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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Internet is revolutionizing lives today just as electricity and the telephone changed lives in the 20th century. As with many innovations, advantages are accompanied by challenges and the challenges that new technologies such as the Internet pose to drug law enforcement are a main focus of our Annual Report.

Committing a crime in an electronic environment - a cybercrime - is easy. Few resources are required and personal danger for the criminal and the likelihood of detection are greatly reduced, because these crimes are notoriously difficult to investigate and prosecute. Cybercriminals are *criminals sans frontières* who spread their activities across several jurisdictions to minimize law enforcement risks and maximize profits, with no single jurisdiction having effective ownership of a particular criminal case.

In such an environment, traditional police and investigation strategies are not enough. What is needed is a conceptual and a practical cooperative framework within which vigilance and broad international cooperation can prevent the Internet from turning into a worldwide web of drug trafficking and crime. Anti-drug agencies must restructure themselves into operational and functional networks at a global level if they are to succeed in disrupting drug trafficking organizations effectively.

The difficulty that some Governments may have in controlling the spread of drug abuse and trafficking often lies in a misdirected haphazard drug control policy. Many such policies tend to focus on a single aspect of the problem, for instance, supply reduction, while neglecting other areas that might be equally important, such as reducing demand for illicit drugs and preventing favourable conditions for spin-off crimes like money-laundering. Tackling the problem means addressing all parts of it: the manufacture, trafficking and abuse of illicit drugs. The drug problem defies easy solutions - it will not be solved overnight, in a week or even a year. In the end, it may not be possible to eliminate all forms of drug experimentation, use and abuse. But the difficulty of the challenge should not be used as an excuse not to take action.



The mandate of the Board originates from the three international drug control treaties. They are comprehensive all-encompassing instruments which reflect the balanced approach of the international community to the drug issue, dealing with both the supply of and the demand for drugs. They are compassionate instruments, seeking to make drugs available for medical purposes and aiming to protect individuals, families and societies so that they do not become the casualties of dependence and addiction. For those individuals who do become casualties of drug abuse the conventions offer a humane response, with provision for treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration. They do not however, sanction the recreational use of drugs. Thus, while addicted individuals should be cared for and treated without being stigmatized, that is not the case with drug abuse and drug trafficking. It is important that the humane treatment and rehabilitation of addicts without stigma, should not be confused with nor lead to the normalization of drug abuse which as a policy is a high-risk approach to a complex problem. The treaties are also flexible tools which were designed to accommodate change. Over the years, they have responded to new developments and will continue to do so in future. In line with the spirit of the treaties, the Board is placing equal priority on all the aspects of drug control whether related to demand or supply reduction, and this is reflected in the choice of subjects for thematic review in the Annual Reports over the last decade.

The overarching principle of all three international drug control treaties is that the use of drugs be limited to medical and scientific purposes only. Using drugs for purposes other than medical and scientific ones constitutes drug abuse. Drug abusers are therefore, by definition, neither consumers nor users, and drugs and other mind-altering substances are not consumer goods. It is essential that any attempt to minimize, trivialize or even ignore the seriousness of drug abuse by calling it drug use or drug consumption should be strongly resisted.

I call for assistance to Afghanistan, which was previously the biggest producer of opium poppy in the world. Decades of civil war, and the resultant violence, instability and corruption created a perfect environment for drug trafficking, crime and eventually terrorism, producing tremendous suffering first and foremost in Afghanistan itself but also in its neighbouring countries, regions and indeed the world. I firmly believe that the international community must make every effort to ensure that such a situation does not develop again, in Afghanistan or indeed, elsewhere in the world and the Board will work towards that goal, within the confines of its mandate.

Professor Hamid Ghodse
President of the Board