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COMBATING THE SCOURGE OF SYNTHETIC DRUGS WORLDWIDE

Synthetic drugs like Ecstasy could become the main illicit drugs of the future warns the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) in its Annual Report published today. INCB has therefore launched a major initiative to stop the chemicals needed to make synthetic drugs such as Ecstasy from reaching the clandestine laboratories where they are made. Project Prism aims to cut off the supply of chemical precursors and to identify and arrest the traffickers.

Synthetic drugs of the amphetamine type are drugs which stimulate the central nervous system. The most common types are amphetamine, methamphetamine and Ecstasy (MDMA) which are made from chemical compounds in illicit laboratories.

These drugs are very difficult to control because they can be made cheaply and easily anywhere in the world as long as drug traffickers can obtain the necessary chemicals.

Large-scale manufacture of methamphetamine takes place in South-East Asia and North America while western Europe is the world's number one supplier of Ecstasy.

Traffickers have resorted to diverting the chemicals from legal manufacture or recruiting companies to illicitly manufacture the precursors before smuggling them to the places where the drugs are made. Governments need to share information to be able to effectively combat the trafficking of these precursor chemicals.

At a conference with representatives from 38 countries organized by INCB in cooperation with the Government of the United States and the European Commission in July 2002, it was agreed to set up Project Prism to detect and prevent the diversion and smuggling of chemicals used to make stimulants.

A task force has been set up to look at ways to prevent the diversion of chemicals into the illicit drug trade. It is moderated by INCB and includes representatives from the Government of China, the Netherlands, South Africa and the United States and the European Commission, Interpol and the World Customs Organization. The task force will develop more effective mechanisms to investigate the smuggling of precursor chemicals including identifying the sources of the consignments.