. In Sri Lanka, the total number of reported drug users who received treatment in 2019 was 70,862; 2,497 people received treatment for cannabis use disorder and 2,769 people received treatment for opioid use disorder. During the reporting period, 869 beds were available in inpatient treatment facilities in Sri Lanka.

627. Also in Sri Lanka, cannabis use among youths increased during the reporting period. An estimated total of 301,898 Sri Lankans are registered as cannabis users. Cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug, with an annual prevalence of 1.9 per cent among the total population aged over 14. In Sri Lanka, an estimated 92,540 persons, or 0.6 per cent of the population aged over 14, are heroin users. Of those, 70,862 persons, or 77 per cent, are regular heroin users. The prevalence of heroin use among males aged over 14 is estimated at 1.2 per cent. A total estimated 178,643 persons are regular cannabis users and the total number of persons who received treatment for cannabis use in the country in 2019 was 3,613, a 19 per cent decrease compared with 2018. Of the total number of those with drug use disorders in the country, 19 per cent were living in prison settings.

628. Initial data from the latest drug use survey in Nepal, launched in June 2020, showed that the average age of first use of inhalants in Nepal was below 19. In Nepal, the number of people receiving drug treatment for opioid use disorder increased from 902 in February 2020 to 936 in April 2020.

629. On 26 June 2020 (International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking), the Government of Maldives confirmed its decision to return to providing opioid substitution therapy with methadone in its State-run rehabilitation programmes, after a gap of almost three years.

630. In 2019 and 2020, UNODC successfully implemented the universal family skills training programme in Bangladesh. The main objective of the programme is to decrease the risk of drug use and other negative health and social outcomes among young people through evidence-based prevention focused on improving family functioning, bonding and communication. The programme reached and benefited 80 families and 83 adolescents in Bangladesh. UNODC-trained facilitators presented a report on the implementation of the initiative, in the presence of the Education Minister and senior officials from the Ministry of Education, in Dhaka on 1 January 2020.

631. The non-medical use of tramadol has been reported by Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, about 0.2 per cent of the population aged 14 and older are estimated to have misused pharmaceutical preparations in the past year. The non-medical use of tramadol is the most common, although the misuse of morphine has also been reported. The Board notes the growing problem of methamphetamine trafficking and use and the increased use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in the region. A central component in the design of effective

prevention and treatment programmes throughout South Asia remains the collection of drug-related data by centralized agencies mandated to assess that information. Although the amount and quality of information regarding drug use patterns in the region have greatly improved, more research on consumption patterns and trends is needed to tailor treatment initiatives to local needs. The Board reiterates the need for capacity-building in the field of treatment and rehabilitation of people with drug use disorders in the region.

West Asia

In Afghanistan, despite the decrease in the area under opium poppy cultivation in 2019, the production of opium in the country remained almost the same in 2019 as in 2018, with Afghanistan remaining the country in which the vast majority of the world's illicit opium poppy cultivation and opium production take place.

The measures introduced to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting drug shortages on the illicit market reported in countries of South-West Asia may have resulted in increased consumption of harmful domestically produced substances and pharmaceutical drugs, and other more harmful patterns of drug use by people with drug use disorders.

1. Major developments

632. The area under opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan decreased for the second year in a row in 2019, declining by almost 47 per cent, from 263,000 ha in 2018 to 163,000 ha in 2019. However, UNODC has estimated that the production of opium in 2019 remained at almost the same level as in 2018, possibly owing to higher yields. The low price of opium during planting time was one of the main drivers of the decline in cultivation. Afghanistan has accounted for almost 84 per cent of global opium production over the past five years and, to date, there have been no indications of a reduction in the supply of heroin of Afghan origin to consumer markets globally. The Board notes with concern that continued large-scale opium poppy cultivation and opium production in Afghanistan, coupled with limited eradication efforts, further undermine the efforts of Afghanistan and its partners to promote peace, security and sustainable development in the country. The Board reiterates its call for further technical and financial assistance to address the drug control challenges in the country.

633. Trafficking in opiates has continued during the COVID-19 pandemic along the traditional northern, Balkan and southern routes, and the transportation of commercial goods is in many cases used as a cover-up for transporting opiates. However, air travel restrictions and border controls introduced as a result of the pandemic may have had a strong impact on heroin trafficking by land and air, with a shift towards increased trafficking using maritime transport.

634. The substantial increase in 2019 in trafficking in methamphetamine in Afghanistan, continuing an upward trend observed in the country since 2014 and potentially resulting from increased manufacture of the substance in Afghanistan, has become a matter of great concern to the countries of the region and the global community.

635. Afghanistan continued to be one of the main sources of cannabis resin globally; it was cited as a source of the substance by 19 per cent of the countries worldwide that reported seizures of cannabis resin in the period 2014–2018.

636. The Board reiterates its concern with regard to the trafficking in and manufacture of “captagon”⁷² affecting the countries of the Middle East, which are not only destination markets for that substance, but are also increasingly becoming a source for it.

637. Central Asian countries continued to report an increase in trafficking in synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances, which are increasingly sold online or through social media platforms.

638. The Board shares the concern raised by others that the measures introduced to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting drug shortages on the illicit market reported in countries of South-West Asia, including shortages of illicitly manufactured heroin, may have resulted in an increase in the consumption of harmful domestically produced substances and pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs and/or psychotropic substances, and other harmful patterns of drug use.

⁷²Captagon was originally the official trade name for a pharmaceutical preparation containing the substance fenethylamine, a synthetic stimulant. As encountered in seizures across West Asia today and referred to in the present report, “captagon”, is a falsified drug compressed into pills or tablets that are similar in appearance but distinct from the earlier pharmaceutical preparation Captagon. The active ingredient in counterfeit “captagon” is amphetamine, which is typically cut with multiple adulterants, such as caffeine.

2. Regional cooperation

639. In line with the Anti-Drug Strategy for 2018–2023 of SCO and the programme of action to implement the Strategy, an international counter-narcotics operation named Web was conducted in SCO member States (China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) in July 2019. The operation, which was coordinated by staff based at CARICC in Almaty, Kazakhstan, was aimed at suppressing the channels of supply and distribution of new psychoactive substances and synthetic and other drugs, including those involving the use of the Internet and electronic payment systems. Representatives of counter-narcotics agencies, internal affairs and public security bodies, national security agencies, and customs and border services of the SCO member States, as well as an SCO observer State (Afghanistan) and international organizations (UNODC and CARICC) contributed to the conduct of the operation.

640. In accordance with the plan for the main organizational activities for 2019 of the Coordination Council of Heads of Competent Authorities for Countering Drug Trafficking of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, in cooperation with the CSTO secretariat, conducted a subregional counter-narcotics operation named Channel-Caucasus Redoubt in September 2019, during which 18 tons of drugs were seized.

641. In addition, in August 2019 in Balykchy, Kyrgyzstan, special units of the anti-drug agencies of CSTO member States conducted a tactical exercise named Thunder-2019 to identify and investigate transnational criminal groups; seize and destroy places of storage, production and packaging of drugs; and destroy drug laboratories.

3. National legislation, policy and action

642. On 26 February 2020, the Parliament of Uzbekistan adopted amendments to the Law on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1999 permitting legal entities with a relevant licence to cultivate and trade in cannabis for industrial purposes. In accordance with the amendments, cannabis may be grown, processed and sold only for industrial purposes that are not related to the production or manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Another condition set out in the legislation is the THC content of the varieties of cultivated cannabis, which should not exceed 0.2 per cent. The varieties of cannabis permitted for cultivation by legal entities are to

be determined by the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan. Prior to the adoption of the amendments, section 6 of the Act on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances had provided for the maintenance of a State monopoly over cultivation and other activities involving plants containing narcotic drugs, which could be undertaken only for scientific purposes.

643. On 3 October 2019, the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan adopted a resolution aimed at improving measures to prevent, diagnose and treat diseases related to drug use, strengthening the material, technical and human capacities of drug treatment services and enhancing the effectiveness of the work of drug treatment institutions. In the resolution, the Cabinet of Ministers provided for the construction and renovation of buildings and premises, the provision of medical equipment, tools and other inventory for those institutions, the introduction of modern methods and technologies for prevention, diagnosis and treatment, and related scientific research.

644. On 21 April 2020, the Parliament of Lebanon adopted a law allowing for the cultivation of, trade in, study and use of cannabis for medical purposes. The law allows for the cultivation of cannabis with a maximum THC content of 1 per cent. In addition, it provides for the establishment of an authority for managing the cannabis industry, namely, the Regulatory Authority for the Cultivation of Cannabis Plants for Medical and Industrial Use, and for a committee responsible for the review of licensing applications and compliance with the law and for developing instructions issued by the Regulatory Authority.

645. In December 2019, the mini-Dublin Group for Afghanistan, which is dedicated to the fight against drug trafficking, held a meeting that was hosted by the French Embassy in Kabul and was attended by the acting Interior Minister of Afghanistan, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, and representatives of 19 countries and organizations, including the European Union, NATO and UNODC. In their statement, the members of the mini-Dublin Group reiterated that they remained committed to continuing to work in close cooperation with the Afghan authorities and would take actions to enhance the effectiveness of the fight against drugs.

646. One of the factors defining the situation with regard to drugs in Kazakhstan is the influx of new types of synthetic drugs into the illicit drug market. Legislative amendments were adopted in 2019 to improve State control over the circulation of new psychoactive substances and counter trafficking therein. As a result of the

amendments, the Government is now empowered to approve the list of controlled substances and to determine the threshold quantities that define criminal liability. Previously, any changes to that list and the threshold quantities of drugs could be introduced only through a legislative process. In July 2019, the Government adopted a resolution in which it approved the updated list of narcotic drugs, thereby increasing the number of controlled synthetic drugs in the country, including fentanyl and its possible analogues. The measures adopted also allowed for the rapid inclusion of new types of drugs in the list and the timely establishment of State control over them.

647. During the reporting period, Kazakhstan introduced amendments to its Criminal Code to classify the sale of and inducement to use drugs over the Internet and other electronic information resources as particularly serious offences. Criminal liability for the sale of drugs in public places by an official misusing his or her official position was increased, the advertising and promotion of drugs was introduced as a new category of crime and the definitions of drug advertising and drug promotion were amended in the legislation in order to exclude unintentional acts.

648. Kyrgyzstan reported that it was currently developing a new draft law on narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their analogues and precursors. In addition, measures were being taken to update the existing national Anti-Drug Programme, including by developing an action plan for the coming five-year period.

649. To prevent violations of its rules on the legal circulation of controlled substances, the Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan held seminars in Dushanbe and in the country's regions for employees of State agencies, organizations, institutions and enterprises whose activities were related to the legal circulation of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors. Participants in the seminars discussed the requirements of the legislative framework of Tajikistan regarding licit drug control in the country.

