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New Challenges in Drug Law Enforcement from Globalization and New Technologies

VIENNA, 25 February (UN Information Service) -- Governments must take action to limit the dangers that globalization and new technologies pose in fighting drugs, urges the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) in its Annual Report published today (27 February 2002).

The report shows that drugs are being sold over the Internet, private chat rooms are being used by drug dealers and online pharmacies are selling prescription-only drugs over the web. These are just some of the challenges posed by new technologies and globalization highlighted by the Board in its Annual Report.

The President of INCB, Professor Hamid Ghodse, said: "For the Internet there is a real danger that its benefits might be seriously undermined by criminals for illicit gain. Governments must address the challenges that new technologies pose to drug law enforcement in an era of increasing globalization."

The Board is calling on Governments to take action to prevent organized criminal gangs continuing to exploit the technological advances and to consider developing a United Nations Convention on Cybercrime.

Afghanistan

The Board's Report also focuses on the situation in Afghanistan and warns that preventing the resumption of illicit opium poppy cultivation is inextricably linked to achieving peace, security and development. INCB is calling on the international community to provide adequate technical and financial assistance to the country to be able to fully implement the drug control treaties. The Board also urges the authorities in Afghanistan, now or in the future, to commit themselves to full compliance with international drug control treaties.

Cannabis

Treating cannabis like alcohol and tobacco would be a 'historical mistake', the Board states in its Report. While the damage to health caused by alcohol and tobacco is well-known, it would be imprudent to add to the burden on national health care systems with another harmful substance like cannabis. The Board calls on all Governments and the

relevant international bodies to review the situation and find ways to deal with developments on cannabis within the framework of international law.

The Board is increasingly concerned that some States which are signatories to the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, are circumventing the mandated controls of cannabis through legal manoeuvres. Some Western European Governments have introduced legislation involving the decriminalization of cannabis cultivation or possession for personal use. The Board is disturbed by the fact that while developing countries struggle to eradicate cannabis and fight illicit trafficking of the substance, certain developed countries have chosen to tolerate the cultivation, trade and abuse of cannabis on their territory. "Operation Topaz"

Very large quantities of a chemical from which up to 230 tons of heroin could have been manufactured, has been prevented from being diverted through an international operation to track global shipments of a crucial chemical says the INCB in its Annual Report. The first eight months of 'Operation Topaz' have seen very positive results with Governments preventing the diversion into the illicit drug trade of more than 200 tonnes of acetic anhydride from legal international trade, denying traffickers of vital supplies for the manufacture of heroin. The equivalent of up to 2.3 billion doses of heroin could be manufactured with such quantities of the chemical.

Regional Highlights

Injecting heroin is becoming more common in parts of Africa which will further contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS infection which is already widespread in the region. In South Africa there has been an increase of 40 per cent in the number of intravenous heroin abusers over the last three years.

In Colombia drug traffickers have diversified their operations as is shown by seizures of substances other than cocaine and heroin such as MDMA (Ecstasy). It appears that South American cocaine is smuggled into Europe, where it is exchanged for MDMA (Ecstasy), which is then smuggled back into South America and onto the north.

The Government of Canada has passed a regulation allowing individuals to access cannabis for medical purposes although the medical usefulness of the drug has not been proved and the action was explicitly opposed by the Canadian Medical Association. Federal authorities in the United States have forestalled similar moves by certain states.

Myanmar accounted for most of the world's illicit poppy cultivation in 2001 following the ban on cultivation in areas of Afghanistan controlled by the Taliban authorities and the prolonged drought in the country.

Most countries in central and eastern Europe which have been transit countries for drug traffickers, now face serious problems with heroin abuse. HIV infection and hepatitis C infection are spreading among intravenous drug abusers in many countries.

The Board regrets the establishment of a drug injection room in New South Wales in Australia stating that such facilities run counter to the provisions of the international drug control treaties.

The launch of the Report will be held on Tuesday 26 February at 11:00 am at the Concordia Press Club, Bankgasse 8, 1010 Vienna