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Iraq Emerging as a Transit Country for Drugs, INCB President Says

VIENNA, 12 May (UN Information Service) -- Iraq is emerging as a transit point for drugs originating in Afghanistan and entering Jordan en route to final destinations in Asia and Europe, Professor Hamid Ghodse, President of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), said today at a press briefing in Vienna, where the INCB is currently meeting in its 83rd session.

Law enforcement authorities in Jordan have noted a major increase in drug trafficking activity over the past year and have made a string of drug seizures. Just last month, three million pills of Captagon were seized at the Iraqi-Jordanian border. The active substance of Captagon is fenetylline, a central nervous system stimulant with properties similar to amphetamine. Significant quantities of cannabis resin have been seized and chemicals like acetic anhydride, which is needed in the illicit manufacture of heroin, have increasingly been shipped to Iraq. Moreover, medicines containing internationally controlled substances (for example, diazepam) are available in Iraq without the required prescription.

Drug trafficking groups are said to enter Iraq's holy cities disguised as pilgrims to go about their business. Recently, a large number of people were arrested on drug trafficking charges. Cases of drug-related intoxication are on the rise in hospitals in Baghdad and around the country.

"The pattern is similar to what we have seen in other post-conflict situations", said Professor Ghodse. "Whether it is due to war or disaster, weakening of border controls and security infrastructure make countries into convenient logistic and transit points, not only for international terrorists and militants but also for drug traffickers. It is therefore all the more important that both the Government of Iraq as well as the international community act swiftly and take preventive measures before the situation escalates."

The Iraq Government's record of cooperation with INCB continues to be exemplary. Despite the war, the Board continued to receive all reports required under the international drug control treaties. Moreover, the Government has taken several measures to address the emerging problem, including the adoption of a National Drug Control Programme and an action plan against drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking. However, the Government also depends on international assistance to fully implement such activities, but the fragile security situation has limited the assistance that could be delivered so far.

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