650. To address problems relating to the availability of and access to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and to ensure that sufficient stocks are available in the case of a complete closure of its borders in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population of Tajikistan officially applied for permission from the Drug Control Agency of Tajikistan to import such drugs and substances by air. In 2019, the Islamic Republic of Iran launched several drug control strategy documents, including the "Comprehensive document to combat the drug supply" and the "Comprehensive

document to adopt a community-based approach", which served as strategic and scientific road maps to counter the illicit use of drugs and psychotropic substances.

651. With a view to addressing the increasing challenges of trafficking in and consumption of new psychoactive substances, in 2019, Turkey placed 69 such substances under national control.

652. From 2 to 4 December 2019, as part of the INCB Learning project, specialized training on the requirements of the three international drug control conventions relating to the regulatory control and monitoring of the licit trade in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals was provided in Moscow to 38 drug control officials from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The participants also received hands-on training on the Board's global online tools, including I2ES, the PEN Online system, PICS and IONICS. These systems are available free of charge to Member States.

653. Following the aforementioned training, on 5 December 2019, the INCB Learning project held an awareness-raising workshop on the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. The event was co-organized with and hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and brought together participants from national authorities, international organizations and civil society to discuss the importance of ensuring access to medicines containing internationally controlled substances.

654. Initiated by UNODC, a meeting of experts from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was held in Vienna on 29 and 30 January 2020. The meeting was attended by independent scientific experts and by representatives of CARICC and UNODC. The participants discussed the current drug situation and recent trends in opiate trafficking along the northern route. In addition, concern was raised about increased trafficking in synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances in CARICC member States.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

655. According to UNODC, the area under opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan decreased for the second year in a row in 2019, declining by almost 47 per cent in 2019 compared with 2018. Despite that decline, UNODC has estimated that the production of opium in 2019

amounted to 6,400 tons, almost the same amount as reported in 2018. That could be explained by the higher yields reported in the main opium-producing provinces in Afghanistan, which were attributed to favourable weather conditions. The low price of opium during planting time was one of the main drivers of the reduction in cultivation. In the main opium production areas in Afghanistan, the price of opium declined by an average of 37 per cent in 2018 and 24 per cent in 2019. Prices for high-quality heroin also declined in those areas, by 11 per cent in 2018 and 27 per cent in 2019.

656. Afghanistan has accounted for about 84 per cent of global opium production (global opium production was estimated at approximately 7,610 tons in 2019) over the past five years, supplying illicit drug markets in neighbouring countries, in Europe, the Middle East, South Asia and Africa, and to a limited extent in North America and Oceania. To date, there has been no indication of a reduction in the supply of heroin to consumer markets globally, despite a decrease in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.

657. According to UNODC, the key months for the opium poppy harvest in Afghanistan are March to June; the 2020 opium poppy harvest was thus under way during the COVID-19 crisis. This suggests that the opium harvest would be affected if the labour force needed for harvesting was not able or willing to travel to the areas where opium poppy is grown in the country owing to mobility restrictions imposed by the Government or non-State actors, or to the spread of COVID-19 itself. A shortage of opium poppy lancers has been observed in the western and southern provinces of the country, mainly attributed to the closure of a border crossing with Pakistan. However, women in opium poppy-growing households and persons who lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic appear to be increasingly engaged in the opium poppy-lancing process.

658. The largest quantities of opiates seized globally in 2018 were seized in Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan, which together accounted for 98 per cent of opium seized globally, 97 per cent of morphine and 38 per cent of heroin. In total, 690 tons of opium, 42 tons of morphine and 37 tons of heroin were seized in those three countries in 2018. The Islamic Republic of Iran accounted for more than half (53 per cent) of the amount of opiates seized globally, when defined in common heroin equivalents; it was followed by Afghanistan (12 per cent), Turkey (9 per cent) and Pakistan (5 per cent).

659. When the total amount of heroin and morphine seized in countries of Central Asia is combined with the

total amount of those substances seized in Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan, the resulting total represents more than 56 per cent of the global combined quantity of heroin and morphine seized in 2018.

660. According to CARICC, the amount of heroin seized in the territories of its member States, namely, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, increased by 69.6 per cent in 2019, compared with 2018, whereas the amount of opium seized decreased by 41.3 per cent. In total, 5.7 tons of opiates were seized in 2019, compared with 5.3 tons in 2018. The amount of heroin seized increased most significantly in Kazakhstan, from 58.6 kg in 2018 to 1,522 kg in 2019. The amount of heroin seized also increased in Azerbaijan, by 73 per cent, and in Uzbekistan, by 98.5 per cent, in 2019, compared with 2018. In the other CARICC member States, decreases in the amounts of heroin seized ranged from 27 per cent to 39 per cent. In 2019, the amount of opium seized increased only in the Russian Federation, from 1.3 kg in 2018 to 7.6 kg in 2019, while the remaining CARICC member States observed decreases ranging from 12 per cent to 89 per cent.

661. Analysing the current and potential impact of COVID-19 on drug trafficking in and through the Central Asian region, the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan, CARICC noted that the closure of State borders and the resulting restrictions on the movement of people and goods had somewhat weakened the ability of transnational organized criminal groups to smuggle drugs and precursors, as well as cash proceeds from drug-related crimes, across borders. However, CARICC is of the view that further research on the topic is required, as, during the initial months of 2020, an increase in the amounts of drugs seized overall, including drugs originating in Afghanistan, in the entire CARICC region was observed, which may have been a result of an increase in measures to counter drug trafficking, including measures by States to control the movement of cargo at borders, and not necessarily a result of an increase in activities of organized criminal groups as such. Transnational drug-related criminal groups could also be exploiting deliveries of food supplies to the populations of those countries during the pandemic in order to traffic drugs.

662. CARICC observed that, although trafficking in heroin of Afghan origin to illicit markets in the Russian Federation and beyond via Central Asian States had become more challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic, the risk of opiate trafficking continued to exist, as commercial cargo and food products continued to be transported, albeit in accordance with certain additional sanitation requirements. That was evidenced by a number

of major seizures made in March 2020 in countries located at the beginning of the northern route and the beginning of a sub-branch of the Balkan route that passes from the Islamic Republic of Iran to the countries of the southern Caucasus and then onwards to Ukraine via the Black Sea into Eastern Europe. Two major seizures of drugs smuggled from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Azerbaijan were recorded in March 2020: more than 43 kg of heroin, 500 grams of opium, 1.6 kg of cannabis and 2 kg of methamphetamine were seized during the first operation, and a combined total of 61 kg of heroin, opium and cannabis were seized during the second. Two criminal gangs involved in trafficking in drugs from the Islamic Republic of Iran into Tajikistan were also identified in Afghanistan, resulting in seizures of 10 kg of methamphetamine and 2.11 kg of heroin. In addition, at the end of April 2020, 40 kg of heroin were seized from a criminal trafficking group that had smuggled the drugs by car from Armenia to Georgia with the intention of smuggling them onward into Europe.

663. During the pandemic, trafficking in heroin also continued along the main Balkan route, which runs from Afghanistan, through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey and the Balkan countries, towards destination markets in Western and Central Europe. Similar to the situation along the northern route, the transportation of commercial goods was, in many cases, used as a cover. EMCDDA reported that seizures of significant amounts of heroin had been made along the Balkan route despite the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, a joint operation between authorities in Bulgaria and Turkey led to the seizure of 72 kg of heroin in Bulgaria at the end of March 2020. In addition, several seizures of large amounts of heroin reported in Turkey in the first months of 2020 and a further two seizures of more than 100 kg each in eastern Turkey in late April 2020 suggest that opiates have continued to flow from Afghanistan to Turkey. Moreover, a joint police operation at the end of February 2020 between authorities of the Netherlands and Turkey led to several significant seizures of heroin, with a total of 2,384 kg seized across five countries (1,105 kg in Kazakhstan, 703 kg in Germany, 350 kg in Poland, 171 kg in the Netherlands and 55 kg in Turkey).

664. Although no conclusive evidence is yet available concerning the overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in opiates along the southern route, which is used for trafficking in opiates to Europe by means of shipments from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan by air or sea, either directly or transiting through Gulf States and East Africa, air travel restrictions introduced as a result of the pandemic may have had a significant impact on heroin trafficking by air. In addition,

a recent increase in seizures of heroin in the Indian Ocean could support the conclusion that traffickers are using maritime transport and routes increasingly frequently to traffic heroin to Europe, which would indicate a major shift in the trafficking strategies of organized criminal groups. A recent seizure of heroin in the port of Rotterdam also demonstrates that trafficking in heroin by means of maritime transport continued during the pandemic.

665. According to a preliminary analysis of available data, the volume of methamphetamine seized in Afghanistan substantially increased, from 182 kg in 2018 to 1,251 kg in 2019, which continued the upward trend observed since 2014. This emerging trend, possibly resulting from the increasing manufacture of methamphetamine in Afghanistan, is of great concern to the countries of the region and the global community. Rapid increases in recent years in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine in Afghanistan have also been inferred by the substantial amounts of methamphetamine of Afghan origin seized by other countries. In particular, the Islamic Republic of Iran reported that most of the methamphetamine seized in its territory in 2018 had originated in Afghanistan. In addition, authorities in Sri Lanka expressed concern regarding an emerging trend whereby methamphetamine manufactured in Afghanistan was being trafficked along the already well-established southern route for heroin trafficking, after having seized at sea, in February 2020, 100 kg of crystalline methamphetamine, which they believed had originated in Afghanistan. According to UNODC, the extent of clandestine methamphetamine manufacture in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the bulk of methamphetamine continues to be seized, appears to be declining.

666. **The Board reiterates its concern with regard to trafficking in and production of falsified “captagon”, which continue to have a negative impact on the countries of the Middle East, which are not only destination markets for “captagon”, but are also increasingly becoming sources of the substance.** This can be explained in part by the continued political instability and unresolved conflicts in some parts of that subregion. In several notable seizures in the Middle East in 2019 and early 2020, “captagon” seized was believed to have been manufactured in Lebanon or the Syrian Arab Republic. During the first half of 2020, the Anti-Narcotics Department of Jordan seized 11.5 million “captagon” pills, with most of the seizures being made in the northern governorates of Jordan, near the border with the Syrian Arab Republic, or in the Governorate of Aqaba, near the borders with Israel and Saudi Arabia. In addition, from June 2019 to June 2020, 2.1 kg of crystalline methamphetamine were seized in four seizures in Amman. Between July 2019 and

June 2020, Lebanon seized about 1.8 million “captagon” pills and 2,990 “ecstasy” pills. Most of the seizures were accompanied by arrests of individuals from Lebanon or the Syrian Arab Republic. In one case, the “captagon” seized was destined for the Sudan, in another, for the United Kingdom, and in several other cases, for Saudi Arabia or other Gulf States. In June 2019, the Internal Security Forces of Lebanon dismantled a “captagon” smuggling network and arrested a prominent drug trafficker in the Bīqā’ Valley. He was suspected of smuggling large shipments of “captagon” to at least six countries (Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen). Kuwait and Oman also reported seizures of “captagon” pills during the first half of 2020. The countries of the subregion continued to face challenges related to trafficking in and use of tramadol, although official data in that regard remain scarce.

