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## **INCB CALLS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTION TO ADDRESS ISSUE OF DRUG TRAFFICKING AND RELATED CRIME AND VIOLENCE**

*Law enforcement needs to be more sensitive and recognize the  
importance of community participation*

The impact of drug abuse on crime and violence at the community level is the focus of the first chapter of the Annual Report of the Vienna-based International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), released here today (3 March 2004).

While recognizing the macro level political and security implications of transnational organized crime syndicates dealing in drugs, the Board also urges Governments to give special attention to micro-trafficking—i.e. community level drug abuse and related crime. Besides violence and its immediate consequences, depletion in social capital, security and support structures, are just some of the effects of drug abuse at the community level that are highlighted in the Report. Leaving these concerns unattended while focussing on macro level drug flows leaves societies vulnerable to a long term decline in safety and living standards.

“The very fabric of society is challenged by the continued presence in communities of drug-related crime. Communities that suffer disproportionate levels of violent drug-related crime also suffer from higher levels of other criminality and the disruption to civil society associated with it,” says the Board.

While the Board clarifies that most crime related to drug abuse is non-violent and petty, it stresses that the impact of illicit drugs, crime and violence is highly damaging to local communities at the micro-social level. The relationship between violence and illicit drug abuse is highly complex and has to be examined keeping a range of factors in mind.

Giving concrete instances of the extent of drug-related crime, the Report cites the case of Brazil, where drug-related violence poses a particularly serious challenge that negatively impacts on communities. Of almost 30,000 homicides registered annually, a high proportion are linked to drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking. Street children, acting as couriers for drug traffickers, play an important part in this illicit market, and are frequently killed because they know too much, steal too much or are caught in the crossfire between gangs and dealers.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, a survey conducted by the World Bank on youth gangs and violence indicated that youth gangs involved in drug trafficking generally displayed higher levels of violence than those not involved in such activities.

While drug-related crime obviously has a greater impact in resource deficient settings, even in the developed world, the extent of the problem is significant. For instance, in the late 1990s, 69 per cent of arrestees in five police areas in the United Kingdom tested positive for at least one illicit drug upon arrest; and 61 per cent of those arrested for assault tested positive for an illicit drug.

The Report maintains that a demonstrable link to violence and crime exists in that some drug addicts resort to violence either to fund their habits or indeed as a result of the psycho-pharmacological impact of some illicit drugs. However, based on controlled laboratory-based experiments, INCB stresses that it is very difficult and misleading to suggest a direct

causal link between violence and illicit drug ingestion. This link has to be examined with reference to culturally and socially situated factors, that, in turn, influence an individual's behaviour.

However, the Board also seeks to draw the attention of Governments to drug abusers who are victims of violence and crime, both at the hands of criminal elements and sometimes, of law enforcement. A number of studies have concluded that drug abuse leads to a heightened risk of victimization. Drug abusers are also exposed to situations where violence, and the use of guns in connection with drug trafficking is normalized. Female drug abusers suffer disproportionately from sexual assault.

The INCB calls on Governments to implement comprehensive drug demand reduction policies, paying special attention to drug abuse prevention in combination with a range of social, economic and law enforcement measures—if the problem of drug-related violence is to be successfully combated. Governments and the international community need to recognize the severity of the problem, and grass roots level interventions, including community-based drug abuse prevention programmes and community policing are critical, says the INCB.

“Only with the introduction of a comprehensive demand reduction programme will we see real progress being made to address the multiple problems that illicit drugs inflict on their communities,” says the Board.

The Board specifically notes that sometimes, local administrations and law enforcement efforts that do not take into account the peculiarities of local circumstances lead to inadequate measures which can be counter productive in terms of worsening the long-term crime situation. The Report notes: “Local administrations have often been characterized as responding to problems related to drug-related crime and violence based on a process of denial, overreaction and misidentification.”

The Board calls for specific attention to be paid to young people, (either individually or as part of gangs) as they are often involved in drug-related violence, either as perpetrators, or as victims.

Citing instances of community-based interventions that have succeeded in suppressing the activities of youth gangs, the Board calls for preventive action. Amongst the specific measures it advocates are early school-based intervention, sensitively targeted police intervention focused on problem areas and training programmes for school employees, criminal justice personnel, parents, community groups and youth workers.

The comprehensive set of recommendations suggested by INCB to help communities deal with the problem include: creating a local environment that is not conducive to drug dealing and micro-trafficking; supporting local efforts at employment and licit income generation, educational programmes targeting socially marginalized groups; integrated as well as targeted intervention work with risk groups; information sharing between various agencies; community-based restorative justice intervention by people representing a cross-section of the community; and interventions taking into account gender, youth and minority affiliation. The Board also notes that programmes need to be sustainable in the long term in order to generate the desired impact.