

C. Americas

Central America and the Caribbean

Central America and the Caribbean suffers from a high level of armed violence and insecurity, which is often linked to the activities and violent competition of drug cartels and street gangs.

In a number of countries in the region, the national plans on drug control may have expired. The persistent unavailability of recent epidemiological surveys on the prevalence of drug use in most countries in the region may be hampering the development of evidence-based drug control policies.

Countries in Central America and the Caribbean are increasingly being targeted by traffickers attempting to smuggle cocaine to markets in Europe.

1. Major developments

489. Because of its geographical location at the crossroads of the main coca-producing countries and the consumer markets in North America and Europe, the region of Central America and the Caribbean continues to be used as a transit area for the large-scale trafficking of illicit drugs. Drug trafficking is increasingly linked to trafficking in firearms and poses a major challenge to stability and security in the region and the western hemisphere.

490. In November 2022, the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) of OAS published the *Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2022*. The report, covering the period 2016–2020, provides statistical information from 30 OAS member States on the illicit supply of drugs, including on trends in drug and laboratory seizures, illicit crop eradication and arrests. According to the report, the primary drug of concern varies by country, reflecting the variety of the illicit supply of drugs across the region. Cannabis stands out as the only drug in relation to which illicit supply was mentioned by all OAS member States that provided data for the report.

491. In December 2022, CICAD released the thematic national evaluation reports of the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism for 2022, on measures to control and counter the illicit cultivation, production, trafficking and distribution of drugs and to address their causes and consequences. The reports indicated that, among the countries evaluated, there was a high level of compliance with the priority actions relating to drug supply reduction outlined

in the CICAD Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs for the period 2021–2025, including with regard to improving access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes and strengthening the exchange of information related to drug interdiction and border control measures to prevent drug trafficking. However, the reports also emphasized the need for further efforts in several areas, including the control of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances. For example, more than 60 per cent of countries in the Americas had not made progress towards establishing and/or strengthening early warning systems, and more than 70 per cent of such countries had not developed adequate regulatory approaches to enhance national control over the use of new psychoactive substances and synthetic opioids for non-medical purposes. Regarding the trafficking of drugs in small quantities, about one half of the countries that participated in the evaluation had only a limited range of programmes and strategies to prevent, at the national and international levels, the exploitation of at-risk populations by drug trafficking networks.

492. According to the study entitled *Weapons Compass: The Caribbean Firearms Study*, published by the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security of the Caribbean Community in 2023, the Caribbean region suffers from some of the world's highest rates of violent death, with firearms used in the majority of homicides. The study reviewed some of the factors that underlie gun violence in the Caribbean region, including gang violence, drug trafficking and access to illicit firearms. Information provided in the study regarding trafficking in firearms and their trade for cannabis involving Haiti and Jamaica corroborates the concerns of some regional experts regarding the links between drugs and trafficking in firearms. In its latest annual report on global trends, entitled "Global trends: forced displacement in 2022", the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees asserted that armed conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing the public order were among the reasons why there were more than 108 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide, including refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons, at the end of 2022. More than 40 per cent of a total of 2.6 million new individual asylum applications in 2022 were filed by nationals of Latin American and Caribbean countries, including Cuba, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua.

493. The UNODC report entitled "The online trafficking of synthetic drugs and synthetic opioids in Latin America and the Caribbean", published in 2022, analyses diverse aspects of the rapidly evolving phenomenon of the online trafficking of those substances in the region. According to the report, one estimate of the online drug trade suggested the likelihood that in mid-2021 about 30 organized criminal groups controlled the darknet synthetic drug markets in

Latin America and the Caribbean. The report concluded that further monitoring of the Internet and additional surveys on the online marketing of drugs are required to better estimate the magnitude of the illicit online market for synthetic drugs and synthetic opioids. The report also advocated for enhanced cooperation between anti-drug agencies and specialized cybercrime units to investigate this increasingly complex issue.

2. Regional cooperation

494. CICAD, INCB and UNODC continued to organize expert meetings and provide training for the competent national authorities of the countries of Central America and the Caribbean. Drug control officials from 16 countries in Central America and the Caribbean have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. An INCB Learning regional training seminar and an awareness-raising availability workshop, for officials from competent national authorities of Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama, were held in February 2023 in San Salvador. The officials participated in the two training events, dedicated to the implementation of provisions of the international drug control treaties. The one-day awareness-raising availability workshop brought together specialists from Governments, PAHO/WHO and civil society to find ways to improve access to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical use in the region. Both activities were organized in close collaboration with the Government of El Salvador and CICAD.

495. In Central America and the Caribbean, Container Control Programme units and AIRCOP task forces under the UNODC Passenger and Cargo Border Team are now operational in the Bahamas, Barbados, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago. The Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama participated in Operation Insight, a global operation launched in 2023 by INCB in cooperation with the Passenger and Cargo Border Team. The operation was designed to suppress the illicit trafficking of precursors of drugs and explosives through free trade zones and to raise the awareness of national control authorities regarding the vulnerability of such zones (see the report of the Board for 2023 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention).¹⁴⁵

496. In November 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme held a training event in the Dominican Republic for law enforcement and regulatory officers focused on awareness-raising and safe handling practices related to new

psychoactive substances, synthetic opioids and other dangerous substances. The event was also aimed at strengthening information exchange using the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence HD targeting tools. The event included field visits to the customs facilities at the international airport in Santo Domingo and a forensic laboratory.

497. In December 2022, the GRIDS Programme conducted a capacity-building training event in Guatemala for officials from law enforcement and regulatory agencies on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances and on strengthening intelligence exchange using IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence HD. The event also included field visits to a forensic laboratory and the headquarters of the anti-narcotics police.

498. In August 2023, the GRIDS Programme conducted a capacity-building training event in Trinidad and Tobago for officers from the Regional Intelligence Fusion Centre of the Caribbean Community's Implementation Agency for Crime and Security on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids, fentanyl-related substances and new psychoactive substances and on strengthening intelligence exchange using IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence HD. The event also included a field visit to the Trinidad and Tobago Forensic Science Centre. In the same month, the GRIDS Programme conducted a similar training event in Barbados for officers of the Joint Regional Communications Centre of the Caribbean Community's Implementation Agency for Crime and Security.

499. The sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, held by the GRIDS Programme in Vienna in September 2023, brought together participants from 31 Governments and five international organizations. Several participating Governments also engaged in bilateral or multilateral case meetings facilitated by INCB that were held on the margins of the meeting. In addition, the GRIDS Programme, in collaboration with the WCO Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Central America, hosted its first "twinning" programme, in the form of an event to provide opportunities for trust-building, active networking and training on real-time trafficking incidents. The event was held in Central America in October 2023 and included the participation of law and regulatory enforcement officers from El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama. The officers developed practical skills for international operational cooperation, cross-border communication, and awareness-raising related to synthetic opioids.

500. UNODC continued to cooperate closely with inter-governmental organizations in the region, including the

¹⁴⁵E/INCB/2023/4.

Caribbean Community, its Implementation Agency for Crime and Security, and the Central American Integration System. For example, officials from Guatemala and Honduras participated in several activities conducted in the framework of the UNODC programme entitled “Safe handling and disposal of seized drugs and precursor chemicals”. Officials from Costa Rica and Panama were among those participating in a regional training event on the investigation of cryptocurrency-enabled crime, organized in Panama in June 2023 within the framework of the UNODC Global Programme on Cybercrime. In addition, the UNODC global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) programme continued to strengthen the capabilities of forensic laboratories in the detection and analysis of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances in Latin America and the Caribbean, including in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

501. Over the course of 2022, the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs of CICAD continued to provide technical assistance to OAS member States and their national drug observatories through online and in-person training events, including webinars, training courses and round tables on a variety of topics related to research methods, drug information networks and early warning systems. The Early Warning System for the Americas (SATA) continued to collect, analyse and disseminate alerts on emerging drug threats issued by El Salvador and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay.

502. Building on earlier progress, the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies, in its third phase (COPOLAD III), continued to promote technical cooperation and political dialogue between the European Union and countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region in support of the implementation of more effective drug policies in the region. Countries participating in the programme included Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. In 2022 and 2023, the programme supported a wide range of activities, including training for national drug observatories on early warning systems, the exchange of experiences on care practices for people with drug-related problems, in particular women and vulnerable populations, the exchange of best practices regarding the use of special drug-related investigative techniques and expert meetings on the chemical concealment of cocaine.

503. A joint operation targeting firearms trafficking, Operation Trigger VII, conducted in September 2022 by

19 countries, including Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago, and supported by INTERPOL and the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security of the Caribbean Community, led to seizures of more than 300 weapons, ammunition and 12.6 tons of drugs, thus highlighting the convergence of trafficking routes and the use of firearms to control the illicit drug trade in the Caribbean. Several countries reported the trafficking of illicitly produced cannabis from Canada and the United States of America into the Caribbean subregion.

504. In May 2023, Antigua and Barbuda, the Dominican Republic, Grenada and Jamaica participated in Operation Caribe, a pilot operation of the fifth phase of the Seaport Cooperation Project (SEACOP V). SEACOP V is aimed at combating maritime trafficking and criminal networks in the Caribbean, Latin America and West Africa. The operation, which lasted for two weeks, was focused on leisure and commercial craft, and resulted in, inter alia, seizures of a total of more than 1.1 tons of cocaine in the Dominican Republic.

3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

505. The three international drug control treaties require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. The reports enable the Board to monitor licit activities involving internationally controlled substances and ensure the availability of those substances for medical and scientific purposes.

506. The consumption of opioid analgesics for medical and scientific purposes, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants, has gradually increased in Central America and the Caribbean, with some fluctuations over the last 20 years, reaching a regional total of 10,631 S-DDD_{pm} in 2021, triple the level in 2002. Fentanyl accounted for most of the consumption of opioid analgesics in the region in 2021 (7,053 S-DDD_{pm}), followed by morphine (1,680 S-DDD_{pm}), oxycodone (1,211 S-DDD_{pm}), pethidine (616 S-DDD_{pm}) and hydrocodone (70 S-DDD_{pm}). Consumption of opioid analgesics above 300 S-DDD_{pm} was, for example, reported by the Bahamas, Barbados, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The Board considers levels of consumption of opioid analgesics below 200 S-DDD_{pm} to be inadequate.

507. Of the countries and territories of Central America and the Caribbean, approximately three quarters have regularly provided their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances, as required by the 1971 Convention. Of the remaining countries and territories in the region, nearly all have failed to provide any statistical reports in the past five years, which hampers efforts to determine the availability of psychotropic substances in the region. It also remains challenging to determine the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in Central America and the Caribbean, as only a third of the countries and territories in the region have provided consumption data on any psychotropic substance to the Board for the past five years. The Board emphasizes the importance of ensuring the sufficient availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical purposes in all countries worldwide, including in Central America and the Caribbean.

508. With regard to precursor chemicals, in the context of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means.

509. Out of the 20 countries in the region, 17 (85 per cent) had provided the Board with at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations. Of the countries that provided those estimates, five prohibited imports of ephedrine or pseudoephedrine (as a raw material or in the form of pharmaceutical preparations) into their respective territories. Two countries have not updated their estimates of annual legitimate requirements for ephedrines in all forms in the past 10 years, which undermines the potential of those data as a tool to inform exporting countries of the legitimate requirements of importing countries for those substances. Updating the estimates of annual legitimate requirements assists Governments in preventing oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes. In the last five years, three countries in Central America and the Caribbean, namely, the Bahamas, Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago have provided estimates of annual legitimate requirements for ephedrines for the first time.

510. Further information on the availability of internationally controlled substances can be found in the technical

reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,¹⁴⁶ psychotropic substances¹⁴⁷ and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁴⁸ In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

4. National legislation, policy and action

511. Antigua and Barbuda is drafting a new drug strategy, covering the period 2024–2028, which will replace the current national anti-drug strategy, covering the period 2019–2023. The Ministry of Justice of Cuba, in accordance with its resolution 635 of November 2022, updated the institutional plans on drug control that serve as the methodological bases for the development of the national programmes of each competent national authority. According to the information available, national drug policies and/or national plans on drug control in a number of countries in the region have expired.

512. In March 2022, the Government of El Salvador declared a state of emergency to address the deteriorating security situation in the country. Amendments were made to legislation in July 2023 which increased the duration of imprisonment for those found to be street gang leaders and permitted group trials of a larger number of people if they are accused of being in the same criminal group.

513. According to a report prepared by the National Anti-Drug Commission of El Salvador on the security and drug trafficking situation in the country, young people between 15 and 29 years of age have accounted for the highest incidence of arrests for drug-related crimes in recent years. In 2020, of the young people between 15 and 24 years of age in the country, about 340,000 (26 per cent) were neither students nor employed. Those young people, mainly from low-income backgrounds, became easy targets for organized criminal groups seeking to recruit them for criminal activities.