667. In July 2020, the police in Italy seized a record quantity of 14 tons of amphetamines, including more than 84 million “captagon” tablets with a value of over \$1 billion, which the authorities of Italy suspect were manufactured in the Syrian Arab Republic and destined for European markets, with the proceeds to be used for financing Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The tablets had been hidden in large paper and steel cylinders and transported to the port of Salerno in southern Italy, where they were seized by the police. According to the media statements of the Italian authorities, COVID-19 may have brought the manufacture and distribution of synthetic drugs in Europe to a halt, leading many traffickers to turn to the Syrian Arab Republic, where such manufacture does not seem to have been affected by the pandemic. Although it is too early to reach any definitive conclusions, restrictions on the movement of persons, goods and services across borders related to COVID-19 may have disrupted the supply of precursors used for the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs in the subregion, including in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

668. Turkey, which is on the route used for trafficking “captagon” to different parts of the Middle East and the Gulf States, reported that there had been a significant decrease in the amount of “captagon” seized in its territory in recent years. Cross-border operations and increased security measures to eliminate security threats to Turkey stemming from the civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic were believed to be the reasons for that decrease, which had led smugglers to opt for alternative routes. At the same time, Turkey, which has observed a continued increase in the amount of methamphetamine seized since 2016, saw a sharp increase (almost twofold) in the amount of the substance seized in 2019, compared with 2018. The largest

amount of methamphetamine seized ever in Turkey was in 2019; it totalled almost 1 ton. Experts in Turkey believe that the substance will become the biggest near-term threat to the country. Crystalline methamphetamine, which is the most common form of methamphetamine found in Turkey, is mainly seized in the regions bordering the Islamic Republic of Iran. Most of the methamphetamine seized in Turkey is believed to originate in the Islamic Republic of Iran and countries in Europe.

669. In 2019, in the territories of the CARICC member States, the total amount of cannabis and cannabis resin seized continued to represent the majority of overall drug seizures in terms of weight. Despite the travel restrictions and other protective measures implemented in CARICC member States as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, CARICC experts believe that cannabis and cannabis resin will continue to comprise the majority of the drugs seized in the region in 2020. Of a total of 66.3 tons of drugs seized in 2019, 55 tons were cannabis and cannabis resin. In 2018, about 52 tons of cannabis and cannabis resin were seized by CARICC member States. In Azerbaijan and Tajikistan in 2019, opiates accounted for the majority of seized drugs in terms of weight, while drugs of the cannabis group accounted for the majority in the other CARICC member States.

670. A total of 4.4 tons of cannabis resin were seized in CARICC member States in 2019, representing a 3.8 per cent decline compared with seizures in 2018. The amount of cannabis resin seized decreased significantly in Tajikistan, from 1.3 tons in 2018 to 608 kg in 2019. In 2019, seizures of cannabis resin also decreased in Azerbaijan (from 89 kg in 2018 to 23 kg in 2019), Kazakhstan (from 839 kg in 2018 to 709 kg in 2019) and Kyrgyzstan (from 205 kg in 2018 to 170 kg in 2019) but increased in Uzbekistan (from 61 kg in 2018 to 112 kg in 2019).

671. Among CARICC member States, seizures of cannabis decreased in 2019 in Kazakhstan (from 17 tons in 2018 to 9.6 tons in 2019), Kyrgyzstan (from 2.3 tons in 2018 to 1.3 tons in 2019) and Tajikistan (from 496 kg in 2018 to 60 kg in 2019) but increased in Azerbaijan (from 756 kg in 2018 to 822 kg in 2019) and Uzbekistan (from 600 kg in 2018 to 736 kg in 2019).

672. Afghanistan remains one of the main sources of cannabis resin globally, and was reportedly a source for cannabis resin in 19 per cent of the countries worldwide that reported seizures of cannabis resin in the period 2014–2018. Afghanistan is, in particular, the country of origin of cannabis bound for Central Asia, the southern Caucasus and Europe. Other countries reported as source countries were Lebanon and Pakistan. Cannabis resin

originating in the Bika' Valley of Lebanon is mainly found in the Middle East and, to a lesser extent, in Western and Central Europe.

673. The Islamic Republic of Iran reported that the cannabis resin seized in its territory originated mainly in Afghanistan and, to a lesser extent, in Pakistan. In 2018, about 65 per cent of the cannabis resin smuggled out of the Islamic Republic of Iran was destined for countries on the Arabian Peninsula and 15 per cent for the southern Caucasus. Twenty per cent of the cannabis seized in the Islamic Republic of Iran was intended for domestic consumption.

674. Turkey reported that, as a result of successful operations carried out by law enforcement units in the country in recent years, a significant decrease had been observed in the availability of cannabis within Turkey, with the exception of “skunk”, a highly potent form of cannabis. That development had led drug traffickers to start trafficking in “skunk” in order to meet domestic demand. The amount of smuggled “skunk” seized increased by approximately 14 times in 2019 compared with 2017 and by 1.5 times compared with 2018.

675. Central Asian States continued to report increases in trafficking in synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances, within their territories. From 21 October to 21 November 2019, the CARICC member States carried out an international operation, called Reflex-2019, aimed at countering the spread of new psychoactive substances and other synthetic drugs. As a result of the operation, a laboratory for the manufacture of synthetic drugs was dismantled and members of a transnational organized criminal group engaged in distributing new types of drugs over the Internet in the Central Asian subregion were arrested.

676. Tajikistan reported the emergence of new approaches to the sale of new psychoactive substances, including without hand-to-hand transfer by putting drugs in caches and effecting payment over the Internet. The assessment of Tajikistan is that, over the last two years, new psychoactive substances and other illicitly manufactured synthetic drugs have originated mainly in Europe, as well as in Afghanistan.

677. Kazakhstan reported that 2019 and the first three months of 2020 were characterized by a substantial increase in the proliferation of synthetic drugs. Since the beginning of 2019, Kazakhstan has recorded about 380 criminal offences related to trafficking in synthetic drugs in its territory, where nearly 40 kg of such substances have been seized, equivalent to 75,000 single doses. In 2019,

111 grams of fentanyl, 500 grams of MDMA and 6.9 kg of pyrovalerone were seized in Kazakhstan.

678. A comprehensive review of the situation with respect to the control of precursors and chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in West Asia can be found in the report of the Board for 2020 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.

5. Prevention and treatment

679. During the reporting period, with the support of the United Nations, the Drug Demand Reduction Department of the Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan opened five drug treatment centres in the country. The centres provide services for the prevention and treatment of drug use disorders among children and their families.

680. In 2019, the Islamic Republic of Iran continued to carry out a range of measures for the prevention and treatment of drug use disorders and the rehabilitation of people with such disorders. The Helping Hands project was implemented under the auspices of the Drug Control Headquarters of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the aim of creating and strengthening the sense of individual and social responsibility and participation in drug use prevention efforts. Under the project, various activities have been implemented, including cultural and sports events, seminars on the role of non-governmental organizations and vocational training programmes.

681. In Dushanbe in November 2019, UNODC, within the framework of its Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries, and in recognition of World Children's Day, convened a three-day training workshop entitled "Treatment of children with drug use problems, with special attention to synthetic drugs". The workshop highlighted the importance of introducing scientific evidence-based interventions in relation to prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. During the workshop, participants from Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan enhanced their knowledge of treatment for children with drug use disorders.

682. Also within the framework of the Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries, in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in December 2019, UNODC conducted a regional expert group meeting on sharing experiences in the implementation of the strengthening families programme and best practices in the prevention

of drug use among youth. Representatives from the law enforcement, education and health sectors in Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan discussed and shared experiences in programme delivery in relation to family and evidence-based interventions. The participants highlighted the need for data collection, monitoring and analysis relating to the implementation of evidence-based prevention interventions.

683. In February 2020, Uzbekistan conducted a month-long campaign focusing on drug prevention among youth. As part of the campaign, thematic sessions involving representatives of competent authorities, students and teachers were organized, sporting events under the motto "We Are Against Drugs!" were held, visual aids were published, awareness-raising videos and television programmes were broadcast and relevant articles were published in print media. During the campaign, representatives of the National Information-Analytical Centre on Drug Control and the Ministry of the Interior, together with regional drug control commissions, local bodies of the Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education conducted more than 16,000 prevention interventions in educational institutions, covering more than 2.2 million people.

684. With the support of the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek, the Service for Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, together with Kyrgyz educational institutions, within the framework of a month-long campaign dedicated to the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, held competitions among schoolchildren on the theme "We are for a healthy Kyrgyzstan!". Because schools and higher educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan were closed in March 2020 in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, drug use prevention events have been held online since that time using social media networks.

685. According to UNODC, countries in South-West Asia have reported shortages of drugs on the illicit market attributed to the measures introduced to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, including shortages of heroin at the retail level, which could potentially result in the increased consumption of harmful domestically produced substances, as well as more harmful patterns of drug use among people with drug use disorders.

686. The Central Asian subregion also witnessed impacts of COVID-19 on drug use patterns. For example, UNODC found that, in Uzbekistan, the use of pharmaceutical drugs had increased significantly. The subregion

also saw an increase in the use of homemade opium alkaloid, which is extracted from poppy seeds that are legally available and widely used by the food industry for decoration and flavouring. In general, as a result of the pandemic, drug users have actively sought alternatives, such as alcohol, pharmaceutical drugs, extracted opium and synthetic substances, to common illicit substances.

687. According to UNODC, the COVID-19 pandemic and related response measures in Central Asia have resulted in changes in the patterns of acquisition of illicit substances. The Internet and related technologies, including messaging platforms and e-wallets, have been used increasingly frequently to purchase psychoactive substances. An increase in drug prices has led drug users to join groups to purchase such substances. There has also been an increase in the frequency of illicit drug use at home, potentially provoking serious conflicts within families. However, UNODC has reported that some people who use substances have reduced such use out of fear that their family and friends might become aware of it.

