I. Social cohesion, social disorganization and illegal drugs

1.   The abuse of illegal drugs is one of the greatest challenges that the world is facing today. Occurring in all countries, from the richest to the poorest, it is a problem that involves all groups and, increasingly, all ages, fuelling global crime, corruption and terrorism, generating unimaginable wealth for the few and limitless harm for the many, costing millions of lives and threatening the very sustainability of communities the world over.

2.   The scale and impact of the world's drug problem are challenging health, educational, criminal justice, social welfare, economic and, in some instances, political systems in countries around the globe. It is a problem that has gathered enormous momentum and that, with new technologies, including the Internet, has found new means of increasing its influence and profitability.

3.   The focus of the present chapter, however, is not on the general pattern of drug abuse in different societies but rather on the development within many countries of communities of varying size — some large, some small — in which drug abuse has become virtually endemic, driving and in turn being driven by a whole host of social problems, including violence, organized crime, corruption, unemployment, poor health and poor education, in a vicious spiral of individual and collective harm. These communities present enormous challenges, not only in terms of meeting their own needs but also in terms of the risk that they may in time come to pose to the wider societies of which they are a part.

4.   The problems that these communities are facing and the trend towards increasing levels of drug abuse, criminality and social disintegration are disheartening. There are, however, initiatives already under way within many of these communities through which governmental and non-governmental agencies are working with commitment and determination to bolster the capacity of local people and to tackle the multiple social problems that have become so endemic in these areas.

5.   The importance of meeting the needs of the residents within these communities can hardly be in doubt. The Millennium Development Goals of eradicating extreme poverty, ensuring the provision of universal primary education for all children, promoting gender equality, promoting global public health, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, ensuring environmental sustainability and facilitating global partnerships for development provide a political consensus for action designed to tackle the needs of these high-risk and highly vulnerable communities.

6.   It is important to recognize that, while many of these marginal communities pose a major risk to the health and welfare of those who live within them, in the course of time they could come to pose a major risk to the wider societies of which they are a part. These are not communities that can or should be ignored, either in terms of their own needs or the challenges that they may pose more broadly.

7.   Societies are by their very nature more than the accumulation of a large number of discrete individuals. Key within the very notions of community and society are the ties that bind people together and provide a common sense of identity and purpose. When individuals and families have a clear sense of being connected to their neighbours, a shared investment in the future, a common language, mutual respect and a deep sense of trust, there is likely to be a strong sense of community.

8.   However, where individuals feel that they have little vested interest in the wider society and, crucially, when they feel that the wider society has little regard for their welfare, there is a real danger that the ties that would otherwise bind people together will weaken, creating a deeply fractured sense of community and providing an enormous impetus to a wide range of social problems. The degree of social cohesion within communities and societies is very much a barometer of the health of those societies. When societies are fractured, with little sense of cohesion, there are likely to be multiple problems, of which drug abuse and criminality may be only the most visible signs. Those problems can give rise to a higher level of social disorder and violence, as has been experienced in cities throughout the world, and the social disorder and violence can spill over into the wider society, well beyond the boundaries of those communities.

A. Growth of marginal communities and the drug abuse problems in those communities

9.   What is now being seen in countries around the globe, in rich nations and in poor nations, is the development of marginal communities in which a combination of conflict, violence, drug abuse, criminality, intimidation, poor health, poor education and limited or non-existent opportunities for employment have had a devastating effect and become the norm for many of the people living within them.

10.   Drug abuse, drug trafficking and organized criminality have become everyday occurrences within these

communities. These are areas where the ability of the national and local governments to regulate activities has become increasingly challenged and where heavily armed, well-financed criminal gangs have taken on the role of providing local governance, shaping the lives of local people through a combination of intimidation and short-term reward. Within these communities, the drug abuse problem has acquired extraordinary momentum. Young people growing up in these areas are often drawn to the enormous wealth and status seemingly enjoyed by those involved in drug trafficking and drug dealing.

11. Although there are well-known and well-publicized examples of these marginal communities in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, the United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the problem exists in every region. There are communities, some in rural areas and some in the heart of the most affluent cities on the planet, where the local people no longer feel part of the wider society and where the problems of social exclusion and social disintegration are all too evident.