514. Haiti acts as a transit country for trafficking in illicit drugs, primarily cocaine and cannabis, which are mostly shipped onwards to the Dominican Republic, the United

¹⁴⁶E/INCB/2023/2.

¹⁴⁷E/INCB/2023/3.

¹⁴⁸E/INCB/2023/4.

States and Western Europe. In 2023, gang violence in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, expanded at an alarming rate in areas of the city that had previously been considered relatively safe. Heavily armed criminal gangs targeted critical infrastructure, including ports and police stations, and gained control of major highways to the capital. According to government officials, 80 per cent of the cities in the country were under the control or influence of armed groups. Compared with the first quarter of 2022, criminal incidents, including homicides, rapes, kidnappings and lynchings, more than doubled in the corresponding period in 2023.

515. UNODC, in its assessment entitled “Haiti’s criminal markets: mapping trends in firearms and drug trafficking”, expressed concerns regarding the increased trafficking of sophisticated, high-calibre firearms and ammunition into Haiti by land, air and, most frequently, sea. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2645 (2022), in which the Council requested the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti to work with UNODC to support Haitian authorities in combating illicit financial flows, as well as trafficking and diversion of arms and related material, and in enhancing management and control of borders and ports, the Government of Haiti and UNODC agreed to improve cooperation between all relevant institutions, with a view to strengthening the national capacity to combat illicit trafficking, organized crime and terrorism and to increasing revenue collection.

516. The law enforcement authorities in Jamaica have expressed concern about the influence of the illicit production of cannabis on the environment, including in relation to the demand for water and pollution. While legally licensed cannabis production in the country must comply with environmental protection standards, illicit cannabis production continues to be a problem because of its impact on land and the availability of water for legitimate agricultural production in the country.

517. In 2023, the competent national authorities of Panama initiated the implementation of national legislation regulating the production of cannabis and its use for medical purposes in the country.

518. According to the annual report of the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme for 2022, published in January 2023, seven new port control units were recently established worldwide, including one in Santiago, Cuba, and three in the Dominican Republic, in Manzanillo and Puerto Plata and at the border with Haiti.

519. In 2022, Trinidad and Tobago and UNODC signed a memorandum of understanding on the country’s

participation in the Airport Communication Programme (AIRCOP), which is a multi-agency programme implemented by UNODC in partnership with INTERPOL and WCO in more than 40 airports in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, South-East Asia and South-Eastern Europe. AIRCOP is aimed at strengthening the capacities of international airports to target and intercept high-risk passengers, cargo and mail, as a contribution to, inter alia, the fight against illicit drugs and trafficking in persons. Since 2010, AIRCOP task forces have seized a combined total of more than 20 tons of illicit drugs, new psychoactive substances and khat, in addition to precursors, counterfeit medicines, weapons and currency.

5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

520. According to the *CICAD Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2022*, the total amount of cocaine seized in the western hemisphere rose from about 911 tons in 2016 to 1,091 tons in 2020. While, in Central America, the amount of cocaine seized steadily rose from 51 tons in 2016 to more than 71 tons in 2020, in the Caribbean, the amount seized decreased from 13 tons to 9 tons over the same period. The record level of illicit manufacture of cocaine in South America, which in 2021 reached a high of 2,304 tons of pure substance, has resulted in a further increase in cocaine trafficking affecting the Americas as a whole. According to UNODC, in 2022, customs and other law enforcement agencies participating in the efforts of AIRCOP and the Container Control Programme under the UNODC Passenger and Cargo Border Team seized more than 275 tons of cocaine, over 100 tons more than in the previous year.

521. Cocaine manufactured illicitly in Colombia is usually trafficked to North America either directly from ports on the Pacific or Caribbean coasts or through Brazil and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) northward towards the Caribbean and Central America.

522. According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, most of the cocaine seized in the European Union or in transit to Europe is concealed in cargo ships and shipped directly from the main cocaine-manufacturing countries, in particular Colombia; neighbouring countries in South America, in particular Brazil and Ecuador; or countries in Central America and the Caribbean. A route that runs through the Caribbean, involving other forms of sea transport, as well as air transport, also runs through North and West Africa, including the islands off the coast of West Africa. Cocaine hydrochloride

trafficked to Europe is often concealed in carrier materials and later extracted in Europe in dedicated extraction facilities.

523. In Costa Rica, the amount of cocaine seized decreased from 44.3 tons in 2021 to 24.8 tons in 2022, a decrease of 44 per cent. In the Dominican Republic, 31.1 tons of diverse illicit drugs were seized in 2022, about 5 tons more than the 25.9 tons seized in 2021. The seizures in 2022 included 27.7 tons of cocaine and 3.3 tons of cannabis herb. A further 2.8 tons of cocaine were seized the country in the first trimester of 2023. In Guatemala, 1.6 tons of cocaine were seized and 3.7 million coca plants were eradicated in 2022. In recent years, Guatemala and Honduras have reported the discovery of small coca plantations and a limited number of illicit cocaine laboratories.

524. In 2022, according to media reports, El Salvador registered the second largest cocaine seizure (12 tons) in the last 34 years, reportedly due to the Government's efforts to curtail gangs operating in the country. Moreover, in mid-July 2023, the Government stated that it had reached more than 290 days without a homicide in the country since the state of emergency was introduced.

525. In Panama, a total of 138.4 tons of drugs were seized in 2022, most of which was cocaine (108.8 tons), followed by cannabis herb (29.5 tons), representing a decrease of 6.8 tons in comparison with the amount of drugs seized in the country in 2021. In January 2023, a further 5.6 tons of cocaine and 2.3 tons of cannabis were seized in Panama. In Trinidad and Tobago, the amount of cocaine seized ranged from 130 kg to 380 kg per year in the period 2018–2021, with a decline being observed in 2022, when only 17 kg of the substance were seized.

526. According to the *CICAD Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2022*, increased cannabis cultivation and trafficking was reported by eight countries in the Caribbean in the period 2016–2020. Overall, from 2016 to 2020, the amount of cannabis seized in Central America and the Caribbean slightly increased. There were reports of innovations in cannabis trafficking in Central America, such as trafficking in liquid cannabis or cannabis suspended in wax. In Jamaica, the authorities noted a high international demand for cannabis cultivated illicitly in that country, due to its perceived superior quality.

527. In 2022, Costa Rica reported the largest total amount of cannabis herb seized in the country (25.1 tons) since 2000. In addition, more than 600,000 cannabis plants were eradicated and 13.5 tons of cannabis herb were seized in the country in the first half of 2023. Two tons of cannabis herb were seized and 5.3 million cannabis plants were

eradicated in Guatemala in 2022. In Honduras, cannabis seizures have been reported in all regions of the country in recent years.

528. While cannabis is locally produced in Trinidad and Tobago, the substance is also trafficked into the country from Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). In 2022, 580 kg of cannabis were seized in Trinidad and Tobago, a decrease from what was reported in the period 2018–2021, when, on average, 2,950 kg of cannabis were seized annually in the country. In the same year, 6,900 fully grown cannabis plants were eradicated, a decrease from what was reported in the period 2019–2021, when, on average, 163,000 cannabis plants were eradicated annually in the country.

529. Across Central America and the Caribbean, the number of arrests involving cannabis did not surpass 10,000 per year in each subregion in the period 2016–2020. According to CICAD, the relatively low number of arrests may have been due in part to the decriminalization of the possession of small amounts of cannabis, especially in the Caribbean, as well as the overall low number of countries in the Americas that provided such information (15 countries).

530. In Trinidad and Tobago, in the period 2020–2022, there was an average of 470 arrests per year for the possession of cannabis, which was a significant decrease from the previous period of 2018–2019, in which there was an average of 3,200 arrests per year. That decrease could in part be attributed to the amendment of the country's Dangerous Drugs Act in December 2019, which decriminalized the cultivation and possession of small quantities of cannabis.

531. Illicit opium cultivation and heroin manufacture and trafficking do not appear to be of concern for the countries in the region, except for Guatemala, which reported the eradication of almost 10 million opium poppy plants in 2022, and the Dominican Republic, which has reported a low-level prevalence of heroin use in recent years.

532. In August 2023, according to an open source of information, the competent national authorities of Trinidad and Tobago dismantled the first methamphetamine laboratory in the country. Since 2017, seizures of amphetamine and methamphetamine have been reported by several countries in the region, including the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago. Seizures of "ecstasy" have been reported by the Bahamas, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago. Seizures of LSD have been reported by Costa Rica and Honduras. Costa Rica, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago have reported seizures of ketamine in recent years.

6. Prevention and treatment

533. The Board has noted with concern the continued lack of recent epidemiological surveys on the prevalence of drug misuse in most countries in Central America and the Caribbean. In many countries of the region, the latest estimates of the annual prevalence of use of illicit drugs among the general population are more than 10 years old. For example, within the region, the most recent estimates of the prevalence of use of cannabis, cocaine and amphetamines among the general population aged 15–64 were made in 2018, in Haiti, and the most recent estimates of the prevalence of use of “ecstasy”-type substances and prescription stimulants among the general population were made in 2015, in Costa Rica and Panama. There are no recent estimates available to enable the production of estimates of the extent of opioid use in the region. **The Board reiterates its call to the countries concerned to prioritize the collection of data on drug use trends and treatment demand in order to inform the development of evidence-based drug control policy and encourages bilateral partners and regional and international organizations to provide support to this end.**

534. As estimated by UNODC in 2021, the past-year prevalence of cannabis use among the adult population was 3.1 per cent in Central America and 5.7 per cent in the Caribbean. In Jamaica, in 2016, the most recent year for which data are available, the past-year prevalence of cannabis use among the adult population was 18 per cent, which was, for purposes of comparison, higher than the global average of 4.3 per cent for 2021. According to the National Anti-Drug Commission of El Salvador, the most common combinations of substances for which patients in the country received treatment for polydrug use in 2022 were, in order of prevalence, cannabis herb with cocaine hydrochloride, cannabis herb with benzodiazepines and cannabis herb with “crack” cocaine or freebase cocaine.

535. According to the *World Drug Report 2023*, the annual prevalence of the use of cocaine among persons aged 15–64 years in Central America and in the Caribbean, as estimated in 2021, was 0.96 per cent and 0.19 per cent, respectively, and considerably lower than that in North America (1.88 per cent) and South America (1.62 per cent). According to the same source, the annual prevalence of the use of amphetamines and prescription stimulants among adults in Central America was 0.99 per cent, and that of “ecstasy” was 0.17 per cent. The annual prevalence of the use of those substances in the Caribbean was not provided. With regard to new psychoactive substances, Costa Rica and El Salvador reported the use of ketamine, mephedrone and synthetic cannabinoids among the general population aged 15–64 years in their territories in the period 2015–2018.

536. The percentage of people under 25 years of age in treatment for drug use in Central America and the Caribbean (37 per cent) is, according to UNODC, the second highest among all regions worldwide, after South America (52 per cent).

537. According to the best estimates from the latest UNODC/WHO/UNAIDS/World Bank data, published in 2023, among the population aged 15–64, about 20,000 people in Central America and about 100,000 people in the Caribbean inject drugs. The best estimate of the global prevalence of HIV among injecting drug users was 11.9 per cent. In Central America and in the Caribbean, where HIV prevalence data were available for one third of all people who inject drugs, this prevalence was estimated at 0.95 per cent and 10.8 per cent, respectively. Data from PAHO indicate that, while the number of new HIV cases in Latin America is estimated to have increased by 4.7 per cent from 2010 to 2021, with approximately 110,000 new cases in 2021, the number of new cases in the Caribbean decreased by 28 per cent over the same period, from an estimated 19,000 per year to 14,000 per year. It is estimated that 18 per cent of people with HIV in Latin America and in the Caribbean are unaware of their condition.

North America

The opioid crisis continued to have serious consequences in the countries of the region. An increasing number of opioid toxicity deaths over the period under consideration involved illicitly manufactured fentanyl, often mixed with other synthetic drugs, including stimulants or benzodiazepine analogues.

The United States launched the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats, which is aimed at preventing the illicit manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs, detecting emerging drug trends, and drug use patterns, and responding to public health impacts, in partnership with Governments, as well as the private sector, civil society, hospitals and public health stakeholders.

Illicit drug-related activity by cartels and criminal gangs in Mexico continues to result in high levels of violence, in particular homicides, in the country.