688. Possibly as a result of significant reductions in the supply of drugs that have traditionally been commonly used in Central Asia, as well as reductions in their purity and increased costs, countries in Central Asia have witnessed an increase in the demand for treatment. At the same time, measures related to COVID-19, such as restrictions on movement, the repurposing of beds in drug use treatment facilities and the limitation of hospital admissions to emergency cases, have resulted in limited availability of treatment options for drug users. There have also been reductions in the range of services provided in the context of drug treatment and programmes to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use, and an increase in online counselling services. These challenges have resulted in increased demand for the training of relevant staff in the provision of online drug-related services and, owing to the increased prevalence of synthetic drug use disorders, for medical and non-medical interventions to treat those who use synthetic drugs.

689. In 2019, a downward trend in the number of people registered with drug treatment facilities continued in almost all CARICC member States, except Azerbaijan. The number in Kazakhstan decreased by 12 per cent (from 22,748 persons in 2018 to 20,003 in 2019), in Kyrgyzstan by 1.4 per cent (from 8,564 in 2018 to 8,448 in 2019), in Tajikistan by 11.3 per cent (6,059 in 2018 to 5,375 in 2019) and in Uzbekistan by 7.2 per cent (6,142 in 2018 to 5,698 in 2019). In that same year, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan reported a decrease in the number of newly registered drug-dependent persons in

comparison with the previous year, while Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan reported increases.

690. Tajikistan reported that about 55 per cent of the registered drug-dependent persons in the country were injecting drug users. The number of drug-dependent persons in Tajikistan has been decreasing in recent years.

691. A similar decreasing trend in the number of injecting drug users was observed in Uzbekistan. Among the registered drug users in the country, persons dependent on cannabinoids represented the largest group (3,982 persons, or 69.9 per cent of registered drug users in 2019, and 4,169 persons, or 67.9 per cent of registered drug users in 2018); the number of those who were dependent on opiates amounted to 1,418 persons, or 24.9 per cent of registered drug users in 2019, and 1,684 persons, or 27.4 per cent of registered drug users in 2018. The number of heroin users decreased by 1.8 times and amounted to 536 persons in 2019, compared with 979 persons in 2018, and represented 9.4 per cent of the total number of registered drug users in 2019, compared with 15.9 per cent in 2018. Uzbekistan also reported an increase in recent years in the consumption of synthetic cannabinoids and pharmaceutical preparations containing opioids.

692. Turkey reported its serious concern about the increasing use of new psychoactive substances, in particular among youth in recent years, and tackling that emerging threat has become one of the priority areas in the country's national efforts to combat the drug problem. Turkey also noted the increased use of the Internet for the commission of drug-related crimes.

693. UNODC found that the subregional prevalence of HIV among people who inject drugs continued to be the highest by far in South-West Asia (29.5 per cent). In South-West Asia and the Middle East, the past-year prevalence of opiate use, amounting to 1.8 per cent, was higher than the global average of 0.6 per cent.

694. The use of methamphetamine in Afghanistan appears to be increasing and, similarly to the situation observed in the Islamic Republic of Iran, methamphetamine is frequently used in Afghanistan concurrently with opiates in order to mitigate the negative side effects of opiate use.

695. Iraq has witnessed an increase in the use of crystalline methamphetamine in recent years, in particular in the Province of Basrah. The types of drugs most used in Iraq are amphetamine-type stimulants, with methamphetamine (32 per cent of all amphetamine-type stimulants) and fenethylamine (14 per cent) being the most

prevalent. Several reasons have been identified for the prevalence of drug use in Iraq, among which are the psychological pressures and severe stress suffered as a result of security threats and the unstable social and economic conditions facing the Iraqi population.

696. Trafficking in and use of tramadol, an opioid analgesic not under international control, continued to occur in the State of Palestine, especially in Gaza, in addition to trafficking in and use of synthetic opioids on the West Bank. To address those challenges, the Palestine National Rehabilitation Centre for drug users was established in 2019. The Centre provided services to about 260 drug users during the reporting period. UNODC continued to support the work of the Centre, including through the provision of training. In addition, UNODC continued to support the Opioid Substitution Treatment Centre, opened in 2015, which currently serves about 230 drug users in community and closed settings.

697. In February 2020, the President of Afghanistan convened and chaired the first meeting of the High Commission for Counter-Narcotics and Intoxicants. During the meeting, the President identified action against drug trafficking and use as one of the five priorities of his Government, emphasizing the need for synergies to be developed among the health, justice and security sectors. The need for greater regional cooperation was also highlighted during the meeting.

E. Europe

Several countries in Europe took steps towards the legalization of the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes, in contravention of the provisions of the international drug control treaties.

Evidence points to synthetic drug manufacture taking place increasingly in Eastern Europe, with both small- and large-scale operations dismantled in several countries.

A rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 indicated increasing use of the Internet and the darknet to illicitly buy drugs. It also indicated lower availability of treatment services for persons using drugs within the region; those services were subsequently partly supplemented by telemedicine and other innovative treatment service models.

1. Major developments

698. The Netherlands is in the process of launching its four-year trial programme for the production and distribution of cannabis for non-medical purposes in the country by adopting relevant domestic legislation, thereby becoming the first European country to legalize, on a temporary basis, the cultivation and sale of an internationally controlled narcotic drug for non-medical purposes in parts of its territory. Switzerland approved a long-term study to examine the possible effects of introducing a similar approach. Luxembourg continued to work on draft legislation to the same effect.

699. Beyond the traditional origin countries for amphetamine-type stimulants in Northern and Western Europe, countries in Eastern Europe are increasingly detecting illicit synthetic drug manufacture in their territories. Ukraine disrupted half a dozen sizeable illicit drug manufacturing operations in 2019, among them two large-scale methamphetamine manufacturing sites and trafficking networks. Belarus detected four small-scale clandestine laboratories, while the Russian Federation eliminated a few small- to medium-scale methamphetamine manufacturing sites and discovered numerous others, involving a variety of end products such as mephedrone, methadone and *alpha*-pyrrolidinovalerophenone (α -PVP). Cyprus dismantled a clandestine methamphetamine laboratory for the first time in 2020.

700. Based on data gathered through an online survey and intelligence received from law enforcement authorities, EMCDDA and Europol produced a joint paper containing a rapid assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the drug market in the European Union, entitled “EU drug markets: impact of COVID-19”. Travel restrictions and other social-distancing measures seemed to have resulted in shortages of and higher prices (mostly noted at the retail level) for some drugs. Trafficking activities related to the wholesale supply of drugs, however, did not seem to have been interrupted. Adaptations made by organized criminal groups to ensure uninterrupted supply encouraged the growth of online drug dealing through encrypted communications, posing additional challenges for law enforcement entities.

2. Regional cooperation

701. The European Commission adopted the European Union Agenda and Action Plan on Drugs for the period 2021–2025 on 24 July 2020, in which the political framework and priorities for action for the coming five years are set out. Eight strategic priorities are outlined, under

the following three areas: (a) enhanced security (focused on all aspects of trafficking in drugs); (b) increased prevention (of the adverse effects of drugs, including links to violence); and (c) addressing drug-related harms (through access to treatment, risk and harm reduction, and a balanced approach to the issue of drugs in prisons).

702. In view of a wider use of encrypted communications technologies by organized drug trafficking syndicates in the region, a joint investigation team was formed among French and Dutch law enforcement and judicial authorities, Europol and Eurojust to dismantle an encrypted telephone network used by criminal networks. The considerable amount of information obtained by the operation enabled authorities to disrupt planned criminal activities and trigger new criminal investigations into organized criminal groups across Europe and beyond.

703. The INCB secretariat presented updates concerning seizures of newly available fentanyl-related substances in Europe and opioid-related overdose deaths in several OSCE participating States during the OSCE conference on the theme “Evolving threat of synthetic drugs”, held in Vienna on 3 and 4 June 2019. In January 2020, the INCB secretariat also conducted a training workshop in Slovakia to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies in Austria and Slovakia to counter trafficking in new psychoactive substances, chemicals and non-scheduled dangerous substances. In February 2020, an overview of the INCB multi-agency global IONICS platform was provided to nearly 260 law and regulatory enforcement officers from more than 30 European countries during a webinar organized by the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training.

3. National legislation, policy and action

704. Since March 2019, Cyprus has permitted the prescription of cannabis by physicians for any medical condition. The related regulations that amend the Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances Law L29/77 also provide the basis for the issuance of licences for the cultivation of cannabis for medical purposes, which is expected to be subjected to monitoring and control by a governmental office dedicated to the country’s cannabis programme for medical purposes. According to the official communication received on the matter, this office has yet to be established.

705. Several acts introduced the option of using cannabis for medical purposes in Czechia. The conditions

for prescribing, preparing, distributing, supplying and using the substance for medical use are laid out in Decree No. 236/2015 Coll. In October 2019, the Parliament approved an amendment to the Public Health Insurance Act that allows 90 per cent coverage by insurance companies of cannabis for medical use. The amendment came into force on 1 January 2020 and has set a limit of 30 grams per month for cannabis for medical use covered by public health insurance.

706. In Luxembourg, the two-year pilot programme on cannabis for medical purposes, launched in 2018, the budget for which had been tripled in late 2019, was approaching its first evaluation in 2020. It was expected that the programme would be continued and would include training for medical practitioners on handling cannabis for medical purposes, while also lifting current restrictions that allow only selected hospital pharmacies to sell cannabis for medical purposes, on prescription.

707. In France, a decree providing details of the regulatory framework of an experiment on the use of cannabis-based medical products (approved by the Parliament in 2019) was issued in October 2020. The decree specifies the therapeutic indications or clinical situations under which the cannabis-based drugs can be used, the specifications of permissible cannabis-based drugs and the conditions of their availability. The two-year programme will be implemented by the Ministry of Solidarity and Health. Participating companies are required to supply the products to the patients free of charge, and the products concerned must comply with pharmaceutical standards, including good manufacturing practices.

708. The Board recommends that Governments that allow the use of cannabinoids for medical purposes should monitor and evaluate the potential for diversion to trafficking or other unintended consequences of those programmes.

709. In November 2019, the Netherlands passed legislation allowing a pilot programme for the production and commercial distribution of cannabis for non-medical purposes, referred to as the “closed cannabis supply chain experiment”. The legislation became effective on 1 July 2020. Under the programme, the local cultivation and wholesale supply of cannabis to “coffee shops” was legalized in 10 municipalities for a trial period of four years, to be followed by an evaluation of the experiment and its effects on public health, public order, safety and crime. Within the 10 selected municipalities (which exclude the 4 largest municipalities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht), “coffee shops” will be required to limit sale exclusively to cannabis sourced from

Government-licensed Dutch producers. The official preparation phase of the experiment includes a public tender to select a limited number of producers, which are not required to be from the selected municipalities and will be designated in accordance with specific criteria. The earliest harvest of locally sourced cannabis for non-medical use is expected in 2021. In municipalities that do not participate in the trial, applicable Dutch laws will continue to be enforced. Those laws generally prohibit the cultivation, distribution and use of cannabis, with the option of tolerating (i.e., not enforcing the prohibition of) the sale and purchase of small amounts for personal use in “coffee shops” under certain conditions.