12. Many of these communities are witnessing a dangerous downward spiral in which an array of social problems, including drug abuse, violence, organized crime, poverty, poor health, limited education and widespread unemployment, have gathered momentum. These are communities in which individuals and families are experiencing a profound sense of hopelessness, which leads them to believe that the circumstances in which they are living will never change and that they will never experience the benefits of safety, security and economic stability that are enjoyed by other members of their society. Confronted by a reality in which they seem to have been cut adrift from the wider society, some people may inadvertently feel that there is little reason not to engage in a lifestyle involving illegal drugs and criminality.

13. These communities are often seen as "no-go areas", places that one simply does not go to, for fear of experiencing violence or intimidation. Those who live within these communities may develop a strong sense of identity and connection with their community that may be both a source of strength and a source of separation from the wider society. Equally, those living within the wider society may come to see the residents of these areas as fundamentally different from themselves, living lives that are somehow characterized by danger and criminality.

14. At the same time, many of the agencies working within these communities (police, health services, social services and educational services) may come to feel that the challenge posed by these areas is simply too great for them to address within their finite resources. In the case of the

police, for example, local criminal gangs can attain a position of such power and influence over these communities that it is simply beyond the capacity of conventional law enforcement agencies to successfully investigate criminal acts and prosecute those involved. In some instances, criminal gangs have deliberately targeted the police, killing significant numbers of law enforcement officers and sending a powerful message to local people that it is they, the criminal organizations, and not the police who are in charge. An additional dimension to the gang problem is the gang-versus-gang dynamic, which reinforces the individual's sense of belonging to the gang.

15. Confronted by a reality in which the capacity of law enforcement agencies can seem insufficient to tackle the level of organized criminality within these communities, those living in these areas may come to feel that they are effectively being held hostage within their own homes and neighbourhoods.

16. The message that is often powerfully conveyed to local people by these criminal gangs is not to talk to the police. It is a message that is often conveyed with both the threat of violence and actual violence. Local people may become fearful of speaking out against those who are engaged in the drug economy within these communities. Indeed, even if they may be inclined to report incidents to the police, they may fear that corrupt elements within the local police may cause their reports to be passed on to those who are engaged in such criminality. In turn, this may lead to a situation in which little or no information is passed to the police, as a result of which the view might develop that the entire community is somehow complicit in the criminal lifestyle.

17. When law enforcement agencies do mount operations to tackle criminal gangs within these areas, such operations may sometimes need to be carried out in a manner resembling a military operation. Indeed, on occasion the only law enforcement operations deemed safe by the authorities are those that combine the police with elements of the military, so heavily armed are the criminal gangs that are essentially running these areas. No matter how well-resourced, well-planned and professionally executed these operations are, the impression inevitably conveyed is that the authority of the State is under severe threat.

18. Alienation and disintegration within these communities are evidenced not only by the extent to which drug dealing, drug abuse and drug-related criminality are occurring. Very often these communities are characterized by poor or non-existent health services, limited social services, underfunded educational services, poor or non-existent transport systems, poor sanitation and limited

access to goods, services and employment, as well as elevated levels of morbidity and mortality.

19. Although meeting the needs of the populations within these areas will undoubtedly be challenging, the consequences of failure would be far greater and should be avoided at all cost. The challenge extends well beyond providing effective and efficient law enforcement to socially rehabilitating these areas so that their residents can enjoy the benefits of full participation within the wider society. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that any social rehabilitation efforts will face fierce competition from entrenched gangs.

B. Threats to social cohesion

20. The present section outlines the threats to social cohesion that are now being observed within some communities. While such threats are numerous and varied, it is important to recognize that none of the social processes described below should be seen as leading individuals inevitably into a lifestyle of drug abuse and criminality. Whenever and wherever an individual engages in such behaviour, at some level he or she has exercised some element of personal choice. This is not to "blame the victim" but rather to recognize that, whatever the social processes and social pressures at hand, human beings still have the capacity to exercise some element of choice in what they do and what they refrain from doing. Importantly, it is this element of choice that holds out the prospect of improvement and rehabilitation, even in the most challenging of circumstances, and of individuals finding a way out of their current difficulties.