1. Major developments

538. The opioid crisis resulting from an increasingly adulterated illicit drug supply continued to have serious consequences in North America. Drug overdose deaths in the United States have risen fivefold over the past two decades, with over 106,000 such deaths in 2021 alone. In Canada, there were more than 36,000 apparent opioid toxicity deaths between 2016 and 2022. An increasing number of opioid toxicity deaths over the period under consideration involved illicitly manufactured fentanyl, often mixed with other synthetic drugs, including stimulants or benzodiazepine analogues, reflecting the polysubstance nature of the crisis.

539. In response, all three countries of the region have strengthened their legislation related to precursor chemicals. In particular, Canada permanently scheduled a group of novel fentanyl precursors, which are analogues and derivatives of *N*-phenyl-4-piperidinamine (4-AP) and its salts, under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. This measure came into effect on 30 August 2023 and is intended to enable law enforcement authorities to continue acting against any illegal importation, distribution and use of those precursor chemicals. Derivatives or analogues of fentanyl precursors are also being placed under national control in the United States, including certain derivatives of 4-piperidone and halide analogues of 4-AP, effective 30 November 2023.

540. The President of the United States extended the national emergency with respect to global illicit drug trafficking, which had first been initiated by an executive order issued on 15 December 2021, beyond 15 December 2022. Under the order, international drug trafficking, including the illicit production, global sale and widespread distribution of illegal drugs, the rise in high-potency drugs such as fentanyl and other synthetic opioids and the growing role of Internet-based drug sales are considered to continue posing an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy and economy of the country.

541. During a ministerial-level meeting, which was held virtually on 7 July 2023, the United States Secretary of State launched the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats. The Coalition, formalized through a joint ministerial declaration signed by 81 Governments, is aimed at preventing the illicit production and trafficking of synthetic drugs, detecting emerging drug trends, and drug use patterns, and responding to public health impacts, in partnership with civil society, hospitals and public health stakeholders, as well as the private sector, including chemical manufacturers, shipping companies and social media platforms. The Coalition is expected to reconvene at the political level on the margins of various high-level political events.

2. Regional cooperation

542. Effective cooperation in law enforcement matters and in combating illicit drug manufacture and trafficking continued to be promoted through various regional mechanisms. At the 2023 North American Leaders' Summit, held on 9 and 10 January 2023, Canada, Mexico and the United States committed to coordinating actions and strategies to combat arms and drug trafficking that represent a shared threat to the three countries. The countries also agreed to continue their collaboration within the North American Drug Dialogue under an updated strategic framework to address illegal drug threats and strengthen public health approaches to substance use. That included increased distribution of overdose reversal medications and information-sharing on chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of fentanyl and other synthetic drugs.

543. Mexico and the United States continued to cooperate within the Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health and Safe Communities. On 9 March 2023, a second phase of the framework was launched, and the two countries agreed to further increase cooperation to combat the illicit manufacture and use of fentanyl, as well as arms trafficking, across the region. On that occasion, approximately \$25 million in funds stolen by criminal actors through embezzlement and fraud that were seized and forfeited by the United States Department of Justice were returned to the federal Government of Mexico. The funds were earmarked to be used to advance the goals of the Bicentennial Framework. On 13 April 2023, further collaboration was announced within the Framework, including public awareness campaigns and commitment to continued cooperation to dismantle the fentanyl supply chain on both sides of the border between the two countries.

544. On the same day, the first meeting of the senior-level Trilateral Fentanyl Committee was convened. The Committee, comprising senior-level officials from Canada, Mexico and the United States, recognized synthetic opioids, in particular fentanyl, as the foremost drug threat in North America, and the three countries agreed to work together to disrupt the global transfer, facilitation and supply of illicit fentanyl and the precursor chemicals and equipment used in its illicit manufacture before they reach North America. The Committee also pledged to coordinate international actions to mobilize other countries impacted by synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine, "captagon" and tramadol. The formation of the Committee was agreed during the North American Leaders' Summit in January 2023.

545. INCB has been supporting countries of the region in addressing the emergence of highly potent synthetic drugs through the activities of its Global Rapid Interdiction of

Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme, including through the use of tools such as IONICS, which facilitates the exchange of real-time information between national authorities. As of July 2023, over 2,200 incidents had been communicated concerning interdictions and seizures of opioids through the platform by law enforcement focal points for North America. On 9 December 2022, the INCB GRIDS Programme provided in-person support for 33 law enforcement and regulatory officers from the Technical Group for Synthetic Drug Control of Mexico, focused on strengthening information exchange using the IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence targeting tools.

546. Between December 2022 and January 2023, Mexico and the United States participated in the INCB Operation Knockout and exchanged intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical 1,4-butanediol, carisoprodol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through international postal, express mail and courier services and related modalities.

547. From 21 to 23 February 2023, the INCB GRIDS Programme organized an online stakeholder consultation on voluntary cooperation between Governments and freight forwarding services for the prevention of trafficking in dangerous substances. The event was attended by more than 44 representatives from 10 Governments, three international organizations and six industry associations, including 13 participants from Canada, Mexico and the United States. Participants exchanged best practices and shared case examples related to the exploitation of legitimate ancillary logistics services and discussed the next steps for promoting voluntary cooperation between Governments and their private sector partners.

548. The GRIDS Programme convened, in Mexico City in June 2023, the second regional expert group meeting on the exploitation of Latin American and Caribbean e-commerce platforms for the marketing and sale of dangerous substances. The meeting was aimed at engaging stakeholders in discussions regarding the current trends in regional trafficking in synthetic drugs, fentanyl and related chemicals, challenges confronting e-commerce platforms and promising practices to prevent future exploitation by traffickers. More than 29 stakeholders, including representatives from the Governments of Mexico and the United States, international organizations, regional industry associations and leading private sector companies, participated in the event.

549. In Vienna in September 2023, the GRIDS Programme organized the sixth annual operational meeting on counteracting trafficking of dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals

through postal, courier and air cargo services. The event brought together over 100 participants from 30 Governments and international organizations, including participants from Canada, Mexico and the United States. Several participating Governments also engaged in bilateral and multilateral case meetings to enhance cooperation across borders, facilitated by INCB.

550. Also in Vienna in September 2023, the GRIDS programme convened the third international expert group meeting on expanding the INCB lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate uses and novel approaches for their identification in falsified or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals. The event brought together nearly 45 participants from 20 Governments and international organizations, including participants from Canada, Mexico and the United States.

551. A total of 228 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of the three countries in North America have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. The existing e-modules cover the topics of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

552. The Board acknowledges the timely and thorough reporting of data by the competent national authorities of all three countries of the region, as required by the international drug control conventions and requested in the relevant resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, including the voluntary reporting of data on the domestic consumption of psychotropic substances.

553. According to the reported data, Canada and the United States have maintained a high level of availability of opioid analgesics, peaking in 2014 with a total of 75,408 S-DDD_{pm} for the two countries. However, availability has been steadily decreasing, falling to the levels of 20 years ago, at 48,867 S-DDD_{pm} in 2021. In 2021, the United States reported the consumption of 31,860 S-DDD_{pm} in 2021, with Canada reporting the consumption of 17,007 S-DDD_{pm} the same year. With regard to Mexico, the availability of opioid analgesics in the country has been much lower, as consumption has never exceeded 200 S-DDD_{pm}, the threshold considered adequate by the Board, between 2013 and 2020. In 2021, Mexico exceeded the Board's threshold of

adequacy for the first time as it reported the consumption of 277 S-DDD_{pm}. Among all countries in North America, the most consumed opioid in 2021 was hydrocodone (mostly consumed in the United States), followed by oxycodone, fentanyl, hydromorphone and morphine.

554. Psychotropic substances, used for the treatment of a wide range of mental health and neurological disorders, have been manufactured and traded throughout the region for decades. The consumption of those substances as reported by Governments indicates that they are generally available for legitimate medical purposes.

555. The Board highlights the importance of ensuring that narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are available for legitimate purposes, while putting in place adequate policies and practices to prevent their overprescription and misuse. The Board reminds Governments of the need to foster responsible prescription practices and controls on distribution to avoid diversion into illicit channels and overconsumption resulting in dependence and associated harms.

556. With regard to precursor chemicals, in the context of Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 49/3, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means. As at 1 November 2023, all three countries in the region had provided at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or their preparations, and all three have regularly updated their estimates for those substances, which contributes to preventing their oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes.

557. Further information and analysis of trends relating to the availability of internationally controlled substances are contained in the technical reports of the Board for 2023 on narcotic drugs,¹⁴⁹ psychotropic substances¹⁵⁰ and the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.¹⁵¹ In addition, the publication entitled *Guide on Estimating Requirements for Substances under International Control*, developed by INCB and WHO for use by competent

national authorities, and the document entitled “Issues that Governments may consider when determining annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine” are available on the Board’s website.

4. National legislation, policy and action

558. In support of the implementation of the National Drug Control Strategy and to address the illicit fentanyl supply chain, in April 2023, the President of the United States requested the United States Congress to approve the allocation of an historic sum of \$46.1 billion for National Drug Control Program agencies in 2024. The budget request for the fiscal year 2024 represents a significant increase in comparison with previous years. In addition to leading a coordinated global effort to disrupt the illicit trade in synthetic drugs, the budget foresees greater funding to support the expansion of prevention, treatment, harm reduction and recovery support services in the country.

559. The overdose crisis continued to have a significant impact across Canada, with health-care and social services being overburdened owing to the high toxicity and unpredictable content of illicit drugs being consumed. Since 2017, the Government of Canada has allocated more than 1 billion Canadian dollars to increase access to evidence-based treatment and services, as well as to raise awareness and prevent drug use and associated stigma. In the 2023 federal budget, a significant amount was allocated to support a renewed Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy and strengthen the public health-care system, including by increasing access to mental health and substance use services and implementing harm reduction, treatment and recovery strategies for people who use drugs.

560. On 17 November 2022, Bill C-5, amending the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act of Canada, received royal assent. The amendment repeals mandatory minimum penalties for all drug-related offences, aiming to increase the use of conditional sentences and require prosecutors to consider alternatives to laying or proceeding with criminal charges for simple possession of drugs. One of the stated motivations behind the amendment was to promote fairer and more effective responses to criminal conduct and address systemic racism and discrimination in the criminal justice system of Canada, while maintaining public safety.

561. On 21 January 2023, an exemption from parts of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act for the Province of British Columbia came into effect. The three-year exemption allows the province to not bring criminal charges against

¹⁴⁹ E/INCB/2023/2.

¹⁵⁰ E/INCB/2023/3.

¹⁵¹ E/INCB/2023/4.

adults (aged 18 years and older) for the possession of a combined total of 2.5 grams of opioids, cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA. The exemption does not apply in certain circumstances, including if adults in possession of any quantity of those substances are found on the premises of schools, at licensed childcare facilities or in airports, where they could be charged with a criminal offence. The province is monitoring implementation, early outcomes, public awareness and unintended consequences, and the federal Government is carrying out assessments through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

562. In March 2023, in response to the overdose crisis in Toronto, Canada, the city's public health authority, Toronto Public Health, updated its submission to Health Canada for an exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to decriminalize possession of drugs for personal use in the city. If granted, the exemption would remove criminal charges for possession for personal use without use of any alternative sanctions. The exemption would apply to all drugs and substances listed in the Act, to all people, including young people (people aged 12 to 17) and to all areas of Toronto, except for childcare facilities, schools and airports. The exemption would also create a system of voluntary referrals to health and social support services. The original request for an exemption has been pending with Health Canada since January 2022.

563. A number of companies received approval from Health Canada amending their dealer's licence, allowing them to legally possess and produce limited amounts of controlled substances, such as psilocybin, cocaine, coca leaf, opium, morphine and diacetylmorphine, and to sell and distribute them in limited amounts to licensed dealers, such as pharmacists, practitioners, hospitals or holders of an exemption for research purposes under section 56 (1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

564. The Health Department of the Province of Alberta put in place a regulatory framework for the medicinal use of psychoactive substances (psychedelics), becoming the first province in Canada to introduce requirements and medical oversight for such use. As of 16 January 2023, service providers are required to hold a licence under the Mental Health Services Protection Act, except if taking part in an approved clinical research trial, and must meet quality and safety requirements under provincial regulations. In addition to Alberta, clinics providing psychedelic-assisted therapy have also opened in the Province of British Columbia.

565. In view of the lack of federal clinical practice guidelines, Health Canada issued information on its expectations regarding risk-management measures for clinical trials involving psychedelic-assisted therapy in December 2022,

based on some best practices emerging in literature. Measures included adequate training of therapists, the requirement to report any serious unexpected adverse drug reactions to Health Canada and the existence of written informed consent from every person and every product used in the trials, in order to meet good manufacturing practices.