710. In June 2020, Switzerland approved legislation permitting a long-term pilot study to be conducted on the effects of the possible legalization of cannabis for non-medical purposes, with the involvement of several large Swiss cities. As part of the study, the market, both licit and illicit, for cannabis, as well as the anticipated social impact of legalization in a controlled setting, will be examined. In the same month, the Government of Switzerland submitted a draft amendment to the legislation on cannabis for medical purposes, containing a proposal to ease access to the substance by no longer requiring special authorization of prescriptions by the Federal Office of Public Health.

711. Luxembourg continued to explore modalities for the legalization of the production, distribution and use of cannabis for non-medical purposes.

712. The Board wishes to remind all parties to the 1961 Convention as amended that, under article 4, paragraph (c), of that Convention, the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution of, trade in, use and possession of drugs are limited exclusively to medical and scientific purposes and that any measures allowing for the non-medical use of cannabis are in violation of the legal obligations incumbent upon parties.

713. The European Commission approved the inclusion of seven precursors in its list of scheduled substances in annex I to regulation (EC) No. 273/2004 of the European Parliament and the Council and the annex to Council regulation (EC) No. 111/2005, including those precursors recently recommended for international control (3,4-MDP-2-P methyl glycidic acid, 3,4-MDP-2-P methyl glycidate, APAA and MAPA), as well as two additional amphetamine designer precursors (P-2-P methyl glycidate and P-2-P methyl glycidic acid). These chemicals, which can be easily transformed to support the production of amphetamines and “ecstasy”, will be listed in category 1 of the regulations. Red phosphorus, which has

considerable legitimate use but is frequently diverted for the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine, will be listed in category 2A and will be subject to less stringent control than those substances listed in category 1. The new regulations were to enter into force in December 2020.

714. Legislative changes concerning new psychoactive substances were enacted in some European countries. The United Kingdom revised the generic definitions for a range of synthetic cannabinoids permanently controlled as class B drugs under the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act and as schedule 1 compounds under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001. The definitions came into effect on 15 November 2019. In Hungary, with amendments to the Criminal Code on New Psychoactive Substance, people who commit criminal offences involving new psychoactive substances will face the same penalty as those who commit offences involving other controlled substances. In addition, Governmental Decree No. 22/2012 (on the procedure for listing new psychoactive substances and on licit activities involving narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and new psychoactive substances) has been amended, so as to speed up the listing procedure for new psychoactive substances within the country. In Sweden, the updated 1992 Narcotic Drug Controls Act and the 1999 Prohibition of Certain Goods Dangerous to Health Act have provided the police with the authority to make anonymous purchases of new psychotropic substances on behalf of the Public Health Agency of Sweden or the Swedish Medical Products Agency since 1 January 2019. It is envisaged that such changes will facilitate a faster classification of substances dangerous to health that are or may be made available on the Swedish market.

715. The Russian Federation added 14 new psychoactive substances, as well as kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*), to its national schedules for drug control in August 2019, placing 12 of them on the schedule of prohibited substances (catalogue I) and 2 on the schedule of substances of restricted circulation (catalogue II). An additional 15 substances were added in March 2020 (11 to catalogue I and 4 to catalogue II), and 10 precursors were placed under national control in February 2020.

716. Bulgaria, one of the countries with flexible legislative measures on allowing new substances to be put under control, listed eight new substances under the ordinance on the procedure for classifying plants and substances as narcotic.

717. In 2019, an increasing number of notifications regarding mephedrone were registered by the drug early warning system of Belgium and the new synthetic opioid

isotonitazene was detected. Formal notification was sent to EMCDDA and UNODC.

718. An action plan for the period 2019–2020 to limit the use and spread of drugs was approved by the Government of Latvia in 2019, which paved the way for shifting responsibility for the development and coordination of drug policy from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Health by the end of 2020. The plan is aimed at reducing demand for and supply of drugs and includes 28 measures divided into three areas of action: (a) promoting the quality and availability of drug prevention, addiction treatment, social rehabilitation and harm reduction interventions; (b) reducing drug supply and availability; and (c) promoting effective drug policy coordination, data collection, research and evaluation.

719. In December 2019, the Supreme Court of Italy issued a ruling removing small-scale cultivation of cannabis for private use from the definitions in article 73 of the Consolidated Law included in Presidential Decree 309/1990 that criminalizes illicit activities with controlled substances. In its ruling, the Court declared that the offence of “cultivating narcotic drugs” should not include small amounts grown domestically for the exclusive use of the grower.

720. Italy has taken measures to strengthen cooperation among different stakeholders on drug-related policies. Specifically, the Department of Drug Policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers signed agreements with the police, universities and other institutions to increase monitoring of online activities related to new psychoactive substances and cryptocurrency payments related to international drug trafficking, and to analyse wastewater in major cities to identify the use of drugs among the general population.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

721. The latest EMCDDA reports state that some of the recent trends are: (a) growing availability and illicit use of high-purity cocaine; (b) more diverse drug production within the region; and (c) the continuing availability of high-strength MDMA products.

722. Albania, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine reported the eradication of illicitly cultivated cannabis on their territories in 2019. Opium poppy was also illicitly cultivated in all of those countries, with the exception of Albania, but the amount of land affected had decreased (significantly, in the case

of the Republic of Moldova), while illicit cannabis cultivation was reported to be on the rise in Albania and the Republic of Moldova.

723. Despite an overall decrease in the flow of opiates trafficked along the northern route, which goes from Afghanistan, through Central Asia to the Russian Federation and Europe, the Russian Federation observed attempts by international organized criminal groups to use the country’s territory for the transit of heroin destined for European markets. Belarus and the Baltic States were named as possible transit points for cocaine entering the Russian Federation from Latin American countries, through Europe.

724. Belarus reported that the illicit manufacture of amphetamine, α -PVP and methadone had taken place in its territory during the reporting period, although in significantly lower amounts than in preceding years. Four manufacturing sites set up in private homes had been dismantled by law enforcement agencies, with laboratory equipment and unspecified precursor chemicals seized.

725. Some authorities in the region noticed that the domestic illicit drug markets changed and grew in 2019, driven by greater use of the Internet to share information and to communicate. In Sweden, buyers and sellers using the darknet and social media, together with traditional *modi operandi* for drug distribution, drove a trend of polydrug smuggling. Meanwhile, considerable numbers of online purchases of cannabis seeds and equipment for illegal cultivation were detected in Latvia, as the amounts of cannabis herb seized and unauthorized cannabis cultivation rose. Authorities believe that factors such as the legalization and public tolerance of cannabis use, as well as the ease of online purchase, have promoted this growth. The Republic of Moldova reported that 12 per cent of organized drug trafficking groups operating from within the country were using the darknet for drug distribution, targeting mainly domestic consumers. Fewer than one in four criminal groups were believed to operate internationally. Authorities in Belgium also observed the growing role of the darknet in retail sales and the emergence of “mobile” cannabis plantations, which comprise containers with cannabis planted inside.

726. According to EMCDDA, there was greater activity on the darknet, driven mostly by retail sales of cannabis, in some European countries during the first quarter of 2020. Restrictions on freedom of movement and social-distancing measures reduced access to street dealers, resulting in an increase in drug trafficking activities over the Internet and shipments by post. In mid-2020, Bulgaria noted a considerable decline in drug and precursor

trafficking, as a result of the travel restrictions and social-distancing measures adopted by most European Union countries. The distribution of drugs within the country also decreased, as nightclubs, discos, ski resorts, restaurants, hotels and schools were closed. However, authorities believe that online purchasing and small-scale delivery continued.

727. Spain reported a considerable reduction in the amount of cocaine seized in 2019 (down by 22 per cent compared with 2018). The use of maritime shipping containers remained the main method for cocaine trafficking. Owing to its geostrategic location and proximity to Africa, Spain was once again the European country in which the greatest amount of cannabis resin was seized in 2019 (about 350 tons), mainly originating in Morocco (94 per cent). The majority (85 per cent) of cannabis resin seizures took place in Andalusia, the province closest to Morocco. About 1.5 million cannabis plants, mainly cultivated indoors, were also seized in the same year. The amount of heroin seized (about 230 kg in 2019) remained close to that of the previous year, but the amount of methamphetamine in powder or crystalline form reached historic highs of almost 1.6 tons.

728. The amount of heroin smuggled into the United Kingdom, mainly in air freight, through express courier services and the post and by air travellers, registered a considerable increase in 2019. Meanwhile, authorities noted the continued trend of trafficking on board yachts across the Atlantic and the rising amounts of cannabis seized that originated in North America. Demand for synthetic drugs also expanded further, with increasing imports of chemicals required for their manufacture and greater seizures, alongside a widening geographical market for amphetamine.

729. Considerable amounts of cocaine continued to be seized by some countries, including Portugal (10.5 tons in 2019), Belgium (6.5 tons in 2019), Romania (1.6 tons in 2019) and Finland (223 kg in 2019). Notably, the amount seized in Portugal was twice that seized in 2018. In Finland, one batch of 176 kg of cocaine with purity of between 95 and 100 per cent was found in a container. The container had been sent to the harbour in Helsinki from South America, with the prohibited substances hidden among legal cargo. Authorities indicated that the trafficking of large amounts of cocaine in sea containers originating in South America was a recent phenomenon.

730. One of the most commonly used synthetic drugs in France is “ecstasy”; more than 1 million tablets of the substance were seized in the country in 2019. For the second

year in a row, the total amount of methamphetamine seized in 2019 (562 kg) exceeded that of amphetamine (92 kg).

731. The continued emergence of new psychoactive substances remained a considerable challenge for Europe. Bulgaria identified 18 new psychoactive substances in about 120 cases during 2019, with synthetic cannabinoids being the most commonly identified group and 5F-ADB being the most frequently identified type of synthetic cannabinoid. In 2019, the new psychoactive substances monitoring system in Denmark detected the emergence of new psychoactive substances containing a high content of “ecstasy” and a very small share of amphetamine analogues (a worrying trend given that methamphetamine has been found only rarely in Denmark in the past). In Sweden, about 40 substances were detected for the first time in 2019 and reported to EMCDDA through the country’s early warning system.

