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## **International Narcotics Control Board expresses concern over the trend to legalize non-medical use of cannabis, which contravenes the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs**

*In its 2022 Annual Report, the International Narcotics Control Board:*

- notes that the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs classified cannabis as highly addictive and liable to abuse, and that any non-medical or non-scientific use of cannabis contravenes the Convention;*
- expresses concern that this trend among a small number of governments is leading to higher consumption, negative health effects and psychotic disorders;*
- notes with concern that the growing cannabis industry advertises products, particularly to young people, in ways that lower the perception of risk involved in using them;*
- finds the impact of legalizing cannabis on society difficult to measure because legislative models vary from country to country and data is still limited;*
- voices concern that many countries continue to have difficulties procuring enough controlled substances for medical treatment, including during emergency situations;*
- highlights that countries are confiscating a high number of non-scheduled chemicals and designer precursors used in illicit drug manufacture and is concerned about the global spread of these substances.*

VIENNA, 9 March (UN Information Service) - The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is warning in its Annual Report 2022 that legalizing the non-medical use of cannabis, which contravenes the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, seems to result in higher consumption and a lower perception of risk, especially among young people.

### **Legalizing the use of cannabis results in higher consumption and lowers risk perception**

The most concerning effect of cannabis legalization is the likelihood of increased use, particularly among young people, according to estimated data. In the United States, it has been shown that adolescents and young adults consume significantly more cannabis in federal states where cannabis has been legalized compared to other states where recreational use remains illegal. There is also evidence that general availability of legalized cannabis products lowers the perception of risk and of the negative consequences involved in using them. New products, such as edibles or vaping products marketed in appealing packaging have increased the trend. INCB finds that this has contributed to a trivialization of the impacts of cannabis use in the public eye, especially among young people.

INCB President Jagjit Pavadia said: “The expanding cannabis industry is marketing cannabis-related products to appeal to young people and this is a major cause for concern as is the way the harms associated with using high-potency cannabis products are being played down.”

### **Higher medical emergencies and traffic accidents in states where cannabis use is legal**

In all jurisdictions where cannabis has been legalized, data show that cannabis-related health problems have increased. Between 2000 and 2018, global medical admissions related to cannabis dependence and withdrawal increased eight-fold. Admissions for cannabis related psychotic disorders have quadrupled worldwide.

Young people, whose brains are still developing, are particularly affected by negative health effects of habitual cannabis use. This can impact their educational outcomes and social behaviour. Statistical evidence from Colorado (United States) shows that fatal traffic accidents with drivers under the influence of cannabis nearly doubled from 2013 to 2020.

### **Have Governments achieved their stated objectives for legalizing cannabis?**

The main objective stated by Governments for legalizing cannabis has been to reduce criminal activities and increase public health and safety. In its 2022 report, INCB highlights that this objective has not been achieved. President of INCB, Jagjit Pavadia said: "Evidence suggests that cannabis legalization has not been successful in dissuading young people from using cannabis, and illicit markets persist." Data show that illegal cannabis supply continues at high levels in all legalizing jurisdictions, reaching 40 per cent in Canada, nearly 50 per cent in Uruguay and even 75 per cent in California.

Generating tax income has been listed as another important goal by Governments which promoted legalizing cannabis. INCB finds that, although tax income from cannabis sales has increased year over year in Canada and the United States, tax revenue has been lower than expected, making up only 1 per cent of the budget in legalizing states.

### **Diverse approaches to cannabis legalization make the impact difficult to measure**

INCB is concerned about the trend among a small number of governments to formally legalize cannabis for recreational purposes, because the drug control treaties require that use of drugs be limited to medical and scientific purposes. It notes that the impact on society has not been sufficiently studied. Data submitted by countries is limited and often too recent to draw meaningful conclusions. Legislative models vary greatly between countries making it difficult to compare frameworks and make predictions about successes and failures.

INCB stresses that the effects of cannabis use on individuals and societies should be studied further before Governments make long-term binding decisions. INCB reminds Governments looking for alternative solutions regarding cannabis offences that the drug control conventions offer significant flexibility.

### **Decriminalization and depenalization as alternative routes for cannabis offences**

In its report, INCB reminds Member States that legalizing cannabis for non-medical use violates the drug conventions and highlights that the concepts of decriminalization and depenalization offer alternative routes to handling cannabis offences.

INCB President, Jagjit Pavadia, said: "The convention-based system offers significant flexibility for States to protect young people, improve public health, avoid unnecessary incarceration and address illicit markets and related crime."

Some countries have shifted their policies for drug-related offences and reduced offences for personal cannabis use to minor infractions or removed criminal sanctions altogether.

### **Expanding cannabis industry lobbies for legalization**

The potential for growth has attracted large corporations looking to expand their business into the medical and adult cannabis markets emerging around the world. Aiming to broaden their commercial profit, many of these companies are lobbying to lift controls on cannabis.

In the United States, the legal sale of cannabis products is one of the fastest growing industries, generating 25 billion US-dollars in sales in 2021 – a 43 per cent increase from the year before.

In the report, INCB clarifies that the cultivation and use of cannabis for medical purposes is permitted, as long as certain conditions of the conventions are met surrounding licensing, national controls and provision of estimates of medical requirements to INCB. The report notes that in some States, “medical cannabis programmes” are operating without these controls and without meeting WHO standards related to manufacturing and prescribing.

### **Many countries don’t have adequate access to controlled substances for medical purposes**

INCB is concerned that many countries continue to have difficulties procuring enough opioid analgesics for pain treatment. Regional disparities also exist for medications containing morphine, although data show that opiate raw materials are sufficiently available. In addition, the limited amount of morphine available for pain relief is concentrated in high-income countries. This is confirmed by data from the World Health Organization. Similar disparities also exist in the consumption of anti-epileptic drugs and medication for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

INCB points out that emergency situations increase the global need for controlled medicines for pain management, anaesthesia, surgical and palliative care, and for the treatment of mental and neurological conditions. INCB highlights the importance of timely emergency legislation to expedite access to controlled medicines during humanitarian emergencies.

In a supplementary report, “No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes”, INCB makes a set of recommendations to Governments to improve the availability of these essential medicines.

### **INCB warns about surging illicit cocaine production and trafficking**

Larger quantities of cocaine with high levels of purity have become available at cheaper prices due to a surge in production and trafficking of cocaine. This is linked to changing criminal activity in locations where coca bush is grown. In addition, trafficking organizations are moving cocaine processing to Europe, which accounted for six of the 15 cocaine processing laboratories discovered globally.

### **Global action required to address trafficking in synthetic opioids and opioid overdose epidemic**

The opioid epidemic and drug overdose crisis in North America has worsened due to illicit manufacture of and trafficking in synthetic opioids. Trafficking in fentanyl and other dangerous opioids is expanding to Oceania. INCB’s Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme is building capacity and supporting cooperation among law enforcement authorities to prevent these and other dangerous substances from reaching consumer markets.

### **Precursors report**

INCB is concerned about the increasing use of non-scheduled chemicals and designer precursors in illicit drug manufacture, with a high number of seizures reported in 67 countries on five continents. INCB warns Member States about increased trafficking of non-scheduled substances and the speed with which the illicit drug industry circumvents international controls. INCB calls for more precursor control to achieve more secure trade for the legitimate chemical industry.

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For further information, please contact:

#### **INCB Secretariat**

Telephone for media inquiries: (+43-1) 26060 4163

Email: [incb.secretariat@un.org](mailto:incb.secretariat@un.org)

Website: [www.incb.org](http://www.incb.org)