566. Developments regarding access to some psychedelic substances have also taken place in the United States. In April 2023, Bill No. 5263, relating to access to psilocybin services by individuals 21 years of age and older, was passed by the legislature of the State of Washington. However, the Governor of the State partially vetoed the bill because of provisions conflicting with other regulations, including federal law obligations. This limits the scope of the bill to research in the medical use of psilocybin and, potentially, to a pilot programme pending the release of a final report by the Washington State Health Care Authority expected in December 2023. Bills related to psilocybin have been introduced in an additional 18 states in the country.

567. In May 2023, the Governor of the State of Colorado signed the Natural Medicine Legalization and Regulation (Bill SB23-290), which establishes the regulatory framework for licensing the cultivation, manufacture, testing, storage, distribution, transport, transfer and dispensation of natural medicine and natural medicine products. The licensing of facilitators, healing centres and other licensees is to begin no later than 31 December 2024. The legislation concerns psilocyn and psilocybin only, however, the range of substances will be expanded to dimethyltryptamine, ibogaine and mescaline (excluding *lophophora williamsii* ("peyote")) after 1 June 2026.

568. In May 2023, the Oregon Health Authority issued the first psilocybin service centre licence, in implementation of the state's Psilocybin Services Act. Under the Act, upon completion of a preparation session with a licensed facilitator, persons 21 years of age or older may access psilocybin services without prescription or referral from health-care providers. In addition, service centres will sell psilocybin products.

569. In Mexico, a commission to fight trafficking in illicit synthetic drugs, firearms and ammunition was created pursuant to a presidential decree issued on 12 April 2023. The commission aims to improve coordination among government entities of Mexico to support the investigation and arrest of individuals involved in the production and trafficking of fentanyl.

570. On 29 May 2023, Mexico established the National Commission on Mental Health and Addictions

(CONASAMA), a decentralized administrative body of the Ministry of Health. The Commission merges activities previously carried out by the Technical Secretariat of the National Mental Health Council (STCONSAME), the Psychiatric Care Services (SAP) and the National Commission against Addictions (CONADIC). The Commission develops policy, strategies and programmes for the prevention and treatment of mental health disorders, including drug use disorders. It is also responsible for the operation of the Observatory of Mental Health and Addictions of Mexico, which collects, analyses and interprets information on mental health and the consumption of drugs, with the aim of obtaining reliable national- and state-level data for decision-making. The Commission was established in implementation of the health policy priorities of the General Health Law, adopted in May 2022.

571. In May 2023, the Federal Law for the Control of Chemical Precursors, Essential Chemical Products and Machines for the Manufacture of Capsules and Tablets of Mexico was amended. The amendment strengthens actions aimed at controlling the production, preparation, disposal, acquisition, import, export, transportation, storage and distribution of chemical precursors, essential chemical products and related equipment through inter-agency coordination.

572. Following the launch of the review of the Cannabis Act by the Minister of Health and the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions of Canada in September 2022, an expert panel was formed to undertake an assessment of the legislative framework governing cannabis, engage with stakeholders to gather perspectives to inform the review, and provide expert advice on aspects of the legislative framework and its implementation that the Government could prioritize for improvement or reform.

573. The expert panel received a series of recommendations from various stakeholders, including the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction and industry representatives, as part of the consultation process for the review mechanism. The recommendations submitted to the panel incorporated issues related to improving competition within the cannabis industry, including the review of the licensing process and related costs; adjustments to THC limits; the review of cannabis promotion, packaging and labelling; surveillance of online cannabis distribution; and research on the equitability of access, the availability of the legal supply and pricing.

574. On 2 December 2022, amendments to the Cannabis Act and its regulations concerning cannabis research and testing and beverages containing cannabis came into force in Canada. The amendments increase the public possession

limit for cannabis beverages from 2.1 to 17.1 litres, a level similar to that of other cannabis products, such as edibles. Existing controls aimed at mitigating the risks of over-consumption and accidental consumption, such as child-resistant packaging and strict limits on the amount of THC per container, remain unamended. The amendments also facilitate non-therapeutic cannabis research involving human participants and allow analytical testing licence holders and federal and provincial governmental laboratories to produce, distribute and sell reference standards and test kits.

575. In April 2023, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the provisions of the provincial law banning the possession and cultivation of cannabis plants in Quebec for personal purposes are valid and operative under the Constitution of Canada. While the Federal Cannabis Act allows people to possess or cultivate four cannabis plants at home, the Cannabis Regulation Act of Quebec prohibits such possession and cultivation. In a unanimous ruling, the Court ruled that banning the possession of cannabis plants and their cultivation at home is a means of achieving the provincial law's public health and security objectives and such legislation is within the provinces' jurisdiction over property and civil rights and residual jurisdiction over matters of a local or private nature.

576. In the United States, as at 1 November 2023, 38 states, three territories and the District of Columbia allowed the medical use of cannabis products. On 31 March 2023, the Governor of the State of Kentucky signed into law Senate Bill 47, authorizing the medical use of cannabis in the state. The use of cannabis for medical purposes would be allowed for registered patients with qualifying medical conditions, such as cancer, epilepsy or post-traumatic stress disorder. Some provisions of the bill will not become effective until 1 January 2025.

577. In July 2023, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs issued Directive 1315, on access to Veterans Health Administration clinical programmes for veterans participating in State-approved cannabis programmes. Under the directive, health-care providers under the Department discuss relevant clinical information regarding cannabis use with veterans who request information or report cannabis use and document such information in the veteran's electronic health record. Clinical treatment decisions in relation to cannabis use must be made on a case-by-case basis and take into account the health and safety of veterans. Furthermore, veterans must not be denied Veterans Health Administration services solely because they are participating in a State-approved cannabis programme or because they acknowledge that they use cannabis. However, to comply with federal law, Veterans Health Administration health-care providers are prohibited from

recommending or registering veterans for participation in a State-approved cannabis programme, completing forms for them to that end, or making referrals to such programmes.

578. As at 7 November 2023, 24 states, two territories and the District of Columbia had enacted measures to regulate the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes. Most recently, the State of Delaware passed Bills HB1 and HB2. Both bills became law on 23 April 2023, without the signature of the Governor of the state, owing to his reservations regarding legalization. Persons over the age of 21 are allowed to possess, use, display, purchase or transport cannabis without penalty, and the legislation also establishes a regulated, taxed market for cannabis for recreational use similar to that for alcohol. Bill H.F.100, establishing a regulatory framework for the use by adults of cannabis for non-medical purposes, including a regulated market with taxation on cannabis products, was enacted in the State of Minnesota on 30 May 2023. The “issue 2” ballot initiative in a referendum held in the State of Ohio on 7 November 2023 was approved by voters. The initiative modifies Ohio law and allows for the possession and personal cultivation of cannabis as well as the licensing of cannabis growers and retailers.

579. **INCB underscores that article 4 (c) of the 1961 Convention requires States parties to take such legislative and administrative measures as may be necessary, subject to the provisions of the Convention, to limit exclusively to medical and scientific purposes the production, manufacture, export, import, distribution of, trade in, use and possession of drugs, and that article 3 of the 1988 Convention requires States parties to adopt such measures as may be necessary to establish as criminal offences under its domestic law, when committed intentionally:**

(a) The production, manufacture, extraction, preparation, offering, offering for sale, distribution, sale, delivery on any terms whatsoever, brokerage, dispatch, dispatch in transit, transport, importation or exportation of any narcotic drug or any psychotropic substance contrary to the provisions of the 1961 Convention, the 1961 Convention as amended or the 1971 Convention;

(b) The cultivation of cannabis plant for the purpose of the production of narcotic drugs contrary to the provisions of the 1961 Convention and the 1961 Convention as amended.

580. The proclamation by the President of the United States, who announced on 6 October 2022 a full, unconditional and categorical pardon for prior offences of simple possession of cannabis under federal law and the law of the District of Columbia, is being implemented by the United States Department of Justice. While the presidential pardon

does not expunge the existing conviction, it removes civil or legal restrictions, such as on the rights to vote, hold office or sit on a jury, and lifts barriers to housing, employment and educational opportunities.

581. As of March 2023, a cannabis company was authorized to import and acquire cannabis seeds and cultivate, produce and sell cannabis products with low levels of THC in Mexico. This is the first authorization related to commercial cannabis issued by the Federal Commission for the Protection against Sanitary Risks (COFEPRIS), the health regulatory agency of Mexico. The authorization was granted by the Commission in response to a decision by the Supreme Court of Mexico. In a public statement, the Commission emphasized that it did not have enough information to determine that future products would be safe for the purposes for which the company intended them to be used. In addition, the Commission, in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, filed complaints and non-conformity appeals seeking to reverse and invalidate the authorization in order to protect public health.

5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

582. According to the 2022 *Public Report on Organized Crime in Canada*, cocaine remained the primary commodity trafficked in Canada, and organized crime involvement in the markets for methamphetamine and fentanyl continued to increase. More than 350 organized crime groups were involved in the illicit market for fentanyl in Canada, while 21 such groups were involved in its illicit manufacture.

583. In December 2022, the Canada Border Services Agency seized nearly 2.5 tons of opium in Vancouver, British Columbia, the largest opium seizure by the agency to date. In addition, between 13 April and 14 May 2023 alone, the Agency made 15 seizures of ketamine, amounting to 89.8 kg, with a street value of over 6 million Canadian dollars. All the seizures were made at the Léo-Blanchette Mail Processing Centre.

584. There have been significant seizures of fentanyl by various law enforcement agencies in the United States. In 2022, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration seized a total of more than 57 million fentanyl-laced counterfeit prescription pills and nearly 6,000 kg of fentanyl powder. An additional 6,800 kg of fentanyl was seized by the United States Customs and Border Protection. The Drug Enforcement Administration estimated that the seizures amounted to over 379 million deadly doses of fentanyl. The United States Postal Inspection Service seized approximately 150 per cent more fentanyl in 2022 than in the previous year

and the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the United States Department of the Treasury designated nearly 100 individuals and entities for their role in the illicit drug trade, including trafficking in fentanyl and precursor chemicals.

585. According to data from the High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas programme, between the last quarter of 2021 and 30 September 2022, law enforcement officials seized more than 11 tons of fentanyl, nearly 3 tons of heroin, more than 150 tons of methamphetamine and nearly 170 tons of cocaine, representing nearly \$9 billion in street value. The programme oversees 33 regional areas in all 50 states of the United States, as well as Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands and the District of Columbia.

586. In the United States, seizures of illicit ketamine by drug enforcement agencies rose by 349 per cent between 2017 and 2022. In 2023, the United States Customs and Border Protection seized over 6 tons of ketamine, compared with 4.9 tons in 2022.

587. Fentanyl and methamphetamine seizures in Mexico increased in 2021, in comparison with 2020. The National Guard seized 168 kg of fentanyl in 2021, whereas less than 50 kg of the substance were seized in 2020. The quantity of methamphetamine seized reached more than 4.7 tons in 2021, compared with 1.36 tons in 2020. On the other hand, seizures of cocaine, cannabis, heroin and other psychotropic substances decreased.

588. Seized equipment and illicit narcotic drugs have been continuously destroyed in various regions in Mexico, often in large quantities. On 25 June 2023, the Office of the Attorney General of Mexico, through the Specialized Regional Control Prosecutor's Office (FECOR), in its Sinaloa Delegation, destroyed nearly 36 tons of various narcotic drugs and precursor chemicals and over 735,000 fentanyl pills, in addition to drug manufacturing equipment.

589. The illicit manufacture of and trafficking in drugs among cartels and criminal gangs continue to contribute to high levels of violence in Mexico. According to UNODC data, although intentional homicide rates in the country have fallen slightly over the past several years, the homicide rate remains one of the highest among countries worldwide, with more than 28 homicides per 100,000 people in 2021. Available data for 2022 and 2023 suggest that the rates of violence and homicide in the country have remained at the levels of 2021.

6. Prevention and treatment

590. According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, drug overdose deaths in the United States have risen fivefold over the past two decades. In 2021, there were over 106,000 deaths due to overdose of drugs, including illicit drugs and prescription opioids. The number of drug overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids other than methadone continued to increase, reaching more than 70,000 deaths in 2021, while deaths involving heroin declined from nearly 13,200 in 2020 to nearly 9,200 in 2021. In comparison, provisional data for 2022, published in May 2023, show that the overall reported number of drug overdose deaths occurring in the United States slightly decreased from 2021 to 2022. However, drug overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids (including fentanyl but excluding methadone) and stimulants with abuse potential (such as methamphetamine) continued to increase in comparison with 2021. The Board stresses the importance of the availability of and access to overdose-reversing medications, such as naloxone, which, if administered in a timely manner, have life-saving effects.