732. The Republic of Moldova noted that diversion of clonazepam by medical professionals had taken place during the reporting period. Also during the same period, clonazepam, phenazepam, tramadol and pseudoephedrine had been diverted on a small scale, mainly through friends and family and through the use of falsified prescriptions in Belarus.

733. Cyprus dismantled three clandestine methamphetamine laboratories on its territory in 2020, marking the first discovery of illicit methamphetamine manufacture in the country. Ukraine dismantled six illicit drug manufacturing operations in 2019, among them the biggest clandestine laboratory for the production of psychotropic substances (amphetamine, α -PVP and mephedrone) in the history of the country, and an interregional drug trafficking network specialized in the manufacture of 1-phenyl-2-nitropropene, a precursor for amphetamine and methamphetamine. Another large-scale methamphetamine laboratory dismantled in Ukraine in 2020 led to the seizure of large quantities of pseudoephedrine. Organized criminal groups said to involve Polish nationals are reported to be involved in the supply of that precursor. Belgian authorities also detected methamphetamine production sites and the first morphine-to-heroin conversion site in the country.

734. The Russian Federation dismantled numerous clandestine laboratories involving amphetamine and α -PVP, as well as methamphetamine and mephedrone, and reported a marked increase in illicit synthetic drug manufacture using simple synthesis methods with instructions obtained from the Internet.

5. Prevention and treatment

735. Most European countries have high-quality data on the prevalence of drug use, which helps the monitoring of trends in the region. According to the *European Drug Report 2018*, in 2018, more than 92 million individuals aged 15–64 (over 25 per cent of the population of the European Union) were estimated to have tried illicit drugs during their lives. Cannabis remained the most commonly used illicit drug in the region, with an estimated annual prevalence of 5.4 per cent in 2018. In Western and Central Europe, the prevalence of past-year cannabis use among the population aged 15–64 has fluctuated around 6 and 7 per cent over the past decade. However, some countries (particularly those with larger populations, such as Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom) have registered an increase in cannabis use in recent drug use surveys. The rise in the prevalence rate over the past decade seems to suggest greater social acceptance of the use of cannabis.

736. Drug-related mortality remained a concern in most European countries during the reporting period. Of concern in several countries, including Cyprus, was the increased presence of opioids other than heroin in cases of drug-related deaths. Some countries, for example, Ukraine, reported a rise in cases of drug-related deaths involving tranquillizers, specifically benzodiazepines and barbiturates, but also unidentified sedatives and anti-epileptic substances. Also in Ukraine, the second-highest number of drug-related deaths was associated with hallucinogens (after opioids and before tranquillizers), representing a marked increase over previous years' figures. In the United Kingdom, large increases in drug-related mortality rates were observed across all drug classes, except cannabis, over the reporting period.

737. Eastern Europe continued to be the subregion with the highest worldwide prevalence of people who inject drugs among those aged 15–64 (1.26 per cent in 2018, roughly 5.5 times higher than the global average). The unsafe use of needles and syringes contributes to the high subregional rates of HIV and hepatitis B infection.

738. Some countries in Europe have reported an increase in the use of substances not under international control. The Netherlands reported that nitrous oxide (“laughing gas”), a substance widely used in the medical and gastronomic fields, was the fourth most prevalent drug used in 2019, particularly among youth (after tranquillizers, cannabis and amphetamine-type stimulants, in that order). The use of drugs containing psilocybin, among other hallucinogens, significantly increased in several countries, such as Luxembourg and the United Kingdom. A new

development during the reporting period was the use of benzodiazepines among youth in Liechtenstein and the United Kingdom. Codeine use was also observed in Liechtenstein and the highest prevalence rate on record to date of ketamine use among adults was registered in the United Kingdom.

739. The increased use of stimulants (such as cocaine and methamphetamine) among drug users was reported by several European countries, including Cyprus, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Ukraine and part of the United Kingdom (England); in the latter, the increase of 4.4 per cent in the estimated number of people who use “crack” cocaine and/or opiates over a two-year period was considered statistically significant. The use of hallucinogens was also reported to have increased significantly in 2019 in several European countries, including Ukraine.

740. According to UNODC, cocaine is the second most-popular illicit drug used in Europe, and Western and Central Europe registered a past-year prevalence rate of 1.4 per cent for cocaine in 2018. The growing number of users receiving specialized treatment also points to an increase in substance use disorder associated with this increased prevalence. Results from wastewater analyses within the region indicated an increase in cocaine use of more than 50 per cent in 136 cities in 29 European countries between 2011 and 2019.

741. Europe was estimated to have a prevalence rate of 0.5 per cent for the use of amphetamines in the past year among the population aged 15–64 (or 2.5 million people) in 2018. Household survey data suggest that Czechia has one of the highest levels of methamphetamine use, and increasing use of the substance is now being reported in Cyprus, Germany, Slovakia, Spain and parts of Northern Europe.

742. While opioid use remains comparatively rare and its prevalence rate was estimated at 0.4 per cent of the adult population of the European Union (about 1.3 million users), the high number of problematic heroin users continues to be of concern. In Europe, opioid use is the main reason for receiving specialized drug treatment and related studies suggest that there is an ageing cohort of opioid users in the region. Meanwhile, greater non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids in Western and Central Europe has been noted, as reflected in the higher share of treatment admissions for the use of those substances. According to UNODC, users of pharmaceutical opioids accounted for 22 per cent of total users entering drug treatment in Western and Central Europe for opioid use disorders.

743. Results from the 2019 school survey on drug use among youth aged 15–16 in five countries (Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Spain and Sweden) revealed similar drug use patterns, although considerable differences in prevalence rates. Cannabis was the most commonly used drug, although the lifetime prevalence rate varied from 34 per cent in Spain to 6.3 per cent in Sweden. Identified as the second most-commonly used drug type, tranquilizers and sedatives registered a much higher lifetime prevalence in Latvia and Lithuania (20 per cent) than Sweden (3.8 per cent). Young women reported a higher lifetime prevalence rate of tranquillizer and sedative use, while young men had a higher lifetime prevalence rate of cannabis use.

744. Similar drug use patterns have been confirmed by a series of drug use surveys carried out in 2019 in Romania, Slovakia and the United Kingdom. Cannabis was the most commonly used drug, with a lifetime prevalence ranging from 30.3 per cent in the United Kingdom to 17 per cent in Slovakia and 6.1 per cent in Romania. While tranquilizers and sedatives were identified as the second most-commonly used drug type in Slovakia and had a lifetime prevalence of 8.5 per cent, cocaine (10.8 per cent) and new psychoactive substances (6.3 per cent) ranked second in the United Kingdom and Romania, respectively. Men reported a higher lifetime prevalence rate of illicit drug use than women in both countries.

745. Over the last five years, the Russian Federation has significantly increased the domestic availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for pain relief through a variety of measures. These include identifying a range of pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs for the diversification of available medicines by 2024; expanding palliative care; and allowing subsidized imports of as yet unregistered foreign medications for children into the country while domestic manufacture is established. As a result, the estimated number of patients receiving adequate pain relief increased sevenfold by the end of 2019. Accordingly, in 2019, 80 per cent of the estimated number of patients in need of pain relief during their last month of life were adequately supplied with medication, compared with only 12 per cent of patients five years earlier.

746. During the reporting period, Belarus was in the process of transitioning from the use of methadone to buprenorphine in its medication-assisted treatment programme. Possibilities for self-drug testing, including the increased availability from pharmacies of express tests, were being expanded in the country. In addition, Belarus introduced several initiatives over the course of 2019

aimed at complementing the existing treatment and reintegration support infrastructure under the country's compulsory social reintegration programme. One such initiative involved the establishment of an "experimental centre" that would provide a combination of medical, psychological and psychotherapeutic support; it is planned that the initiative will be replicated across the country. Also, in 2019, Belarus signed into law an interministerial measure (resolution No. 5/8/2) whereby the social rehabilitation of persons suffering from substance use disorders would entail their obligatory involvement in work. Since 2019, drug users in Belarus have also been required by law to undergo a mandatory preventive psychiatric evaluation.

747. The Board urges Governments to ensure the continued provision of treatment services for mental health and substance use disorders as part of essential services. Governments are recommended to look at existing best practices and develop effective strategies to ensure that prevention and evidence-based treatment, rehabilitation, aftercare and social reintegration services continue to operate. In that regard, Governments are encouraged to refer to chapter I of the Board's annual report for 2017, entitled "Treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration for drug use disorders: essential components of drug demand reduction", and the UNODC-WHO *International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders*.

748. Several European countries reported on the impact of COVID-19 on illicit drug use in their territories. Luxembourg reported an increase (by 10–25 per cent) in the retail price of cannabis, cocaine and heroin during the lockdown period. More significant changes were observed in relation to the purity of drugs: the ratio of active ingredients to cutting agents was observed to have decreased, in particular in the case of cocaine. The provision of face-to-face health care and other services, in particular, counselling, remained uninterrupted, but was reduced and moved largely to remote means (including, for example, the delivery of medication-assisted treatment doses to patients) on account of the measures introduced to contain the spread of COVID-19. Luxembourg has also launched a study among health-care providers and a survey of drug users to assess the impact of COVID-19 and related measures on the availability of services and the needs of drug users, both retrospectively and with a view to preparing for subsequent outbreaks.

749. A survey of national focal points carried out by EMCDDA during April 2020 suggested that the impact of COVID-19 and related national containment measures appeared to have caused a reduction in the availability

and provision of treatment and services to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use in most European countries. Specialized outpatient facilities that could not implement the required social-distancing measures were closed in some countries. On the other hand, mobile or online platforms and other innovations, such as greater flexibility associated with medication-assisted treatment service models and the use of telemedicine, were increasingly adopted to provide drug treatment services across the region.

750. Another survey focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on patterns of drug use suggested that there had been some reduction in illicit drug use during the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic (from March to May 2020). Respondents to the EMCDDA online survey provided different explanations, from the lack of social opportunities to reduced drug availability and access to sources of drug supply. Income loss and financial uncertainty were also cited as major reasons for the reduction in illicit drug use.

751. The closure of the night-time economy was commonly considered as the primary reason for decreases in the illicit use of “ecstasy” and cocaine, although increases in the illicit use of amphetamines were reported in some Northern European countries during the lockdown period. On the other hand, cannabis use seemed to be less affected by the lockdown, with occasional users reducing their use and some frequent users consuming more. A reduction in heroin use among high-risk opioid users was observed in Czechia, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Slovakia. Increased “digitalization” of the drug market and more flexible distribution systems were also cited as some of the adaptations employed for continued access to drugs.