1. Persistent social inequality

21. It is a feature of many societies that, just as some social groups have become increasingly wealthy, the gap between the rich and the poor has increased and become entrenched. As a consequence of these inequalities, there are marked disparities in a range of health and social welfare indicators, such as maternal and child health, infant mortality, morbidity, life expectancy and literacy.

22. When societies experience these multiple, persistent and long-standing inequalities, some social groups come to believe that there is simply no prospect of their ever enjoying the benefits of full participation in the wider society. Faced with a future with limited opportunities, individuals within these communities may increasingly become disengaged from the wider society and become involved in a range of personally and socially harmful behaviours, including drug abuse and drug dealing.

2. Migration

23. Where individuals and social groups have migrated from one area to another, there is an increased risk that individuals and communities will face multiple social adversities associated with their sense of displacement. These may include challenges to their physical and psychological health, welfare, employment, education and family life. While migration offers many positive benefits to the migrant and to society at large, it can create a sense of dislocation from the surrounding community and a sense of vulnerability on the part of those who are displaced. Where migrating social groups have travelled from areas associated with illicit drug production and drug abuse, there is a greater likelihood of individuals engaging in forms of drug misuse as a way of coping with such a sense of dislocation.

3. Political and economic transformation

24. Similarly, societies that are in the midst of political and economic transformation may experience a significant reduction in the degree of social cohesion. In a situation in which past political structures and economic activities are no longer supported and new forms of economic activity and governance are evolving, some social groups may feel isolated and disengaged from the wider society. That sense of estrangement from the new structures of governance may lead individuals and social groups to engage in a variety of socially and personally harmful behaviours.

4. Emerging cultures of excess

25. Social cohesion can be undermined not only by poverty and social exclusion, but also by the emergence of a culture of excess. For example, certain individuals who enjoy a high standard of living may come to see themselves as no longer needing to live in accordance with the norms and mores of the wider society and may develop self-destructive patterns of behaviour. For some of these individuals, their abuse of certain drugs (such as cocaine in powder form) can come to symbolize their success and status. The abuse of drugs by some celebrities and some others working in the arts and in the music and entertainment industries may come to be seen as a reflection of their creative talent and status. The resulting development of a culture of acceptance of illicit drug use on the part of some individuals and social groups can contribute to a growing normalization of certain forms of drug misuse within the wider society and in turn can lead to the undermining of social cohesion.

5. Growth of individualism and consumerism

26. There has been an increasing tendency in some societies to give meeting the needs of the individual much more priority than meeting the needs of the wider community. The growing importance accorded to meeting the desires of the individual and the increasing emphasis on consumerism have weakened social cohesion within some societies and led to an increase in some forms of personally and socially harmful behaviour such as drug misuse.

6. Shift in traditional values

27. The level of social cohesion within societies may also be severely undermined when there is a shift in traditional values as a result of cultural, political, economic and spiritual changes, along with a subsequent evolution of new sets of values. This situation may result in some social groups feeling excluded or disconnected from the new and emergent values and more inclined to pursue their own interests irrespective of the impact on the wider society.

7. Conflict and post-conflict societies

28. When societies are experiencing conflict or are in a post-conflict state, there are often clear signs of a breakdown in social cohesion. In such situations, previously close and mutually supportive social ties may become strained and weakened, leaving large swathes of the population uncertain of the degree to which they are members of a shared society. Societies recovering from conflict may experience a vacuum of governance, during which social services may be lacking and justice and law enforcement may not be apparent. This may further weaken an already fragile state of social cohesion.

8. Rapid urbanization

29. Within societies that are undergoing rapid urbanization, including those in which populations are moving from rural to urban environments, a diminution and dissolution of many of the more traditional forms of social cohesion may occur. This may include a breakdown in family connectedness and family closeness. It may also include the development of urban areas as cultural spaces in which a greater range of individual behaviours and social and personal transgressions are tolerated as a result of the increased sense of anonymity within those areas.

