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INTEGRATING DEMAND AND SUPPLY REDUCTION STRATEGIES VITAL, SAYS BOARD

Recommends Creation of National Drug Policy Coordination Mechanisms

“The integration of supply and demand reduction strategies: moving beyond a balanced approach” is the focus of the first chapter of the Annual Report of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) released today (2 March 2005).

Approaches to tackling the drugs demand and supply situation have called for a balance between activities related to reducing the supply of and demand for drugs. While this approach has been fairly successful, in this year’s Report, INCB notes that both demand and supply reduction programmes yield limited results when working in isolation, and that moving beyond a simple balance is necessary when dealing with the issue.

The Board has called for more comprehensive cooperation between supply and demand reduction programmes at the local, regional and international levels. In order to integrate and streamline supply and demand reduction programmes, it has recommended the creation of National Drug Policy Coordination mechanisms.

“To make real progress in achieving the 10-year targets set by the United Nations General Assembly Special Session in 1998, it is imperative that national governments ensure that there is operational and policy level integration of demand and supply reduction efforts,” said Hamid Ghodse, President of the INCB. At the special session, Member States agreed to significantly reduce drug production, trafficking and abuse.

In a multi-level analysis of the relationship between demand and supply, the report points out that, “...as an addictive drug becomes more widely available, a larger number of vulnerable individuals will be exposed to it, the likelihood of experimentation will increase and the problems associated with drug abuse will become more prominent”.

A failure to understand the implications of the links between demand and supply of drugs can lead to epidemic-like situations. For instance, the crack cocaine epidemic in the United States of America in the 1980s, when a new and cheaper form of a traditional drug became widely available illustrates how supply can create demand.

The Report advocates adopting a common analytical model of drug markets as a tool which would help achieve an appropriate balance between demand and supply reduction, specifically tailored to particular local, national and regional markets.

“Policy makers should determine the type of drug markets in a given area in order to establish focused strategies regarding the supply of and demand for illicit drugs in these markets,” said Professor Ghodse. For instance, in the case of a “mature” drug market, which is characterized by high consumption by a small number of addicted and dependent individuals, the Board recommends tackling the supply end of the chain, by cracking down on the relatively small numbers of large-scale traffickers, rather than arresting addicted population.

It also points out that eradication of illicit drug cultivations has to be accompanied by alternative development programmes, in order for it to be sustainable in the long term. These measures should be complemented by demand reduction that stresses provision of treatment options to the small target group; a stress on education-only prevention programmes in such settings would be insufficient.

In order to achieve a macro-level balance in national and regional drug control, the Board has also called for greater coordination and sharing of information, data, operational law enforcement activities and demand reduction programmes. As an example of successful supply-demand initiatives, the Board cites drug courts that integrate law enforcement and health service provisions.

The Board also encourages combined training activities to enhance the mutual understanding between the social service, education and criminal justice and public health sectors.