F. Oceania

Drugs continue to be trafficked in large quantities through Pacific island countries and territories en route to Australia and New Zealand, and there is increased trafficking in methamphetamine from Asia. At the same time, domestic demand for methamphetamine and cocaine is growing in Pacific island countries, and there has been an increase in the number of drug-related offences recorded. However, data on the extent of drug use and treatment demand in Pacific Island countries remain virtually non-existent.

In New Zealand, a proposed cannabis legalization and control bill, which would have allowed people to possess and consume cannabis in certain circumstances, was rejected by voters in a referendum held on 17 October 2020.

In Australia, legislation came into force in the Australian Capital Territory in January 2020 permitting the cultivation of cannabis plants for personal non-medical use; however, the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes remains a criminal offence under Australian federal law.

The 2019 Australian National Drug Strategy Household Survey found that the proportion of people who had used codeine for non-medical purposes in the previous 12 months had halved, from 3.0 per cent in 2016 to 1.5 per cent in 2019. Since 2018, medications containing codeine can no longer be purchased from a pharmacy without a prescription.

1. Major developments

752. The secretariat of the Oceania Customs Organization noted that measures such as border closures and import and export restrictions taken by Governments of Pacific island States in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had hindered the movement of medical supplies and medical teams needed to assist countries. In a guidance document on COVID-19, members of the Oceania Customs Organization were asked to consider expedited clearance of essential goods and workers to support national responses. They were also asked to consider granting all medical supplies and equipment needed to provide relief in relation to the pandemic first priority to cross borders, where practicably possible.

753. Pacific island countries and territories continue to be used as transit points for drug trafficking; however, they are increasingly becoming destinations for synthetic drugs such as methamphetamine, with domestic demand growing, and becoming locations for illicit manufacture. **Recognizing that national capacities in the region are inadequate to respond to this threat, the Board recommends that the international community provide support to enhance the capacities of Pacific island States to address these new challenges and to safeguard their citizens’ health.**

754. Not all Pacific island States have signed and ratified the three international drug control conventions.⁷³ The absence of this international legal framework, coupled with growing domestic demand for drugs and the limited national and regional capacities of Pacific island countries

⁷³Of the 10 States yet to accede to the 1961 Convention as amended, 7 are in Oceania: Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Of the 13 States not party to the 1971 Convention, 8 are in Oceania: Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Of the seven non-parties to the 1988 Convention, four are in Oceania: Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu.

and territories, renders these countries and territories more vulnerable to drug trafficking, illicit drug manufacture and related crimes, including money-laundering and corruption. The Board recalls that the treaties are recognized as the cornerstone of the international drug control system and that they provide countries with a framework to address the challenge of drug trafficking, for example through the provisions on extradition and mutual legal assistance, as well as export pre-notification. However, some non-parties in the region are reporting to the Board and participating in the international system for monitoring licit trade in controlled substances on a voluntary basis. The Board is engaged with the countries of the region, for example in the framework of the memorandum of understanding signed between the Board and the Oceania Customs Organization in 2019, and activities have been held in the region over the past year under the Board's GRIDS Programme (see below for further details). The Board welcomes the recommendation made at the forty-eighth Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police Conference, held in Pago Pago, American Samoa, from 21 to 23 August 2019, that, among other important measures, non-parties should accede to the international drug control conventions. **The Board urges all Pacific island States that are not parties to all three international drug control conventions to accede to them as rapidly as possible and offers its support to this end. The Board encourages the international community to support non-parties in the region towards treaty accession and implementation.**

2. Regional cooperation

755. Participants at the fiftieth Pacific Islands Forum, held in Funafuti, Tuvalu, from 13 to 16 August 2019, endorsed the Boe Declaration Action Plan as a framework to implement the Boe Declaration on Regional Security, including through the establishment of a subcommittee of the Forum Officials' Committee on Regional Security. The Plan includes an affirmation of an expanded concept of security, with an increasing emphasis on, inter alia, transnational crime. The Plan also includes recognition of the substantial geographical area of the region, its extensive and porous jurisdictional boundaries, and its differences in governance and law enforcement capacity that further exacerbate its susceptibility to illicit threats, markets and activities. The Plan sets out a series of actions, including many aimed at disrupting the flow of illicit drugs, such as methamphetamine and cocaine, and strengthening national capacities to address demand and minimize the harm associated with the illicit use of drugs through a comprehensive government approach including health, education and social services.

756. In November 2019, UNODC provided training to law enforcement and customs officers of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in the use of drug and precursor test kits. The training followed two years of national training workshops for technical officers from the law enforcement and health authorities on the challenge of synthetic drugs. UNODC also held meetings with officials from the two countries to review progress made in implementing the practical recommendations developed in the national training workshops.

757. In December 2019, the Oceania Customs Organization delivered training on dangerous substances trafficked in the region and the use of INCB systems during a two-day event at its headquarters in Suva. The training covered awareness-raising, safe handling and interdiction, precursors and synthetic drug trafficking, and intelligence exchange and was attended by officers from the Oceania Customs Organization, the Fiji Police and the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service. It was held in the framework of the memorandum of understanding between INCB and the Oceania Customs Organization signed in 2019. A similar training event was held by the Board in Wellington on 9 December 2019 for the New Zealand Customs Service and the National Drug Intelligence Bureau. In February 2020, INCB delivered training in Nadi, Fiji, during a regional workshop on customs intellectual property rights enforcement organized by the Oceania Customs Organization. At the workshop, participants were provided access to and training on the Board's secure global communications platforms that allow for the exchange of information and alerts to support domestic and international cooperation and investigations into trafficking in dangerous substances not under international control. The workshop was also delivered within the framework of the memorandum of understanding between the Board and the Oceania Customs Organization and was attended by customs officers from Australia, Fiji, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu. Under the Board's GRIDS Programme, an informal meeting of 11 experts on the topic of trafficking in dangerous substances throughout Oceania was held on 3 March 2020 on the margins of the sixty-third session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

758. INCB was represented at the New Zealand Annual Drug and Organized Crime Conference, held at the Police College in Porirua, Wellington, on 9 December 2019. Consultations were held between a representative of INCB and representatives of the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police in Wellington on 10 December 2019 and the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat in Suva on 13 December 2019.

to determine practical ways in which the GRIDS Programme tools and partnerships could be further leveraged to counter transnational crime through enhanced cooperation and information-sharing to disrupt the flow of illicit drugs in response to the region's recently adopted Boe Declaration Action Plan.

759. In August 2020, the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police five-year strategic plan for the period 2020–2024 was launched. In the plan, it is recognized that transnational crime remains at the forefront of concern, with growing local markets for methamphetamine posing a threat to local communities. The plan includes provision for the rapid sharing of information and resources, the development of prevention approaches, the building of intelligence capability and the enhancement of investigations capability.

3. National legislation, policy and action

760. In January 2020, legislation came into force in the Australian Capital Territory permitting the cultivation for non-medical purposes of up to two cannabis plants per person, or four plants per household. Under the legislation, it is an offence to use cannabis in a public place, expose a child or young person to cannabis smoke, store cannabis where children can reach it, cultivate cannabis hydroponically or with the application of artificial light or heat sources, and grow plants where they can be accessed by the public. The sale, sharing and gifting of cannabis remain unlawful, as do the possession, cultivation and use of cannabis by people aged under 18 and the driving of a vehicle with any amount of cannabis in the body. Guidance by the Australian Federal Police states that cannabis is not legal in the Australian Capital Territory, only that amendments have been made that exempt individuals from criminal liability in certain limited circumstances. The use of cannabis for non-medical purposes remains illegal under Australian federal law. Further information on this development is contained in chapter II of the present report.

761. **The Board recalls that developments permitting the non-medical use of cannabis are in contravention of the provisions of the 1961 Convention as amended and the 1988 Convention, to both of which Australia is a party. Consistent with article 9, paragraph 5, of the 1961 Convention as amended, the Board remains engaged in dialogue with the Government of Australia with a view to facilitating effective national action to attain the aims of that Convention.**

762. During the general election in New Zealand in October 2020, a referendum was held on the proposed cannabis legalization and control bill. The bill was rejected by voters.

763. In November 2019, “Law Week”, on the theme “Fighting illicit drugs through awareness”, was held in Tonga by the Office of the Attorney General in cooperation with the Tonga Police and other ministries and agencies. Activities included an outreach programme led by the Tonga Police Safety Team. Also in November 2019, cannabis identification training was provided to police officers in Tonga by the New Zealand Institute of Environmental Science and Research. The Tonga National Illicit Drugs Policy was approved by Cabinet in October 2019; it promotes a whole-of-society approach through harm reduction, supply reduction and demand reduction.

764. In November 2019, WCO, in collaboration with the Australian Border Force and the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, conducted training for customs officers in Suva and Nadi under the UNODC/WCO Container Control Programme. In December 2019, the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service and the Republic of Fiji Military Forces signed a memorandum of understanding formalizing a commitment to cooperate through the provision of training, the sharing of information and the undertaking of joint operations to combat transnational illicit activities.

765. In March 2020, the Community Affairs References Committee of the Senate of Australia issued a report entitled *Current Barriers to Patient Access to Medicinal Cannabis in Australia*, in which it made a series of recommendations to address such barriers. The Export Control Legislation Amendment (Certification of Narcotic Exports) Bill 2020 was passed by the Parliament of Australia in June 2020. It amends the Export Control Act 1982 and Export Control Act 2020 to allow for the licit export of certain narcotic drugs, such as medicinal cannabis and low-THC hemp products.

766. In August 2020, the Criminal Code and Customs Legislation Amendment (Precursors and Drugs) Regulations 2020 came into effect in Australia, listing additional substances as controlled precursors and specifying commercial and marketable quantities for those substances. The commercial and marketable quantities for phenyl-2-propanone were reduced, reflecting changes in the methods for illicitly manufacturing methamphetamine from the substance. Further information pertaining to the control of precursor chemicals can be found in the report of the Board for 2020 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention. The legislation also placed under

national control the substances recently added to the schedules of the 1961 and 1971 Conventions pursuant to the 2019 and 2020 scheduling decisions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. In 2019, the synthetic cannabinoids 5F-MDMB-PINACA (5F-ADB) and AMB-FUBINACA (FUB-AMB) were placed under national control in New Zealand.

