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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The rapid expansion of the illicit synthetic drug industry represents a major global public health threat with potentially disastrous consequences for humankind. Non-medical synthetic drug use and related drug use disorders have become a deadly problem, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths and untold personal and community harm. The thematic chapter of the 2024 Annual Report provides a detailed analysis of the evolution of synthetic drug manufacture, trafficking and use, identifying key trends and patterns as well as potential scenarios for the global proliferation of synthetic drugs.



The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is supporting Governments in addressing this challenge through voluntary multilateral information exchange and coordination in the framework of the INCB Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme and the precursor control programme. The chapter identifies policy gaps in both regulation as well as in supply and demand reduction initiatives, which can be addressed by implementing the recommendations of INCB for a comprehensive response to this serious public health threat. There is also an urgent need to step up efforts in the areas of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, harm reduction, recovery and social reintegration to protect people from these extremely harmful substances.

Treaty-based data reported to INCB reconfirm persistent inequalities in the availability of internationally controlled medicines for use in pain management, anaesthesia, the treatment of neurological and mental health conditions, and opioid use disorder. While the global supply of opiate raw materials exceeds the national requirements reported by Governments to INCB, these may not accurately reflect actual medical needs in some countries. INCB is supporting countries in improving their implementation of the three international drug control treaties, in particular through the INCB Learning programme, with a view to improving the availability of controlled substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes and access to evidence-based and stigma-free services for prevention and treatment, while preventing diversion to illicit channels and misuse. In 2024, I was pleased to sign a memorandum of understanding with the International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care aimed at improving the availability of controlled substances through the exchange of research, data and analysis.

Critically, the need to ensure access and availability also extends to humanitarian emergencies – regardless of whether they result from natural disasters, armed conflict or other human causes – where access by patients to essential controlled medicines and treatment services must be guaranteed. INCB is reminding affected States and exporting countries of the possibility of applying simplified control measures during emergency situations as provided for in the conventions.

Ensuring access to internationally controlled medicines and treatment for drug use disorders for all patients, in all locations and at all times, is part of the right to health. As respect for human rights is inherent to and a prerequisite for the implementation of the drug control conventions, INCB has



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repeatedly called for human rights to be included in the development and implementation of drug policy. Any measure adopted with the purported aim of furthering drug policy but that is inconsistent with universally recognized human rights norms is a violation of the international drug control conventions.

Human rights obligations also encompass the promotion of equality and non-discrimination towards people who use drugs, the prohibition of arbitrary arrest and detention, the right to a fair trial for drug-related crimes, the principle of proportionality, and protection against all forms of cruel and inhuman punishment. INCB continues to remind States that the conventions provide for the application of alternative measures to conviction, punishment and incarceration, including education, rehabilitation and social reintegration.

2024 marked ten years of operation of the Project Ion Incident Communication System (IONICS), which has facilitated the exchange of information on 100,000 synthetic drug trafficking incidents. It has enabled authorities to share critical information on incidents relating to new psychoactive substances, including highly potent non-medical synthetic opioids which has led to numerous successful operations – most recently Operation Zodiac and Operation African Star, coordinated at the INCB GRIDS Programme Cybercommunications Centre (GC3) in Vienna. These operations have disrupted illicit supply chains and reduced the availability of substances on illicit markets worldwide. 2024 also saw the adoption by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs of the INCB recommendation to place two fentanyl precursors and 16 precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants under international control.

INCB welcomed the finalization and adoption in 2024 of a new United Nations convention on cybercrime and looks forward to its ratification and implementation, especially in the context of addressing the exploitation of Internet-based technologies for drug trafficking.

**Jallal Toufiq**

President

International Narcotics Control Board