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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

2020 has been a year unlike any other in recent history. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had a devastating societal and economic impact, claiming many human lives and causing immeasurable suffering. The annual report of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) for 2020 includes an analysis of how the pandemic has affected the global supply chain of medicines, increased demand for controlled medicines required for the treatment of patients with COVID-19 and disrupted the provision of treatment and related health services for people with mental health conditions and substance use disorders. At a time when resources are already stretched, people affected by drug use disorders must not be left behind. INCB calls on Governments to ensure that services for prevention, treatment and rehabilitation continue to be provided.



The pandemic has demonstrated that international collaboration and solidarity are essential for safeguarding health and well-being across our interconnected world. The value of the International Import and Export Authorization System (I2ES) in facilitating the electronic exchange of authorizations during lockdown work-from-home periods proved invaluable. Based on the learnings of the past year, INCB is initiating, in cooperation with Member States, the World Health Organization and other international organizations, an update of the Model Guidelines for the International Provision of Controlled Medicines for Emergency Medical Care.

The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on the well-being of older people. However, there is also a hidden epidemic of drug use affecting this population group, which is addressed in the thematic chapter of the INCB annual report, following past chapters that focused on women and young people. People are living longer; an associated challenge is an increasing vulnerability to drug use and drug dependence. Drug use and drug-related deaths among older people have been on the rise, as has the number of older people in treatment for drug use problems. INCB is recommending that knowledge of this hidden epidemic be improved, and that this often-overlooked population group has access to the necessary health and well-being services.

The launch of the INCB annual report for 2020 coincides with the sixtieth and fiftieth anniversaries of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971. INCB has published a special report reviewing the achievements of the two conventions and highlighting challenges faced by the international community.

In November 2020, INCB met with Member States to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 and explored possible ways of addressing the rapid emergence of designer precursors and pre-precursors used in illicit drug manufacture. This challenge and achievements in implementing the Convention are covered in the INCB report on precursors for 2020.



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INCB remains concerned about the deteriorating drug control situation in Afghanistan. We continue to work with the Government of Afghanistan to support its efforts to address this. Pursuant to article 14 bis of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1954 as amended by the 1972 Protocol, we are calling on regional and international agencies and partners of Afghanistan to provide technical and/or financial assistance to support the drug control efforts in the country. Our report sets out areas that require urgent support, as identified with the Government of Afghanistan. If illicit drug cultivation and production, drug trafficking, drug use and drug use disorders in Afghanistan are not comprehensively addressed, broader development efforts on sustainable development, prosperity and peace in Afghanistan are unlikely to be effective.

INCB remains concerned about legislative developments in a number of countries regarding the non-medical use of cannabis and is engaged in a close dialogue with Member States with a view to supporting them in implementing the provisions of the three international drug control conventions and safeguarding public health and well-being.

INCB continues to call on Governments to implement the international drug control conventions with full respect for human rights standards and norms. Drug trafficking and drug-related violence should be addressed through comprehensive and balanced measures, and responses to drug-related criminal conduct must be proportionate and respect human rights and the rule of law.

INCB is committed to supporting Governments in implementing the international drug control conventions through close cooperation and capacity-building, including through INCB Learning and the Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme. I urge Governments to fully implement the recommendations contained in the 2020 reports for the benefit of their communities. We also recognize the work of civil society organizations and encourage them to take these recommendations into account when planning their activities.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health is yet to be fully seen, and evidence-based prevention and treatment services must be stepped up to stem an increase in drug use disorders and in mental health conditions. This is the shared responsibility of us all. Building back better from the unprecedented challenges of 2020 and ensuring progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals requires the international community to work harder and smarter.

Cornelis P. de Joncheere

President

International Narcotics Control Board