767. The Medical Cannabis Scheme of New Zealand came into effect on 1 April 2020, pursuant to the Misuse of Drugs (Medicinal Cannabis) Regulations 2019. Medicinal cannabis products are available to patients only on prescription from a doctor. Manufacturers and importers are required to provide evidence to the Medicinal Cannabis Agency that they meet minimum standards of quality, and any person wishing to work in the industry must hold a medicinal cannabis licence or work for a company holding such a licence.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

768. In addition to the continuing use of Pacific island countries and territories as trans-shipment points for drug trafficking to Australia and New Zealand, evidence points to those countries and territories increasingly becoming locations of illicit manufacture and domestic use. In Fiji, for example, the number of drug-related offences increased by more than 560 per cent from 2013 to 2018. The authorities of Fiji noted a substantial increase during the same period in seizures of parcels containing drugs, including methamphetamine, originating in China, the United States and countries of South America. Seizures of methamphetamine and cocaine, in addition to cannabis, continue to be made in Tonga. From April 2018, when the Drug Enforcement Taskforce commenced operation, to November 2019, a total of 42.56 kg of methamphetamine, 2.49 kg of cocaine and 3.48 kg of cannabis were seized in Tonga. In the UNODC publication *Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia: Latest Developments and Challenges*, it was noted that the amount of methamphetamine seized in Tonga was substantial, considering that the population is estimated at just over 100,000 people. In July 2020, a seizure of over 500 kg of cocaine, destined for Australia, was made in Papua New Guinea.

769. The amount of cocaine seized in Oceania almost tripled from 2014 to 2018, to 2.1 tons; 97 per cent of the cocaine seized over the period was accounted for by Australia. Over the same period, the quantity of cocaine seized in New Zealand increased from 10 kg to 213 kg. However, the amount of cocaine reported seized by New

Zealand decreased in 2019, with an increasing proportion seized in connection with air transportation and a decreasing proportion in connection with sea transportation.

770. Seizures of large amounts of amphetamine-type stimulants continue to be made in Australia. For example, in April 2020, a yacht carrying approximately 1 ton of methamphetamine was intercepted in Australia, following an investigation in cooperation with authorities of New Caledonia and the United Kingdom. In March 2020, authorities in Australia reported the seizure of over 1 ton of “ecstasy” suspected to have originated in Europe, trafficked via the Republic of Korea. The number of dismantled clandestine laboratories in Australia, most of which were connected to the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine, continued to decline, to 308 laboratories in the 12-month reporting period 2018/19, reflecting a reduction of almost 30 per cent compared with the previous period.

771. The amounts of methamphetamine and “ecstasy” seized in 2019 increased significantly in New Zealand, by 515 per cent and 556 per cent respectively, compared with the previous year, and a record seizure of more than 400 kg of methamphetamine was made in 2019, transported by sea from Thailand. Some decrease in the number of clandestine laboratories illicitly manufacturing methamphetamine was observed in New Zealand, with 54 such laboratories dismantled in 2019, compared with 71 the previous year. However, an upward trend was observed in the first quarter of 2020.

772. The amounts of heroin and morphine seized in Oceania declined for three years in a row to the lowest level since 2009, with Australia accounting for more than 99 per cent of the amount reported seized in the region.

5. Prevention and treatment

773. There continues to be a lack of data about the extent and scope of drug use and treatment demand and delivery in Pacific island States. **The Board urges the Pacific island States to undertake studies to collect data on the extent of the drug problem in order to facilitate the design and adoption of evidence-based drug policies and the provision of appropriate prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services. The Board encourages regional and international organizations and bilateral partners that provide assistance to the Pacific island States to offer their support to the countries of the region in this regard.**

774. Preliminary findings of a survey conducted during the period April–June 2020 of Australians who had regularly used drugs in 2019 showed that, following the introduction of measures to combat the spread of COVID-19, cannabis use had increased, while the use of “ecstasy”, cocaine and ketamine had decreased. Use of pharmaceutical opioids, GHB, benzodiazepines and LSD had mostly remained stable. Most respondents continued to receive their drugs in person, although there were small increases in the proportion of respondents who had drugs delivered to them and those who did not obtain drugs following the introduction of restrictions. A small proportion of respondents reported that they had tried but been unable to access drug treatment and/or mental health services following the introduction of restrictions related to the pandemic. Other studies suggested some disruption to heroin and methamphetamine markets, evidenced in changes in price and availability. Preliminary findings of another study, on the impact of the pandemic and associated restrictions on people who use illicit stimulants in Australia, were similar, indicating that use of “ecstasy” decreased in general following the introduction of restrictions related to COVID-19, while use of cannabis increased and use of benzodiazepines and LSD remained unchanged. Few respondents (6 per cent) reported difficulties in accessing alcohol and drug treatment services since March 2020. Of the respondents to a poll conducted in May 2020 of people who use drugs, 26 per cent reported a decrease in their consumption of drugs during the COVID-19 pandemic, while 17.6 per cent reported an increase. In April 2020, the Government of Australia announced the allocation of additional resources to support online and phone services for people experiencing drug and alcohol problems during the pandemic.

775. The eleventh report of the National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program, which covered about 56 per cent of the population, provided insights into the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on drug consumption in Australia. Record high levels of consumption of methamphetamine and heroin were recorded outside of capital cities, while record high levels of consumption of cocaine and cannabis were recorded in the capital cities. In contrast, there was a record low level of consumption of fentanyl outside of capital cities and oxycodone in the capital cities. Both in and outside of capital cities, population-weighted average consumption of “ecstasy”, oxycodone and fentanyl decreased, while population-weighted average consumption of heroin increased. Average consumption of cannabis also increased outside of capital cities during the pandemic. Wastewater data collected in October 2019, December 2019 and February 2020 (i.e., prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in Australia) indicated that methamphetamine remained the most prevalent

illicit drug for which testing was conducted, with record levels recorded in capital cities. In addition, the presence of cocaine and “ecstasy” had also increased since August 2016, with a significant increase in “ecstasy” since April 2018, to a record level. From August 2016, the presence of heroin declined considerably outside of capital cities but increased in some capital cities. A decline in the presence of oxycodone and fentanyl had been observed since December 2018.

776. The Australian 2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey found that 16.4 per cent of people aged 14 and over had used an illicit drug in the previous 12 months, similar to the level of 2016 (15.6 per cent) but representing an increase since 2007 (13.4 per cent). However, the survey found a lower lifetime prevalence of use of illicit drugs among young people: in 2001, 38 per cent of those aged 14–19 had used an illicit drug at some time in their lives, compared with 22 per cent in 2019. However, among people aged 20–29, use of both “ecstasy” and cocaine had increased. Over the period 2016–2019, past-year use of the following substances had increased among people aged 14 and over: cannabis (from 10.4 per cent to 11.6 per cent), cocaine (2.5 per cent to 4.2 per cent), “ecstasy” (2.2 per cent to 3.0 per cent), hallucinogens (1.0 per cent to 1.6 per cent), inhalants (1.0 per cent to 1.4 per cent) and ketamine (0.4 per cent to 0.9 per cent). Past-year methamphetamine use had stabilized in 2019, at 1.3 per cent of people aged over 14. Between 2016 and 2019, the estimated number of people aged 14 and over who had used a pharmaceutical drug for non-medical purposes within the previous 12 months had declined (from 4.8 per cent to 4.2 per cent), and the proportion of people using substances from the category “painkillers and opioids” for non-medical purposes had declined from 3.6 per cent to 2.7 per cent. It was considered that that decrease was likely to have been the result of the 2018 reclassification of medications containing codeine, following which products containing codeine could no longer be purchased from a pharmacy without a prescription. Indeed, the proportion of people using codeine in the past year for non-medical purposes halved, from 3 per cent in 2016 to 1.5 per cent in 2019. Past-year use of heroin was estimated at 0.1 per cent in 2019 and 0.2 per cent in 2016.

777. Interviews with people who inject drugs also suggested that use of methamphetamine increased in 2019, with three quarters of respondents reporting use of methamphetamine in the preceding six months. On the other hand, one survey found that the use of “ecstasy” in Australia had continued to decline in 2019, with 67 per cent of respondents indicating use of the substance in the previous six months.

778. In Australia, between the 12-month reporting periods 2009/10 and 2018/19, the number of closed⁷⁴ treatment episodes increased for amphetamines (almost sixfold, from 10,000 to 58,200) and for cannabis (from 31,500 to 41,200); amphetamines were the most common principal illicit drug of concern. Closed treatment episodes for which heroin was the principal drug of concern declined from 9.9 per cent in 2009/10 to 5.2 per cent in 2018/19. The number of deaths in Australia involving amphetamines was four times higher in 2018 than in 1999. Over the same period, the rate of drug-induced deaths involving cocaine doubled (0.2 deaths per 100,000 population). Opioids were present in nearly two thirds of drug-induced deaths in 2018 (4.6 per 100,000 population), and the rate of opioid-induced deaths involving synthetic opioids has increased over the past decade. Over the period from 2014 to 2018, the proportion of drug-induced deaths attributed to prescription drugs decreased, from 75 per cent to 60 per cent.

779. The New Zealand Health Survey for the 12-month reporting period 2018/19 indicated that 15 per cent of people aged 16–64 had used cannabis in the previous year. Among young people, aged 15–24, the annual prevalence was 28.6 per cent. This reflected an increase compared with the previous year (11.9 per cent and 24.2 per cent respectively). A 2019 survey of secondary-school students in New Zealand found that 4.1 per cent of students reported use of cannabis at least weekly, representing a decrease since 2001 (6.5 per cent) but not a substantial change since 2012.

780. The use of methamphetamine in New Zealand appears to have increased in recent years, with the New Zealand Health Survey for the 12-month reporting period 2018/19 showing that 1 per cent of people aged 15 or over had used the substance in the previous year, reflecting a significant increase compared with the period 2017/18. According to wastewater monitoring data covering 80 per cent of the population of New Zealand, in 2019, an estimated 14–16 kg of methamphetamine were consumed each week in the sites tested, although a decrease in consumption of the substance was noted in the fourth quarter of 2019. Some increase in the number of people receiving treatment for the use of amphetamine-type stimulants was reported by the Government of New Zealand.

781. A large increase in the use of “ecstasy”-type substances in New Zealand was reported prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the final quarter of 2019, wastewater analysis indicated that “ecstasy” was the second most-commonly detected drug (tested substances were methamphetamine, “ecstasy”, cocaine, heroin and fentanyl), with average annual consumption estimated at 426.4 kg, more than double that of the level detected in the first quarter of the year. It is thought that “ecstasy” is commonly used as a replacement for alcohol, potentially for everyday casual use, particularly among young people.

782. In June 2020, an early-warning system was launched with the aim of reducing drug-related harm in New Zealand. The system, called “High Alert”, is operated by the Drug Information and Alert New Zealand of the National Drug Intelligence Bureau and is designed to help identify where drug-related harm was occurring, provide evidence about outbreaks of harm and, in some cases, anticipate potential harm related to drug use.

⁷⁴A treatment episode is considered closed when treatment is completed or has ceased; there has been no contact between the client and treatment provider for three months; or there is a change in the main treatment type, principal drug of concern or delivery setting.