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REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Africa

Cannabis continues to be the most widely grown, abused and trafficked drug on the African continent. Morocco remains one of the world's leading cannabis producers and the source of 60-70 per cent of the cannabis resin seized in Europe.

An alarming new trend, especially in parts of Sudan, appears to be the shift from cultivation of food crops to cannabis, resulting in food shortages.

The abuse of Amphetamine-Type Stimulants (ATS) continues to be of concern in Southern, Eastern and Western Africa. Methaqualone (Mandrax) abuse in countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, particularly in South Africa, is increasing.

Opiates and cocaine abuse has developed along the transit trafficking routes, mainly in Angola, Nigeria and South Africa and in urban centres in other countries.

Limited and declining poppy cultivation continues to be confined to the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.

Information gathered from conflict-stricken countries, in particular the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, indicates that arms and ammunitions used by rebel groups and criminal organizations may have been partially procured with the proceeds of illicit drug trafficking.

Americas

With strong cooperation from the United States—especially on extradition issues—Mexico increased its law enforcement efforts against drug trafficking organizations and arrested a large number of major drug traffickers.

INCB stresses that the Canadian government's approval (June 2003) of the establishment of a drug injection room in the city of Vancouver, the first such site in North America, is not in line with the international drug control treaties to which Canada is a party.

The high-purity heroin smuggled into the United States can be inhaled instead of injected, making it more acceptable to many middle-class Americans.

Abuse of prescription drugs in the United States continues and is exacerbated by the unlawful selling of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances by online pharmacies from within and outside the United States. Between 1995 and 2002, there was a 163 per cent increase in the number of emergency-room visits linked to the abuse of narcotic pain medication.

In Central America and the Caribbean, drug trafficking and related crimes continue to have the potential to threaten political, social and economic developments, especially on the smaller islands of the Caribbean.

While drug trafficking has contributed to the increase of drug abuse in the region, countries in Central America and the Caribbean have included more initiatives related to demand reduction in their national drug control strategies and increased budget allocations to that end.

Central America and the Caribbean have seen an increased abuse of cocaine and a decrease in the age of initiation in illegal drug consumption.

The increased focus on the political threat of the drug problem has led many South American Governments to devote an ever-increasing proportion of their limited resources to reducing illicit drug supply, including by the eradication of illicit crops, the interdiction of drug trafficking and the introduction of measures against money-laundering.

With respect to coca bush cultivation, combined data for Bolivia, Colombia and Peru indicate a decreasing trend in recent years. Whether the overall reduction is sustainable, will, to a large extent, depend on the creation of alternative sources of income for coca bush cultivators.

The success achieved through eradication efforts in Colombia may lead to a shifting of illicit coca bush cultivation, not only to the traditional coca-growing countries of Bolivia and Peru but also to other countries such as Ecuador and Venezuela.

Asia

As a result of continued government efforts, opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar and the Lao People's Democratic Republic is declining. In Myanmar, the second largest producer of illicit opium after Afghanistan, cultivation has declined by almost two thirds since 1996 while in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, it has decreased by about 55 per cent since its peak in 1998.

Over two thirds of the global seizures of methamphetamine take place in East and South-East Asia. Illicit manufacture of methamphetamine is taking place mainly in China and Myanmar, but more recently also in the Philippines, where significant seizures of the precursor chemical ephedrine were reported in 2003. Methamphetamine is the most widely abused drug in Japan, the Republic of Korea and Thailand.

Heroin remains the main drug of abuse in China, including the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China, greatly contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Despite the armed intervention and the political change in Afghanistan and the fight against terror, illicit cultivation of and trafficking in opiates has grown which may result in more political instability. Opium cultivation in Afghanistan continued on an even larger scale in 2003. Drug crop cultivation has also resumed in Pakistan, mainly in non-traditional poppy-growing areas.

Opiates from Afghanistan continue to be smuggled on a large scale into other countries in West Asia, mainly destined for Europe. The so-called Balkan route (through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey and Balkan countries) as well as, increasingly, more recent alternative routes through Central Asia and the Russian Federation, continue to be used. In 2003, increased seizures of opiates were recorded in Pakistan, Turkey and several countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The Board regrets that Turkmenistan has not participated in several regional cooperation efforts and urges Turkmenistan to join the international community in the fight against drugs.

INCB notes with concern that links between drug trafficking, organized crime and terrorism have reportedly become more prominent in recent years. Governments of countries in South Asia assume that drug trafficking is one of the major sources of funds for terrorist groups.

The main drugs of abuse in Central and West Asia remain cannabis and opiates. Additionally, ATS, in particular Ecstasy, have become increasingly available.

INCB is concerned about a possible increase in drug trafficking to and through Iraq, although this is not yet reported as a serious problem in that country.

Europe

Ambiguity towards drug abuse is common in countries in Western Europe. Drug abuse prevention campaigns call on young people to refrain from drug abuse. In practice, however, authorities do not take measures against incitement of drug abuse, and drug abuse may even be promoted through certain media or other channels.

The Board is concerned that more widespread cultivation and abuse of cannabis in Europe combined with a relaxation of controls might counteract required efforts to eradicate illicit cultivation and combat trafficking in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

The cocaine market in Europe continues to be one of the world's biggest, second only to that of North America and the volume of cocaine trafficked in Europe appears to be on the increase.

As a result of two years of bumper crops of opium poppy in Afghanistan, it is expected that heroin trafficking along the Balkan route and through Eastern Europe will continue to increase—this may also lead to the reversal of the declining trends in the abuse of heroin in Western Europe.

The spread of HIV infection among injecting drug abusers remains alarmingly high in the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), as well as in the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

Western Europe retains its leading position in the area of illicit manufacture of ATS. While ATS produced in Asia and Latin America are primarily manufactured for local illicit markets, ATS manufactured in Western Europe and trafficked mainly from the Netherlands are abused all over the world.

Oceania

Australia and New Zealand remain among the main destinations for shipments of heroin and ATS from South-East Asia. Both countries have strengthened legislation and action aimed at detecting and preventing the clandestine manufacture of ATS and to intercept consignments of such stimulants and their precursors.

Large-scale hydroponic cannabis cultivation continues to be reported in Australia. Significant cultivation also takes place in Fiji and in Papua New Guinea. Though cannabis abuse has declined, it is still at a high level. Cannabis continues to be the drug of choice in New Zealand and Australia, where 72 per cent of all drug-related offences relate to cannabis.

In recent years, successful law enforcement operations in Australia have led to a sharp reduction in the supply of heroin to illicit markets. In contrast, there has been an increase of abuse of cocaine and ATS, which have continued to be widely available despite record seizures at the borders.

Both in Australia and in New Zealand, local illicit manufacture, distribution and abuse of ATS have increased. New, inexpensive psychotropic substances have become popular party drugs in Australia.