591. According to data released by Health Canada, there were a total of nearly 7,400 apparent opioid toxicity deaths in Canada in 2022, with over 2,200 such deaths in the Province of British Columbia alone. That was the second largest number of suspected deaths ever recorded in a calendar year in that province, after the more than 2,300 deaths recorded in 2021. Of all accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths in 2022, 81 per cent involved fentanyl and more than half also involved a stimulant (cocaine or methamphetamine), reflecting the polysubstance nature of the crisis in the country.

592. In the United States there has also been an increasing concern over overdoses involving opioids laced with other substances, including stimulants and benzodiazepines or analogues. In March 2023, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration issued a public safety alert on the sharp increase in the trafficking of fentanyl mixed with xylazine. The Administration reported that it had seized xylazine and fentanyl mixtures in 48 states and that, in 2022, approximately 23 per cent of the fentanyl powder and 7 per cent of the fentanyl pills it had seized contained xylazine. On 12 April 2023, the Government of the United States officially designated fentanyl adulterated or associated with xylazine as an emerging threat to the country, owing to the associated significant and rapidly worsening negative health consequences, including fatal overdoses and severe morbidity. Xylazine is a sedative approved for veterinary use in Canada and the United States.

593. Xylazine has also been identified in an increasing number of samples taken by law enforcement agencies across

Canada. According to Health Canada, the proportion of fentanyl samples that also contained xylazine increased from 1.4 per cent in January 2020 to 9 per cent in April 2023, with a peak near 12 per cent in June 2022. In addition, a number of provinces across Canada have issued toxic drug alerts about bromazolam having been detected in blood samples taken in investigations into sudden deaths; in some cases, the bromazolam had been laced with fentanyl. Bromazolam is a benzodiazepine not under international control. It is not approved for medical use in Canada. Naloxone, which is commonly used to counteract the effects of opioids and prevent overdose, does not reverse the effects of xylazine or benzodiazepines.

594. In implementation of its National Drug Control Strategy, the Government of the United States has accelerated a series of public health initiatives, in addition to actions targeting drug supply reduction. The initiatives include expanding the availability of and access to opioid overdose reversal products, including through the first approval of naloxone as a non-prescription drug, on 29 March 2023, by the United States Food and Drug Administration and by delivering naloxone to communities adversely affected by fentanyl. On 6 April 2023, the Government launched a national campaign to educate young people about the dangers of fentanyl and the life-saving effects of naloxone and has been working to make treatments for opioid use disorders a part of routine health-care delivery, including in prison settings.

595. On 22 May 2023, the United States Food and Drug Administration approved the first nalmefene hydrochloride nasal spray for the emergency treatment of known or suspected opioid overdose in adults and paediatric patients aged 12 years and older. It is the first approval of the substance for use in health-care and community settings in the United States. The approval was supported by safety and pharmacokinetic studies and the nasal spray was subject to a priority review, which allows approval within 6 months, instead of the 10 months required under standard review procedures.

596. To further address the drug overdose crisis in the United States, the National Institutes of Health has established a research network that will test harm reduction strategies, such as the distribution of naloxone and fentanyl test strips, in different community settings and will examine the efficacy of bringing harm reduction services and tools into communities by means of, or in the form of, mobile vans, peer support specialists, Internet- and smartphone-based tools and other types of outreach. The initiative is expected to provide a total of approximately \$36 million over five years and represents the largest pool of funding to date for that purpose.

597. The National Institute on Drug Abuse awarded New York University Langone Health and the Brown University School of Public Health with a grant to conduct research to measure the impact of some of the first publicly recognized overdose prevention centres in the United States, located in New York City and Providence, Rhode Island. As part of the research project, the first of its kind, the three sites are being evaluated between 2023 and 2027 in terms of fatal and non-fatal overdose rates and emergency department visits. In addition, the project is examining the community impact of the sites and estimating their operational costs and the potential cost savings they provide to health-care and criminal justice systems.

598. According to the United States 2022 Monitoring the Future survey, published in June 2023, levels of adolescent cannabis use in the United States decreased after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and remained relatively stable in 2022, with 31 per cent of 12th-grade students reporting cannabis use in the past 12 months. The use of narcotic drugs other than heroin increased slightly among 12th-grade students between 2021 and 2022, with 1.7 per cent reporting such use within the past year. Among the same group of students, the prescribed use of medications for attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder increased from 11 per cent in 2021 to 15 per cent in 2022. Building on results from the Monitoring the Future survey, the University of Michigan and Columbia University undertook a study that showed that young adults aged 19 to 30 years had nearly doubled their past-year use of non-LSD hallucinogens between 2018 and 2021, with past-year use at 3.4 per cent in 2018, compared with 6.6 per cent in 2021.

599. The 2022 Canadian Cannabis Survey results were published in December 2022. Most of the findings did not differ significantly from those of 2021. A new parameter on accidental consumption of cannabis was introduced in the 2022 survey. Among people who had used cannabis in the past 12 months, over 30 per cent indicated higher THC and lower CBD consumption, and over 60 per cent had obtained cannabis from a legal storefront, an increase from 53 per cent reported in the 2021 survey. Five per cent of respondents reported always obtaining cannabis from illegal or unlicensed sources, with online illegal markets remaining attractive owing to the ease of payment and the appearance of being a legal source. Most respondents also indicated that the occasional use of alcohol and cannabis posed no or only a slight risk, whereas the occasional smoking of tobacco and use of e-cigarettes with nicotine posed moderate or great risks.

600. In a report released on 29 March 2023, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction concluded that substance use had cost the Canadian economy over 49 billion Canadian dollars in 2020, up from 11 billion Canadian

dollars per year between 2007 and 2020. Lost productivity, including the value of work lost due to premature deaths and long- and short-term disability, had cost over 22 billion Canadian dollars in 2020, with opioid use having cost over 7 billion Canadian dollars in 2020, higher than in any other year. The report also analysed the related costs of health care and criminal justice and other direct costs.

601. In Canada, between April 2018 and March 2023, the “Know more” opioids awareness programme engaged in more than 1,300 in-person and virtual sessions at high schools, 68 events at post-secondary institutions, 43 events and festivals and more than 175,000 interactions with people, and placed awareness products such as posters and wallet cards in high-traffic areas of 16 post-secondary educational institutions. The programme raises the awareness of teenagers and young people across Canada about the facts surrounding the opioid overdose crisis, opioids, fentanyl, signs of an overdose, naloxone, the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act and the impacts of stigma on people who use drugs.

602. As of June 2023, there were 38 supervised drug consumption sites operating in Canada, and an additional 10 sites were awaiting approval by Health Canada. The sites provide health, social and treatment services, including access to clean drug use equipment, drug checking, emergency medical care in case of overdose, testing for infectious diseases, referrals for drug treatment and access to social services such as housing. Since 2017, there have been over 4 million visits to the sites and over 40,000 overdoses have been reversed at the sites. As possession of controlled substances is prohibited under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, an exemption under section 56 (1) of the Act is required to operate a supervised consumption site for medical purposes.

603. To facilitate access to prevention and health services for people who use drugs, the Inter-Institutional Committee for Risk and Harm Reduction was established in Mexico City in January 2023. The Committee comprises members from the National Commission against Addictions (CONADIC), the Psychiatric Care Services (SAP) and the Technical Secretariat of the National Mental Health Council (STCONSAME) of the Ministry of Health, the government of Mexico City and the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City, and is supported by civil society organizations. The purpose of the Committee is to ensure that prevention and treatment services for people who use drugs in the city are undertaken with respect for human rights and aim to decrease associated stigma.

604. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) of Mexico, in 2021, the Attorney General charged over 3,200 adolescents with alleged drug-related crimes, of which 90 per cent were charged for simple

possession of controlled substances, in particular cannabis and methamphetamine. Drug-related crimes represented a total of 14.4 per cent of the total number of criminal charges against adolescents in that year and were the third most common type of crime among that population, after robbery and various injuries. In comparison with 2015, the number of adolescents charged with alleged drug-related offences decreased by 23 per cent.

605. According to the Observatory of Mental Health and Addictions of Mexico, Mexico is going through an epidemiological transition in terms of the demand for treatment for use of methamphetamine, experiencing an increase in admissions for treatment in a greater number of states. In 2017, six states noted admissions for use of methamphetamine, which increased to 21 states in 2022. Between those years, the use of methamphetamine, ecstasy and stimulants increased by 218 per cent. In 2022, those substances accounted for over 46 per cent of requests for treatment.

606. According to the “Online survey on the use of cannabis and derivatives” carried out in Mexico in 2023, which was taken by nearly 13,500 people between the ages of 12 and 75, 28.3 per cent of survey respondents had used cannabis at some time in their lives and one in five identified herself or himself as a current user. The main reasons given for use included sleep and performance enhancement, stress reduction, socialization and experimentation.

South America

Drug trafficking organizations continue to expand their operations in the Amazon Basin into illegal mining, illegal logging and wildlife trafficking, resulting in life-threatening risks to Indigenous populations. Such activities have been linked to bribery, extortion, fraud and money-laundering, as well as homicide, violent assault, sexual violence and forced labour in the Amazon.

The area under illicit coca bush cultivation in Colombia rose by 13 per cent to a second consecutive record high of 230,000 ha, while a record level of 95,008 ha of illicit coca bush cultivation was reported in Peru for 2022, representing an 18 per cent increase compared with 2021 and taking place most notably in the Peruvian Amazon.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations received a request from the Plurinational State of Bolivia to activate

the process for a critical review of the current classification of coca leaf as a narcotic drug in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended.

1. Major developments

607. South America is one of the three regions in the world that suffer the highest economic impacts of armed conflict, including between militias and drug cartels, together with the Middle East and North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, the effects of drug trafficking on the environment and the life of Indigenous communities are increasingly visible in the region.

608. Most notably, in the Amazon regions in Brazil, Colombia and Peru, which combined account for 79 per cent of the Amazon basin, drug trafficking organizations continue to expand their operations into illegal mining, illegal logging and wildlife trafficking. In the *World Drug Report 2023*, UNODC described the nexus connecting drug-related crime, crimes that affect the environment and convergent crime, which includes bribery, extortion, fraud and money-laundering, as well as homicide, violent assault, sexual violence and forced labour. This complex set of challenges affects the environment through a phenomenon known as narco-deforestation, which poses a significant threat to the world's largest rainforest and disproportionately affects Indigenous Peoples, people of African descent and other vulnerable populations through forced displacements, mercury poisoning and increased exposure to violence.

609. In Colombia, the presence of dissident factions of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP), namely, the Carolina Ramírez First Front and the Armando Ríos First Front, has been linked to numerous accounts of homicides, threats, extortions, forced recruitment of minors, internal displacements and other violent crimes. The violence is connected to disputes for territory and internal control of the factions, as well as the social control imposed by the organizations on local communities, and it affects mostly Indigenous populations. The violence is further fuelled by the presence of the Brazilian criminal organizations Red Command and First Command of the Capital, which collaborate with the Colombian organizations in order to traffic illicit substances and illicit mining spoils across the border. The Colombian Ombudsman issued *alerta temprano de inminencia* (early imminence alert) No. 0-17-23 in May 2023, demanding the prioritization of exceptional preventive humanitarian support to Indigenous communities in the Colombian Amazon, including the Yaigojé Apaporis Reserve in Vaupés Department, and the communities in the non-urban areas of La Pedrera, La Victoria, Mirití-Paraná and Puerto Santander

in Amazonas Department. According to the Ombudsman, these communities are at risk of violations of their right to life, freedom, integrity and security, including violations of international human rights law.

610. Drug-related crime and other forms of organized crime continue to affect politics in South America to different degrees, as illustrated by recent developments and ongoing investigations related to Ecuador and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). In July 2023, Hugo Armando Carvajal Barrios, former director of the military intelligence agency of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, was extradited by Spain to the United States for allegedly participating in drug-trafficking activities. He is charged with participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy; conspiring to import cocaine into the United States; using, carrying and possessing machine guns and destructive devices in connection with narco-terrorism and cocaine importation conspiracies; and conspiring to use, carry and possess machine guns and destructive devices in connection with narco-terrorism and cocaine importation conspiracies.

611. In Ecuador, presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio was murdered on 9 August 2023 after participating in a campaign rally. The violent act also left nine other people injured, including a candidate for the legislature and two police officers. Villavicencio held strong positions against drug cartels, criminal organizations and corruption. The homicide was declared a political crime by Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso, who also declared three days of national mourning and 60 days of state of exception.

612. In January 2023, the Attorney General's Office of Colombia announced the arrest of Margareth Chacón, a Colombian national accused of planning and financing the murder of a Paraguayan public prosecutor, Marcelo Daniel Pecci Albertini, who successfully pursued several high-profile organized crime cases. The homicide was committed in Colombia and Chacón had met with drug trafficking organizations in Mexico before leading the assassination in Cartagena, Colombia, and subsequently fleeing to El Salvador, where she was arrested.

