

INCB Targets Illicit Sales of Drugs on Internet Pharmacies

International Experts to Meet in Vienna to Discuss Solutions

VIENNA, 18 October (UN Information Service) -- In an effort to organize concerted global action against the increasing sales of internationally controlled substances by Internet pharmacies, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is organizing a meeting of experts from 19 to 21 October at the Vienna International Centre.

The meeting comes in response to requests by governments to explore ways and means of tackling this issue. It will examine the problem of illicit sales by Internet pharmacies and drug-smuggling via postal services, with the aim of identifying the scale of the problem and providing suggestions and recommendations on actions to be taken at national and international levels.

Because it provides easy access to controlled drugs, the Internet is becoming an important route for trafficking by on-line pharmacies. These pharmacies illegally provide prescription drugs to clients worldwide, but without the required prescriptions. They are used as a source by drug addicts and provide the means for large-scale dealing to a practically unlimited number of customers.

These prescription drugs often contain narcotics and psychotropic substances with properties similar to illicit drugs such as heroin and cocaine. Demand is high for some of these controlled pharmaceuticals, which are often abused by drug addicts as their first drug of choice. Others may become unwittingly dependent on drugs if they take them without medical supervision. In practical terms it is easier to access drugs via online pharmacies, which are just a mouse-click away, than by seeking professional help or by forging prescriptions or by theft.

“The INCB has repeatedly alerted the international community to this problem since the mid-1990s. The sale of controlled drugs through the Internet is a global problem and tackling it requires joint action and close working by national authorities. So far, only a few countries have taken specific legal action to prevent misuse of the Internet in this way. Even in countries where such legislation exists, different laws and regulations in other countries make it very difficult to consistently identify, investigate and ultimately prevent the illicit use of the Internet,” said Professor Ghodse, INCB President. Countries which have already established the required legal framework to close down such Internet sites and control access to the Internet service providers are obstructed in their efforts by companies operating from countries where no such legal provisions are in place.

Isolated activities by individual countries can therefore have only limited impact without concerted, supportive international action. “The INCB recognizes the need for coordinated international interventions, and hopes that the expert group meeting will come up with recommendations for appropriate action as well as identifying longer term goals and measures to tackle this problem,” added Professor Ghodse.

The Vienna-based Board is a quasi-judicial body that monitors the implementation of the United Nations international drug control conventions. It was established in 1968 in accordance with the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. INCB is independent of governments, as well as of the United Nations. Its 13 members are elected by the Economic and Social Council and serve in their personal capacity, not as government representatives.

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