



EMBARGO: 3 March 2004
00:01 hours GMT

INCB CAUTIONS ON “HARM REDUCTION” MEASURES IN DRUG CONTROL

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) in its Annual Report released today (3 March 2004) “calls on Governments which intend to include ‘harm reduction’ measures into their demand reduction strategy, to carefully analyse the overall impact of such measures. These may sometimes be positive for an individual or for a local community while having far-reaching negative consequences at the national and international levels.”

The Vienna-based INCB which monitors the implementation of international drug control treaties has already, in previous Annual Reports, clarified its views on a range of “harm reduction” measures—actions which are taken with the intention of reducing the negative consequences of drug abuse. In its Report for 1993, the Board already “acknowledged the importance of certain aspects of harm reduction as a tertiary prevention strategy for demand reduction programmes.” In its Report for 2000, “the Board reiterated that harm reduction programmes could play a part in a comprehensive drug demand reduction strategy. The Board drew attention to the fact that harm reduction programmes could not be considered substitutes for demand reduction programmes.”

In its current Report, the Board reiterates specific statements and recommendations concerning the following “harm reduction” related measures:

Needle/syringe exchange or distribution programmes

“Governments need to adopt measures that may decrease the sharing of hypodermic needles among injecting drug abusers in order to limit the spread of HIV/AIDS. At the same time, the Board has been stressing that any prophylactic measures should not promote and/or facilitate drug abuse.”

Substitution and maintenance treatment

The implementation of substitution and maintenance treatments “does not constitute any breach of treaty provisions, whatever substance may be used for such treatment in line with established national sound medical practice.”

Drug injection rooms (facilities where injecting drug abusers can inject drugs they have acquired illicitly)

“The Board has stated on a number of occasions, including its recent Annual Reports, that the operation of such facilities remains a source of grave concern. The Board reiterates that they violate the provisions of the international drug control conventions.”

“The Board reiterates that article 4 of the 1961 Convention obliges States to ensure that the production, manufacture, import, export, distribution of, trade in, use and possession of drugs is to be limited exclusively to medical and scientific purposes. Therefore, from a legal point of view, such facilities violate the international drug control conventions.”

Drug testing programmes (facilities where drugs are tested and then returned to the drug abusers with the test results; the intention is to warn them if a drug is impure or adulterated)

“The Board has been concerned that such practices conveyed the wrong message on the risks of drug abuse and provided a false sense of safety for drug abusers, thereby running contrary to drug abuse prevention efforts required from Governments under the international drug control conventions.”