613. In Brazil, the Brazilian directory of public security was published in July 2023. The report tracks violent intentional deaths at the national and state levels and analyses police lethality as well as casualties among the police forces. Data provided in the report also cover disappearances, violence against children and youth, domestic and sexual violence, firearms and public security spending. The report presents a trend of intentional violent deaths in Brazil since 2011, which peaked in 2017 with 67,078 deaths, decreasing in 2018 and 2019, falling to 47,765 deaths, and then remained relatively stable until 2022, when 47,398 such deaths were recorded.

Regarding the regional distribution of intentional violent deaths, the highest violent homicide rates were registered in Amapá, with 50.6 deaths per 100,000 population, Bahia (47.1) and Amazonas (38.8), in the north and north-east regions of the country. The report also presents an analysis linking the widespread violence in the country to the expansion of activities of the rival drug trafficking organizations – Red Command and First Command of the Capital – from their original territories in south-eastern Brazil (namely in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) into other states.

614. During the fifty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations in September and October 2023, the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela presented its third report (A/HRC/54/57), focusing on two areas: (a) the State apparatus and its mechanisms of repression and restrictions on civic and democratic space; and (b) the establishment of the Directorate of Strategic and Tactical Actions as part of the Bolivarian National Police in July 2022 as the continuation, in terms of structure, command and modus operandi, of the Special Action Forces (FAES). In the report, it is stated that the mission remains concerned about the great number of allegations of extrajudicial executions by security forces in the context of security operations against organized crime.

615. On 26 June 2023, the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia sent a letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations requesting to begin the process of a critical review of the current classification of coca leaf as a drug in Schedule I of the 1961 Convention as amended, in accordance with article 3 of the Convention. In accordance with the same article, the request was brought to the attention of the parties, WHO and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs by the Secretary-General. The Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia will be notified once the review by WHO has been completed. The Plurinational State of Bolivia has a reservation to the 1961 Convention that allows the chewing of coca leaf for cultural purposes in its national territory. The Government constitutionally protects ancestral coca as cultural heritage, a renewable natural resource for biodiversity and a factor of social cohesion, and does not consider it to be a narcotic drug when in its natural state. The General Coca Law establishes a production limit of up to 22,000 ha of coca bush, as well as the authorized production areas with geo-referenced limits.

2. Regional cooperation

616. In 2022, cooperation between Brazil and Colombia was promoted through a pilot project for monitoring the illicit drug market in Brazil, implemented by UNODC in collaboration with the Integrated Illicit Crop Monitoring

System of Colombia, the National Police of Colombia and Brazilian law enforcement agencies. The project has held five technical workshops and trained around 300 representatives from security forces in four states of Brazil. The project aims to build a broader and more diversified monitoring system for the illicit drug market, with a focus on price and purity information. The initiative is part of the Centre of Excellence for the Reduction of the Illicit Drug Supply, a partnership between UNODC, the Brazilian National Secretariat for Drug Policy (SENAD) and UNDP.

617. Moreover, in 2022, the Global Programme on Cybercrime, in cooperation with the UNODC Laboratory and Scientific Service published, under the UNODC opioid strategy, a report entitled “The online trafficking of synthetic drugs and synthetic opioids in Latin America and the Caribbean”. This report has provided information on how organized criminal groups have used social media platforms, open forums and darknet markets for all phases of trafficking, from acquiring the precursors needed to manufacture synthetic drugs to selling the final products and monetizing revenues mainly through cryptocurrencies.

618. During 2022 and 2023, UNODC supported Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru in addressing the whole cycle of drug trafficking investigation in cyberspace, from the initial phases of a case to the trial. In this regard, 14 training courses were delivered focusing on legal aspects of the implementation of investigative techniques in cyberspace, challenges from the theory of the case to trial, blockchain, cryptocurrencies, the darknet, and forensic analysis in all its phases, with practical exercises and live demonstrations.

619. In January and April 2023, UNODC facilitated the exchange of best practices on asset forfeiture between Bolivian prosecutors, counter-narcotics police and officials of seized assets (Directorate for the Registry, Control and Administration of Seized Assets) and the Colombian Police and Prosecutor’s Office. In August 2023, 40 officers of the Special Force against Drug Trafficking and the Regional Centre for Anti-Narcotics Intelligence, based in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, participated in an international course on investigation and financial analysis. The training was conducted by the Federal Police of Brazil and strengthened participants’ skills in the use of financial analysis techniques and technologies in the fight against organized crime related to drug trafficking.

620. UNODC promoted a bilateral meeting between prosecutors from Argentina and Bolivia (Plurinational State of) in May 2023. The meeting was aimed at facilitating interaction among border prosecutors and making progress in the formation of joint investigation teams. This activity was a

continuation of the border visit made by UNODC to the city of Yacuiba, Plurinational State of Bolivia, in 2022.

621. On 13 December 2022, the Centre of Excellence of Brazil, jointly with the Integrated Illicit Crop Monitoring System of Colombia, published the study entitled “Dynamics of the illicit drug market in Brazil: comparative analysis of the prices of cannabis herb, cocaine and other drugs” in four States in Brazil. The study found that risks associated with each stage of the process, such as conflicts in the territory, customs controls and police action, could contribute to variations in drug prices. The study also found that disputes between different organized criminal groups, as well as the hegemony of an organization, could also influence price variation. For example, it was found that the price of cocaine base in Brazil increased as the product was transported further from the drug-producing countries.

622. In December 2022, Argentina hosted the forty-sixth plenary meeting of the Financial Action Task Force of Latin America, which supports countries in strengthening measures to tackle money-laundering and terrorist financing. The Task Force’s member States are Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. During the meeting, the mutual evaluation report on Ecuador was approved. Among the key findings, the report highlighted that, considering the country’s risk profile, although the work of the Economic and Financial Analysis Unit was outstanding, the number of disseminated financial intelligence reports was not appropriate given the seriousness of the threats identified, such as drug trafficking and smuggling. The plenary also approved the “Seventh enhanced follow-up report and second technical compliance re-rating report of Colombia”. The report recognizes the important progress being made by the country in addressing the compliance deficiencies identified in its 2018 mutual evaluation report. The country has been re-rated from partially compliant to largely compliant for two recommendations on customer due diligence.

623. The UNODC-INTERPOL-WCO Passenger and Cargo Border Team units made record seizures of precursor chemicals in South America. As a result of the coordinated work between Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Chile, 690 tons of chemical precursors intended for the production of cocaine were seized in November 2022 in 41 abandoned containers. That was the largest seizure of chemical precursors by a Passenger and Cargo Border Team unit since the programme’s inception in 2005 and constitutes approximately 80 per cent of the total chemical precursor seizures by the Passenger and Cargo Border Team for the entire year (over 830 tons).

624. In 2023, the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies (COPOLAD III) continued to support regional and international cooperation in drug control matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. Activities included a workshop for the exchange of information and intelligence and the improvement of chemical management and disposal systems, held in Quito in April 2023; a seminar on drugs, vulnerabilities and urban territories, held in Fortaleza, Brazil, in April 2023; a meeting organized by EMCDDA on the analytical capacity of national early warning systems and national drug observatories, including updates and new perspectives, held in Santiago in April 2023; and the workshop “Road maps for quality care, social inclusion and the fight against drug use stigma”, held in Montevideo in June 2023.

625. In December 2022, Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Uruguay participated in the Board’s Operation Knockout and exchanged intelligence to identify and dismantle illicit manufacturing and distribution points involving non-medical carisoprodol, 1,4-butanediol, flubromazepam, *gamma*-butyrolactone and ketamine trafficked through the international post, express mail, courier services and related modalities.

626. In April 2023, the GRIDS Programme held capacity-building training for 32 enforcement officers from police, customs and postal security in Uruguay, followed by training for 26 Paraguayan officials. Both events covered the safe identification and interdiction of dangerous substances. Participants also received instruction on IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition targeting tools to improve cross-border intelligence-sharing.

627. In May 2023, the GRIDS Programme delivered two training courses in Brazil for 39 law enforcement and regulatory officers. Participants received instruction on the appropriate utilization of INCB operational tools and targeting platforms, IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence high-definition, to aid in intelligence exchange and investigation efforts.

628. In May 2023, the GRIDS Programme delivered an awareness-raising and capacity-building workshop on the safe interdiction of synthetic opioids and related chemicals for 25 Peruvian front-line officers in Lima. The training emphasized capacity-building to enhance communications by authorities in Peru concerning safe handling and interdiction approaches for dangerous substances.

629. In September 2023, the GRIDS Programme organized the sixth annual operational meeting on countering trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs and chemicals through postal, courier and air cargo services, in Vienna.

The event gathered law and regulatory enforcement focal points and forensic laboratory, chemical and toxicology experts, including from Argentina and Chile, to assess the latest intelligence on dangerous substances with no known legitimate use. Several participating Governments also conducted bilateral and multilateral case meetings to enhance cooperation across borders.

630. Also in September 2023, the GRIDS Programme convened the third international expert group meeting on expanding INCB lists of dangerous substances with no known legitimate use and novel approaches for their identification in falsified or illicitly manufactured pharmaceuticals in Vienna. The event brought together representatives from Governments and international organizations, including from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay. Special attention was given to the efforts and outcomes of INCB Operation Knockout to stop trafficking of new psychoactive substances used to facilitate sexual assault.

631. A total of 338 drug control officials from the competent national authorities of all 12 countries in South America, namely, Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), have registered to use INCB Learning e-modules. There are now five e-modules developed by INCB Learning, which cover narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors, the international drug control framework and ensuring the adequate availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. E-modules are available upon registration through INCB Learning to officials of competent national authorities at no cost.

632. UNODC provided training on the safe handling and disposal of seized drugs and precursor chemicals for authorities in Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru. Though the Regional Programme for the Secure Management and Disposal of Seized Drugs and Chemical Precursors (STAND), UNODC also delivered national and regional training on the control and inspection of precursor users and promoted information exchange at the subregional level to identify emerging trends and *modi operandi* of precursor diversion.

3. Availability of internationally controlled substances, including reporting to the Board

633. The three international drug control treaties require States parties to furnish statistical reports to the Board on an annual basis. These reports enable the Board to monitor

the licit activity of internationally controlled substances and assess the level of availability of these substances for licit medical and scientific purposes.

634. In South America, as in other regions, it is difficult to establish adequate levels of opioid analgesics without the reliable measurement of medical needs related to palliative care and other health conditions. According to data reported to the Board by Member States, the consumption of opioid analgesics in South America, expressed in S-DDD per million inhabitants, has almost tripled in the last 20 years, from 6,239 S-DDD_{pm} in 2002 to 16,824 S-DDD_{pm} in 2021. In 2021, Chile was the country reporting the highest consumption (2,224 S-DDD_{pm}), followed by Colombia (1,780 S-DDD_{pm}), Argentina (1,672 S-DDD_{pm}), Uruguay (962 S-DDD_{pm}), Brazil (704 S-DDD_{pm}), Peru (397 S-DDD_{pm}), Paraguay (392 S-DDD_{pm}), Ecuador (302 S-DDD_{pm}) and Suriname (230 S-DDD_{pm}). The remaining countries reported S-DDD_{pm} below 200: the Plurinational State of Bolivia reported 173 S-DDD_{pm}, while the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Guyana reported the lowest consumption in the region, with 25 and 0 S-DDD_{pm}, respectively. Among the various opioids, fentanyl was the most consumed in 2021 (14,456 S-DDD_{pm}), followed by morphine (1,009 S-DDD_{pm}), hydrocodone (981 S-DDD_{pm}) and oxycodone (193 S-DDD_{pm}). The availability levels of narcotic drugs, excluding those listed in Schedule III of the 1961 Convention as amended, expressed in S-DDD, are calculated by dividing annual availability by 365 days. The result obtained is divided by the population, in millions (S-DDD_{pm}), of the country or territory during the year in question, and then by the defined daily dose.

635. In recent years, countries in South America have demonstrated varying levels of commitment to submitting their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances as required by the 1971 Convention. While there have been years with full compliance or near full compliance, some years have seen a slight decline in the number of submissions. The region continues to strive for consistent reporting from all its members. Determining the levels of consumption of psychotropic substances in South America poses challenges because only between half and three quarters of the countries in the region have provided consumption data on any psychotropic substance over the past five years. Efforts to determine availability are also hampered by the significant proportion of countries in the region failing to regularly provide their annual statistical report on psychotropic substances.