9. Breakdown in respect for the law

30. In situations in which local people feel that their legal system is unfair, corrupt or ineffective, there is likely to be a predictable loss of faith in those laws and the agencies involved in their implementation. At such times, there is a real risk that people will simply give up on the expectation that the national or local government will ever be able to do anything to improve their circumstances. Politicians and public officials may be viewed with suspicion and mistrust and may be increasingly seen as being motivated by a desire to improve their own situation rather than that of the local people. Such a situation may lead to criminal gangs presenting themselves as the only viable authority in the area.

10. Local drug economy

31. Within these communities, the illicit drug trade may become so active as to effectively supplant the legitimate economy, with the danger being not only the proliferation of the illicit drug trade itself but also the development of a culture of drug abuse. In some circumstances, such a culture can be self-sustaining in that it provides the people who live in these areas with a distinctive identity while simultaneously further separating them from the wider society.

32. These are the multiple problems that are being faced by "hot-spot" communities in countries and regions throughout the world. They are the extreme expression of the drug and crime problems that are equally evident around the world. These multiple problems often combine to such a degree that they shape the lives of the people living in such communities.

C. Responding to the problem

33. At the present time, governments, community agencies and voluntary groups in countries around the globe are implementing initiatives aimed at tackling the multiple problems posed by these marginal communities. For example, community policing, the enhancement of social services, the provision of recreational opportunities and urban revitalization may be beneficial in improving social cohesion in communities experiencing social disintegration.

34. In Brazil, for example, the Government has sought to wrest control from armed criminal gangs in the favelas by carrying out a series of high-profile raids using a combination of police and military personnel to arrest gang leaders and institute the rule of law. Such law enforcement approaches have been complemented in some areas with a commitment to community policing in which "peace police" units work to build relationships with local residents, sometimes offering classes or supporting groups of young people in a way that is more akin to social work. Through these combined efforts, an attempt is being made to tackle the power base of the organized criminal gangs

and to build up a sense of trust between the police and residents in such a way as to enhance the safety and security of those living in these areas.

35. Within the Cape Flats area in South Africa, where there is a long history of high rates of drug abuse, violence, poor health and low employment, national and international agencies have implemented initiatives aimed at reducing the level of street-related violence through urban upgrading. These initiatives, often targeting areas with high levels of crime, involve upgrading and developing local transport systems, reclaiming neglected urban space, improving lighting and closer monitoring as a way of enhancing the safety of local residents. Within a number of these communities, small community centres called "active boxes" have been set up along major pedestrian routes. Staffed 24 hours a day by local residents, the centres have been used to reduce the risk of violence to local people.

36. Similar urban upgrading schemes, often funded through a variety of national and international organizations, have been developed in Colombia and El Salvador in an attempt to improve the circumstances of marginal communities with high levels of drug abuse and crime.

37. In the United States, the Safe Streets programme, developed initially in Chicago and then extended to other cities, is aimed at reducing levels of street-related violence within marginal communities. In Baltimore, the programme has been used to engage a wide range of local community groups, spiritual communities and voluntary and statutory bodies in an attempt to bolster local community efforts to tackle the various problems that have become endemic to areas of the city experiencing high levels of crime and drug abuse. Outreach work in areas where there have been incidents involving firearms is aimed at encouraging young people to explore alternative ways of resolving disputes and avoiding violence involving firearms.

38. In other United States cities confronted with drug-related crime involving the use of firearms, local police have been running schemes whereby residents are provided with a financial reward in exchange for any weapon handed to the police. Although those most likely to be involved in street violence will probably not hand in their weapons, such schemes produce a feeling that the overall level of safety among local people is enhanced as a result of fewer weapons being in circulation.

39. Although technology such as the Internet is extensively used by drug traffickers and gangs, it can also be used effectively to empower communities to take action against drug-related crime and organized crime. For example, in India the website "I paid a bribe" enables individuals to report instances in which they have been requested by an official to provide a bribe to facilitate administrative procedures. While such schemes can be effective in empowering communities, there is a risk that they may also be used by criminals to threaten and intimidate others.

40. In Scotland, where drug abuse and criminality were seen to be having a particular impact on a specific area, the local police and council developed a child safety initiative in which local police were empowered to pick up children under the age of 16 who were on the streets and unsupervised after 9 p.m. and return them to their parents. In Liverpool and some other cities in the United Kingdom, similar projects that involve taking vulnerable young people off the streets at night have been developed as a way of tackling problems involving gang membership and street-based criminality.