636. **The Board recalls that there is insufficient availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in some countries of the region and emphasizes the importance of ensuring sufficient availability of and access to**

internationally controlled substances for medical purposes. The Board recognizes the efforts of countries in the region to increase availability in their territories, as evidenced by their increased consumption, and encourages further measures, with special attention to availability in non-urban areas and for vulnerable populations.

637. With regard to precursor chemicals, Member States voluntarily provide estimates of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of certain precursor chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants in the context of resolution 49/3 of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Among other substances, the provision of annual legitimate requirements is requested for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances that also have medicinal uses, as well as, to the extent possible, for preparations containing those substances that could be easily used or recovered by readily applicable means. In the last five years, all countries in South America except Paraguay provided at least one estimate of their annual legitimate requirements for imports of ephedrine, ephedrine preparations, pseudoephedrine or pseudoephedrine preparations to the Board and have regularly updated their estimates for those substances, which contributes to preventing their oversupply and diversion into illicit channels and ensuring their availability for legitimate purposes. Suriname provided annual legitimate requirements to the Board for the first time in the last five years in 2019.

4. National legislation, policy and action

638. On 13 December 2022, Ministry of Security of Argentina approved new “Intervention Guidelines for Police and Security Forces in situations involving people with mental health crises and/or problematic consumption in public space” through resolution No. 843/2022. According to the guidelines, the ultimate goal of an intervention is risk reduction until the arrival of health services, preserving the safety of the people involved and the security forces on the ground, facilitating access to health and social services.

639. On 8 November 2022, through resolution No. 760/2022, the Ministry of Security of Argentina created the national precursor chemicals observatory to support the Implementation Authority of the National Registry of Chemical Precursors, created by Law No. 26.045. The observatory will centralize, process, systematize, analyse and monitor available information on precursor chemicals, with the goal of strengthening the State’s capacity to prevent and investigate illicit trafficking in precursor chemicals by strengthening the linkages between the various

governmental agencies as well as with private sector entities involved in the control of the use of precursor chemicals.

640. In 2023, UNODC launched a programme to counter synthetic drugs and the diversion of chemical precursors in Argentina. The programme focuses on strengthening interdiction of illicit drugs, with an emphasis on synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances, including synthetic opioids, and also focuses on the control of chemical substances, criminal justice responses to drug trafficking on the Internet, and criminal justice responses to corruption associated with drug trafficking. The programme is being implemented in three provinces of Argentina: the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires Province and Santa Fe Province. UNODC also supported Argentina in the drafting of a code of good conduct for chemical precursors operators, which constitutes a useful tool for promoting the joint control of chemical precursors in the public and the private sectors. The code highlights the importance of consensus between both sectors with respect to good practices in the use of chemical precursors to prevent their diversion to illicit markets.

641. Between March and July 2023, UNODC conducted several technical workshops and training sessions to increase the capacity of police officers, prosecutors and judges at the national and subnational levels in Argentina in the following areas: (a) identifying illicit mechanisms for obtaining chemical substances and precursors by organized crime; (b) the strategic criminal investigation and prosecution of drug trafficking cases and associated corruption; (c) the production of narcotic drugs (including synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances) and the chemical substances and precursors used for their illicit manufacture; (d) the introduction to synthetic drugs, synthetic opioids and chemical substances in the illicit production of drugs; and (e) the inspection and safe handling, transportation and temporary storage of chemicals and precursors.

642. On 18 April 2023 an Early Warning System for New Psychoactive Substances was created by joint resolution No. 1/2023 of the Argentine Ministry of Security, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation and the Secretariat for Comprehensive Drug Policies (SEDRONAR). The Early Warning System collects, produces, systematizes and communicates reliable information on new psychoactive substances, emerging drugs and new modalities of consumption and commercialization in Argentine territory, in order to prevent and reduce possible negative effects on people and for public health, on the basis of early detection, risk assessment, communication and the development of timely responses.

643. On 30 December 2022, the Plurinational State of Bolivia approved the National Plan for Drug Demand Reduction for the period 2023–2025 through ministerial resolution No. 0765. The Plan has a community and public health focus, giving special attention to vulnerable populations. It includes a plan of action along the following lines: prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, reintegration and multisectoral coordination. The institutional actors that will be involved in the implementation of the Plan are the Ministry of Health and Sports, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Government, the autonomous departmental governments and the autonomous municipal governments.

644. On 29 August 2023, the Minister of Interior of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and UNODC signed an agreement for a project entitled “Support in the fight against corruption in the Special Force to Fight Drug Trafficking (FELCN)”. The project will strengthen good governance by developing risk management, promoting ethics and integrity and strengthening the capacities of the counter-narcotics police.

645. In Brazil, SENAD has been restructured by decree No. 11.348, of 1 January 2023. The decree restores the institution’s mandate as related to drug demand and prevention and creates a General Coordination of Special Projects on Drugs and Racial Justice. SENAD is divided into three directorates: prevention and social reintegration; research, evaluation and information management; and asset management and justice. On 6 April 2023, SENAD restructured the National Council for Drug Policy through presidential decree No. 11.480. The main changes refer to the establishment of social participation, with an equal composition between representatives of the Federal Government and civil society, and the introduction of an electoral process. SENAD plans to carry out its activities through five cross-cutting strategic pillars, with a special focus on vulnerable groups: (a) the national strategy for access to rights for women in drug policy; (b) the strategy for mitigation and reparation of the impacts of drug trafficking on indigenous populations and ethnoterritories; (c) the national strategy for racial justice in drug policy; (d) the strategy for attention to children and adolescents in drug policy; and (e) the inter-institutional articulation strategy for homeless people in drug policy. The first two strategies targeting women and Indigenous Peoples have been launched in 2023 and are under implementation.

646. The Early Warning System on Drugs of Brazil, which aims to rapidly identify the emergence of new psychoactive substances through cooperation between different Brazilian institutions, published three reports in 2022 that presented data and analysis on new psychoactive substances. In November 2022, it published its third thematic bulletin on

the diagnosis of forensic chemistry and toxicology laboratories of scientific policies in Brazil. The report contained recommendations, including to establish a minimum number of experts needed according to the volume and level of demand for analysis in each laboratory, to provide continuous training for the experts and to establish parameters for prioritizing equipment purchases. In 2023, the Early Warning System on Drugs published one report on fentanyl and one on synthetic cannabinoids. The report on fentanyl alerts the public to the global threat posed by the substance and reports modalities of intoxication observed in Brazil, as victims have unknowingly ingested fentanyl-laced synthetic cannabinoids and LSD. The report contains recommendations that naloxone be made available for emergency services and that monitoring of the situation be strengthened. With respect to synthetic cannabinoids, the report shows an increase in seizures and cases of intoxication, especially in the south-eastern states of Brazil and recommends further monitoring by the institutions involved.

647. In September 2023, Colombia launched its National Drugs Policy for the period 2023–2033. In preparing the policy, 25 territorial consultations were conducted so that the policy would include a community perspective. The policy document contains a diagnosis of the drug problem in Colombia, including details on the relation between the National Drugs Policy and the peace agreement with FARC-EP. Furthermore, one of the policy’s objectives is to establish a regulatory framework for the adult use of cannabis with a focus on human rights, public health, social and environmental justice.

648. **The Board wishes to draw the attention of all Governments to the fact that measures permitting the non-medical use of cannabis are contrary to the provisions of the international drug control conventions, specifically article 4, paragraph (c), and article 36 of the 1961 Convention as amended, and article 3, paragraph 1 (a), of the 1988 Convention.**

649. On 18 May 2023, Ecuador launched three new security strategies: the Emerging Strategy to Prevent and Contain Criminal Violence 2023–2024, the National Strategy against Organized Crime 2023–2030 and the Specific Strategy against International Trafficking in Scheduled Substances Subject to Control 2023–2030. The latter serves as an operational instrument of national policy to counter drug trafficking in a strategic and coordinated manner within the different public security mechanisms. This strategy seeks not only to reduce the supply of drugs but also to strengthen institutional processes of intelligence, investigation and multimodal interdiction, improve international cooperation and fight corruption, money-laundering and organized crime.

650. On 26 June 2023, the Government of Uruguay announced a national plan for mental health and addictions. The estimated budget for the plan, which will start implementation on 1 January 2024, was the equivalent of \$20 million. The plan has two pillars: on prevention and promotion; and on treatment, inclusion and rehabilitation. The first pillar, on prevention, incorporates the Integral Prevention Plan for the period 2021–2025 (“Uruguay previene”), focusing on social inclusion and preventing use among adolescents and youth. The second pillar is the expansion of mental health and drug treatment services of the National Integrated Health System, including the provision of psychotherapy and the creation of new drug addiction treatment centres.

651. Regarding the control of precursor chemicals, the Plurinational State of Bolivia approved two supreme decrees on 12 April 2023 to strengthen precursor control within the country and along its borders. Decree No. 4910 strengthens mechanisms for the regulation, control, monitoring and inspection of the trade in gasoline and diesel. Decree No. 4911 improves the administrative work of the General Direction of Controlled Substances, establishes the requirements and procedure for licit activities involving controlled chemical substances and strengthens mechanisms of monitoring. The Government has also prepared draft legislation to modify law No. 913, including in its list V eight new substances to be controlled as precursor chemicals: sodium permanganate, sodium metabisulfite, sodium bisulfite, jet fuel, ethyl acetate, butyl acetate, isopropyl alcohol and calcium chloride. This is in addition to the 42 other precursor chemicals already under control in the country. The draft legislation is currently being examined by the country’s Plurinational Legislative Assembly.

5. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

652. Coca bush, cocaine and cannabis continue to be the main controlled crops and substances to be illicitly cultivated, produced or manufactured and trafficked in and from South America. Coca leaves are illicitly cultivated mostly in Colombia and Peru, and to some extent in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, while cannabis is illicitly grown in several countries in the region, including Brazil, Chile and Paraguay. The diversification of some traditional drug trafficking routes and modalities has been observed, including in the Amazon region, which may be linked to recent restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

653. In June 2023, Peru reported a record level of 95,008 ha of illicit coca bush cultivation in 2022, an 18 per cent increase from 2021 and which took place most notably in

the Peruvian Amazon. The most significant increase in illicit cultivation from 2021 to 2022 occurred in the departments of Ucayali (from 10,151 ha to 14,531 ha), Loreto (from 10,348 ha to 13,844 ha) Cusco (from 13,642 ha to 16,009 ha) and Junín (from 6,701 ha to 8,063 ha). The valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro rivers continued to account for the largest share of the illicit cultivation in 2022: 37.6 per cent. From another perspective, 19 per cent (18,076 ha) of the total area of cultivation was in territories of Indigenous or original communities and 16 per cent (14,865 ha) in natural protected areas and bordering areas. The country also reported increased levels of crop eradication, reaching 21,628 ha in 2022. Although the area of eradicated crop cultivation is still below the amounts achieved in 2018 and 2019 (25,107 ha and 25,565 ha, respectively), it is well above the amounts reported for 2020 and 2021 (6,237 ha and 5,557 ha, respectively).

654. The Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia reported to the Board that, from 2021 to June 2023, the country implemented 24,961 interdiction operations, resulting in the seizure of 52 tons of cocaine, 515 tons of cannabis herb, 1,643 tons of solid chemicals, 1,753 litres of liquid chemicals and 837 tons of coca leaf, as well as the destruction of 135 crystallization and recycling laboratories and 1,737 factories. The operations have led to the arrest of 8,193 people. The Plurinational State of Bolivia also reported the eradication of 24,537 ha of surplus coca crops from 2021 to July 2023.

655. On 28 February 2023, the Bolivian Minister of Government and UNODC presented the main findings of the report on the validation of information on the destruction of illegal drugs seized in 2022 in the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The projected goal of 80 per cent annual validation has been surpassed, reaching 87 per cent. In 2022, counter-narcotics police seized and destroyed 19.3 tons of cocaine and 11.1 tons of cannabis. UNODC participated in 88.5 per cent of cocaine destruction (17.1 tons), 84 per cent of marijuana destruction (9.4 tons) and final disposal of 17,489 MDMA tablets, 645 grams of MDMA in bulk and 527 doses of LSD.

656. During the reporting period, UNODC released its 2022 coca cultivation survey for the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The document reported a decrease of 2 per cent in the area under illicit cultivation in the country, from 30,500 ha in 2021 to 29,900 ha in 2022. Out of the total area cultivated, 61 per cent was concentrated in the Los Yungas de La Paz region; 38 per cent in Cochabamba; and 1 per cent in Norte de La Paz. Furthermore, UNODC also reported seizures of 331 tons of coca leaves in the Plurinational State of Bolivia for 2022, a 12 per cent increase in relation to 2021. The report estimated a potential production of coca

leaves of between 44,400 and 55,700 tons, with an estimated value between \$229 million and \$279 million. Furthermore, coca paste seizures decreased 15 per cent from the previous year, to 10.13 tons in 2022, while cocaine seizures increased 31 per cent to 10.21 tons.