41. Police forces in British cities such as Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester, like their colleagues in Brazil, have also sought to address the problem of incidents involving firearms by combining law enforcement responses to the problem with community policing initiatives aimed at building trust and mutual support with community members. For example, police officers have been working closely with the siblings of known gang members, who are at particular risk of becoming gang members.

42. In France, a new judicial mechanism has been created specifically for deprived areas. *Maisons de justice et du droit* (centres for justice and law) have been established in the heart of disadvantaged zones to deal with minor and moderate cases of delinquency. Acting, in effect, as branches of the courts, the centres essentially operate by way of mediation. Managed by a magistrate and supported by members of civil society, the centres also receive victims and organize legal consultations. There are currently 107 of the centres, receiving over 500,000 individuals each year.

43. Other schemes have involved working with the parents of young people known to be at risk of becoming gang members, with the aim of supporting the parents' own attempts to limit their children's exposure to street criminality and better enabling the parents to recognize the early signs of gang membership among their children. Attention has also been given to ensuring that young people on the streets in these communities have access to alternatives to spending their time with gang members. These schemes have entailed providing free or subsidized access to facilities for leisure activities, setting up clubs and organizing activities for young people in a concerted attempt to create alternatives to gang membership, with the

added benefit of promoting improved social cohesion among young people in the community.

44.   In the Catalonia region of Spain, a unique approach to gang membership and gang-related violence has been attempted, with a commitment on the part of the provincial government to drawing certain gangs into the process of local governance. For example, an attempt has been made to reconstitute a specific gang as a cultural association promoting the interests of young people and facilitating the assimilation of Latin American immigrants. Through the process of legitimization, the gang has been able to have access to a range of public benefits, which has enabled it to provide a range of educational and training projects in the areas in which it operates. The obligation placed upon gang members as part of the process of legitimization is that they must cease their involvement in criminal and violent activities.

45.   In the Islamic Republic of Iran, there has been a determined effort to strengthen the provision of drug abuse prevention material in schools, prisons and the workplace as a way of reducing the impact of drug abuse and HIV on society. Non-governmental organizations working within each of these sectors have sought to increase local knowledge about risk factors and risk reduction and to promote a wide range of leisure and sporting activities in an attempt to reduce the number of young people becoming involved in drug abuse and drug-related activities.

46.   Aside from the various initiatives explicitly focused on tackling problems involving drugs and crime in marginal communities, there has also been recognition that many aspects of the physical and social geography of these marginal communities are actually promoting the sense of social isolation and disintegration among residents and making the task of tackling those problems much more difficult. For example, some marginal communities have poor or virtually non-existent transport systems, hampering the provision of support services while furthering their sense of isolation and vulnerability. In an attempt to tackle such problems, the Governments of Brazil and other countries have made a commitment to improving the transport systems as a catalyst for other forms of development and support. There has been a commitment in some areas to developing for the first time an effective system of land registration and land-use control in an attempt to reverse the trend towards social disintegration. In some countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Malawi, Peru and South Africa, initiatives have been developed to improve land registration in order to enable local residents to secure loans for development on the basis of their land ownership, thereby providing a catalyst and a means for development within these marginal communities.

47.   As different as these various initiatives are, their common element is the importance they place on involving local people at every stage of the intervention process.

48.   The International Narcotics Control Board emphasizes the importance of responding to the needs of communities experiencing social disintegration before they reach a point beyond which the regular capacity for effective action on the part of governments and local organizations becomes insufficient. The early signs of a breakdown in social cohesion within communities must be recognized and addressed. These signs may include changing demographics, changing land-use patterns, changing societal dynamics following migration or in post-conflict situations, poor levels of educational provision, inadequate availability of health services, limited retail provision, poor transport systems and escalating rates of violence.

49.   The problems posed within these communities have the capacity to spread well beyond the borders of the communities themselves; left unaddressed over time, the problems are indeed likely to do just that. At that point, these marginal communities might exert a powerful radicalizing effect, threatening the very fabric of the wider society. That is a threat that must not be allowed to develop.