657. In September 2023, UNODC in cooperation with the Government of Colombia published its annual report on coca cultivation. For a second consecutive year, Colombia saw a record high in the area of illicit coca cultivation, with an expansion by 13 per cent to 230,000 ha (in parallel with a decline of 33 per cent in the areas eradicated, falling to 69,000 ha) and an increase of 24 per cent in the potential quantity of cocaine manufactured, reaching 1,738 tons, which is the highest level for that metric ever reported for the country. The area of illicit cultivation rose, compared with 2021, by 21.5 per cent in national natural parks, 18 per cent in Indigenous protected territories, 4 per cent in land of black communities and 2 per cent in forest reserves. In parallel, between 2021 and 2022, the number of dismantled laboratories fell by 18 per cent to 4,707. Cocaine seizures and manual eradication have also decreased since 2021, by 1.5 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively.

658. The largest increases in the area under coca cultivation in Colombia in 2022 were reported from the Putumayo-Caquetá region (88 per cent), located in the south of the country, close to the border with Ecuador. Of concern was that 50 per cent of the increase is within 10 km of the border. Meanwhile, the report shows an increase in drugs seizures in Ecuador, to 201 tons in 2021, 90 per cent of which was cocaine, from 128 tons in 2020 and 82 tons in 2019. Other border areas with high concentration of illicit coca cultivation include Nariño, at the border with Ecuador, Norte de Santander, at the border with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and, to a lesser extent, Chocó, at the border with Panama.

659. Peru previously worked with UNODC to conduct periodic surveys of the area of illicit crop cultivation and area of illicit crop eradication. The country issued joint crop monitoring reports with UNODC from 2002 to 2018, and from 2019 to 2022 the country has produced data on illicit crops independently. UNODC is currently working with the Government of Peru and technical experts with a view to issuing a joint report in 2024 on the basis of data for 2023.

660. The Board reiterates its recommendation that Peru resumes the studies and monitoring reports on territories affected by illicit crops that are prepared in cooperation with and fully certified by UNODC. This, in addition to ensuring support for the efforts of the Government of Peru in the fight against drug trafficking, will allow adequate comparative monitoring among the three Andean countries most affected by illicit crops. Moreover, reports certified by

UNODC will introduce stronger, evidence-based data to enable the development of more effective crop reduction strategies. In this connection, the Board notes with appreciation the surveys undertaken by Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Colombia with UNODC support.

661. While cannabis herb seizures decreased in the region in 2021, largely due to decreases in Brazil and Paraguay, according to the OAS/CICAD *Report on Drug Supply in the Americas 2022*, transnational cannabis trafficking in South and Central America is on the rise. This trend could reflect increased trafficking of cannabis from regional producers, more effective interdiction by the security forces and/or a greater focus by law enforcement agencies on cannabis. CICAD highlighted that several countries reported an increased prevalence of a more potent strain of cannabis originating in Colombia called “creepy”. The presence of this strain in domestic markets was reported by Chile and Peru to the extent that, in some cases, it displaced the longstanding domination of cannabis from Paraguay. According to the report, Guyana also noted the appearance of “poppy”, another name for “creepy”, from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which became popular in the local market. The presence of “creepy” in other parts of the Caribbean was also reported by the Bahamas.

662. In the annual report of the Drugs Early Warning System of Uruguay, issued in July 2023, the National Drug Board reported the issuance of two alerts in 2022. The first, issued in August 2022, related to “pink cocaine”, “tuci” or “tucibi”, and its dangerous composition which includes the combination of ketamine with different psychoactive substances. In an emblematic case, the Drugs Early Warning System was notified of a drug sample that included ketamine, methamphetamine, MDMA, tramadol and caffeine. “Pink cocaine” was first detected in Uruguay in 2020, and its presence in the country has increased since then. The second alert was issued in November 2022 on the dangers of ingesting pills with an “EA Sport” logo. Based on reports from the Toxicology Information and Support Centre (CIAT), the analysis of the laboratory of the Technical Forensic Institute identified 74 mg of MDA in the pills. MDA is methamphetamine, a psychoactive substance of the phenylethylamine family, derived from amphetamine and is an analogue of MDMA (“ecstasy”), and produces similar effects in the body.

663. In Uruguay, the most seized drug continues to be cannabis, which made up 38.2 per cent of the total of drug seizures in 2022. Cannabis was followed by cocaine base paste (36.1 per cent) and cocaine (16.8 per cent) for that year. Synthetic drugs accounted for the fourth highest amount of seizures, at 3 per cent. Although percentage shares of the total varied throughout the years, this ranking

of most seized drugs by number of seizures has remained constant since 2018. However, the percentage related to cannabis has been decreasing (from 47.5 per cent in 2018), while the percentage of cocaine base paste has been increasing (from 26.6 per cent in 2018). Moreover, the number of seizures of synthetic drugs has had the sharpest increase, from 62 in 2018 to 169 in 2022, followed by cocaine base paste, from 789 in 2018 to 2,056 in 2022. The most seized synthetic drugs in 2022 were MDA, MDMA, methamphetamine, 2C-B-NBOH (25B-NBOH), LSD, “pink cocaine” and ketamine, by number of seizures.

664. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the most seized drug in 2022 was cocaine, at 32.67 tons, followed by cannabis, at 14.54 tons. Most drug seizures took place in the states of Apure, Bolívar, Falcón and Zulia. Of 8,223 operations, the largest number of operations were linked to cannabis herb seizures (6,379), followed by cocaine and derivatives (1,636), ketamine (11), heroin (8), “ecstasy” (8), “poppers” (4), amphetamines and methamphetamines (3), alprazolam (2) and LSD (1). Security forces destroyed 58 crystallization laboratories close to the western border with Colombia, neutralized 45 aircrafts and destroyed 57 illegal air strips. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela also reported the eradication of 40 ha of illicit coca bush cultivation along the border with Colombia in 2022. The main countries of destination for seized drugs were the United States, Spain, Australia, Guinea, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Italy and South Africa, in order of significance. In 2022, the country recovered 341 vehicles, 25 boats, 44 buildings, two aircraft and 437 miscellaneous objects.

665. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reported the implementation of joint counter-narcotics operations with law enforcement officials of France in Caribbean international waters. On 11 December 2022, an operation in Martinique interdicted a vessel containing 1.5 tons of cannabis, leading to the arrest of 11 Venezuelan citizens. On 25 January 2023, another Venezuelan vessel was intercepted in the same area, resulting in the seizure of 324 kg of cannabis and the arrest of 10 Venezuelans and 1 Colombian. On 6 March 2023, this collaboration led to the interception of a vessel 250 miles east of Barbados, with the seizure of 1.8 tons of cocaine and the arrest of 8 Venezuelan citizens.

6. Prevention and treatment

666. According to the latest data published by UNODC, cannabis has the highest regional past-year prevalence in South America (3.58 per cent), followed by cocaine (1.62 per cent), amphetamines and prescription stimulants (0.88 per cent), opioids (opiates and prescription opioids) (0.30 per cent), and “ecstasy” (0.24 per cent).

667. Ecuador is implementing a project for the development of a strategy for a comprehensive approach to the socioeconomic phenomenon of drugs and the strengthening of mental health for the period 2022–2025. The following surveys and studies are planned as part of that project: a national survey on drug use and mental health problems (2023–2024); a national survey on drug use and consumption among students of ninth year of basic education and first and third year of baccalaureate (2024); a survey on use and consumption among university students (2024); research in treatment centres (2023–2024); 24 provincial situational diagnoses (2024–2025); and research on violence associated with drug use or sales (2024). The most recent official national surveys of drug use among the general population date from 2016, those surveys on use among people in higher education date from 2015, and 2014 for those in secondary education. Official national surveys on treatment issues will be carried out for the first time in the country. The Ministry of Public Health of Ecuador registered 70,062 visits for mental and behavioural disorders due to the consumption of psychoactive substances classified according to ICD10 (F10–F19) during 2022. **The Board welcomes the efforts of Ecuador in the implementation of surveys and data collection in the area of mental health, drug use and treatment.**

668. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reported preliminary results of its national drug survey entitled “Study of perception, risk, consumption and ease of access to drugs 2022”. The survey was conducted in 2022 and interviewed 12,160 persons between 12 and 65 years old. Cannabis herb was the most consumed controlled substance among the population, with a past-year prevalence of 1.41 per cent, followed by cocaine (0.82 per cent) and “crack” cocaine (0.72 per cent). Similarly, the statistical bulletin from the National Public System for Addiction Attention and Treatment reported that out of the 2,382 persons who received treatment for drug dependence in 2022, 89.3 per cent consumed cannabis herb, 1.6 per cent consumed “crack” cocaine, and 0.6 per cent consumed cocaine.

669. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reported 9,631 drug prevention activities in the first half of 2023, providing support to 1,094,325 beneficiaries. The country also implemented the “Safe school” programme in primary and secondary level educational centres, in order to expose and address, from a preventive and awareness-raising approach, the risks of drug use and micro-trafficking. This initiative has been relaunched together with the “School for parents” programme, based on co-responsibility in the care and supervision of their children in the face of the risks of drug use and crime.

670. In 2023, UNODC supported the national seminar on prevention research held by SENAD in Brazil, at which

was launched the virtual platform of the project to support the implementation of the national system for prevention of alcohol and other drug use. The event aimed to promote prevention strategies in Brazil and had the participation of government representatives as well as researchers in the prevention area. The project is a partnership between SENAD, UNDP and UNODC. It seeks to integrate a comprehensive set of interventions and evidence-based strategies to systematize, at the national, state, and municipal levels, access to information, initiatives in prevention and management of policies, actions and to strengthen programmes to prevent the use of alcohol and other drugs.

671. In July 2023, Chile launched the first activities for the establishment of a social innovation laboratory to tackle the issue of drug use among minors under the custody of the State. The initiative is supported by COPOLAD programme and the Agirre Lehendakaria Centre, a social innovation laboratory associated with the University of the Basque Country. Authorities and institutions such as the Ministry of Health, the National Specialized Protection Service for Children and Adolescents and UNICEF participated in the initiative, together with relevant community groups.

672. **The Board wishes to encourage Member States to improve the collection of data on drug use patterns and, whenever possible, to implement periodic drug use surveys.**

D. Asia

East and South-East Asia

The illicit cultivation of opium poppy and manufacture of methamphetamine are among the most significant drug challenges facing East and South-East Asia.

The prevalence of drug use in East and South-East Asia has remained significant, with cannabis being the most used drug, followed by methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type substances.

Several countries and territories in the region have introduced regulatory changes related to cannabis.

Malaysia formally removed mandatory death sentences and life imprisonment for drug-related offences.

Illicit manufacture of and trafficking in ketamine, a substance not under international control, continues to be an issue of concern in the region. Seizures of ketamine nearly tripled in 2022 compared with 2021, and there has been a proliferation of clandestine laboratories for the illicit manufacture of the substance.

1. Major developments

673. The epicentre for the illicit production of opium and manufacture of methamphetamine and, increasingly, of ketamine in the region remains Shan State in Myanmar, owing to continued political instability in the country. The illicit cultivation of opium poppy and trafficking in opium is also centred in Shan State. Between 2021 and 2022, the cultivation of opium poppy in the country rose by 33 per cent and the production of opium by 88 per cent. Approximately 790 tons of opium were estimated to have been produced in 2022 in Myanmar.

674. Seizures of methamphetamine in Myanmar totalled 38.9 tons in 2022, up 22 per cent from the year before. Countries in the region as well as in neighbouring regions of South Asia and Oceania report that most seized methamphetamine originates in Myanmar. As is the case with opium, methamphetamine is trafficked across East and South-East Asia and continues to pose a major challenge for countries in the region.

675. In June 2023, Malaysia amended part of its penal code and drug control legislation formally removing mandatory death sentences for various criminal offences, including drug-related offences. Transitional measures were also introduced to allow the country's courts to review existing death penalty sentences and possibly commute them to life imprisonment.

676. The prevalence of drug use in East and South-East Asia has remained significant. The most used drug in 2021 was cannabis. Methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type substances, which are heavily trafficked in the region, were the second most used group of substances. There is also an established market for the non-medical use of ketamine in the region.

677. Several countries and territories in the region have introduced regulatory changes related to the scheduling and use of cannabis. Hong Kong, China, included CBD under the strictest levels of control in the territory, with trafficking in and the illicit manufacture, possession and consumption of CBD being liable to severe prison sentences, including life imprisonment, and high monetary fines. The Lao People's Democratic Republic has regulated the cultivation and use