D. Recommendations

50.   Addressing the vicious cycle of social disintegration and its associated drug problems requires a multidisciplinary approach involving stakeholders at all levels, including citizens, families, civil society, various levels of government and the private sector. In that regard, the Board makes the following recommendations:

(a)   Governments must ensure the provision of drug abuse prevention services, especially in communities experiencing social disintegration. All stakeholders — schools, community groups, parents and state and voluntary agencies — should be involved in the design and implementation of interventions aimed at achieving this goal. These interventions should be tailored to the specific community, and their key message should be that drug abuse is not an inevitable feature of growing up within that community. Interventions should be implemented as part of a package of other activities that provide people, especially youth, with a positive sense of their own value and achievements and with the life skills required to resist engaging in drug-related activity;

(b) Within communities experiencing social disintegration, people may be drawn to illicit drug activity if they feel that there are no other opportunities available to them. Governments should therefore ensure that young people and families can have access to educational, employment and leisure opportunities similar to those that are available in other areas;

(c) In communities that are economically deprived, the signs of financial success associated with involvement in illegal drug activity may draw young people into the world of drug abuse, thereby furthering their marginalization from the wider society. Governments should therefore, as part of their strategies to tackle the drug problem in marginalized communities, address the visible signs of financial success associated with the illicit drug market and aim at promoting alternative role models for young people. This is particularly important in areas where gang leaders have previously been the only role models for young people;

(d) In so far as possible, a comprehensive programme of community rehabilitation measures should be implemented within communities suffering from social disintegration and problems related to drug abuse. As a first step, where necessary, Governments should support the development of an effective system of local governance, with the involvement of citizens, families and civil society, in order to empower the communities and promote a culture of aspiration rather than one of marginalization. In some communities, where necessary, Governments should invest in the provision of effective and equitable transport, health, educational and social support systems, as well as employment opportunities, and in the provision of adequate retail facilities. The involvement of the private sector should be encouraged as an investment opportunity rather than as a charitable donation;

(e) In planning and development processes, Governments should aim to ensure that these marginal communities have the capacity and the means to develop into thriving communities linked to, rather than cut off from, the wider society. The potential of the Internet and mobile communication technologies should also be utilized to facilitate such a connection;

(f) Governments should consider the implementation of community policing initiatives to build up relationships of trust and mutual respect with local people, while at the same time enhancing safety and security, so that law enforcement agencies are not seen as a threat to local people but rather as an asset for their protection and welfare. The active involvement of community police in leisure, sporting and cultural activities can facilitate the development of trust between residents and law enforcement, as well as promote respect for the rule of the law;

(g) Government agencies should ensure that high-quality drug treatment and rehabilitation services are easily accessible so that those with a drug abuse disorder can receive effective treatment with minimum delay. Treatment should be based on enabling individuals to become drug-free rather than on simply seeking to reduce some of the harm associated with continued levels of drug misuse;

(h) Law enforcement agencies must be cognizant of the importance of social cohesion in addressing social disintegration and the drug abuse problem within marginalized communities. Governments should ensure that law enforcement programmes aimed at wresting control from criminal gangs active in these communities are complemented by the measures recommended above, including community policing, prevention and treatment and the provision of services and infrastructure. Such efforts should be sustained in order to provide a greater sense of safety and security for residents and to challenge the apparent power of criminal gangs;

(i) A culture of development, empowerment and ownership involving all stakeholders should be promoted, rather than further marginalizing the affected communities by producing a culture of dependency. Microfinance-type funding schemes can enable individuals and groups in marginal communities to play an active role in furthering their own development and independence. Land-registration initiatives can provide a further impetus to grass-roots initiatives. Restoration processes may need to be kick-started by governments to create an example of what can be achieved within a community. Nevertheless, the necessity of involving members of the community in the restoration process and of developing their sense of ownership of it cannot be overstated;

(j) The Board underlines the importance of international cooperation in the building of capacity, the provision of technical assistance and the sharing of best practice in rehabilitating these marginalized communities by investing in social cohesion, services and infrastructure with the aim of promoting cohesive, safe and drug-free communities.