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BOARD REPORTS PROGRESS IN CURBING DIVERSION OF KEY CHEMICALS

Trafficking Networks Dismantled; Board Calls on Governments to Intensify Cooperation

In its Annual Report released today (2 March 2005), the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) calls on governments to step up sharing of real-time information on seizures and diversions of key chemicals used in the manufacture of cocaine, heroin and amphetamine-type stimulants.

The INCB is working with various governments in an effort to prevent the diversion of these key chemicals. For instance, under an INCB international initiative entitled Project Prism, a joint backtracking investigation between Poland and China and a successful controlled delivery between Ireland and the Netherlands led to the arrests of traffickers in chemicals used for the manufacture of ecstasy. In the latter case alone, the precursors seized would have been sufficient to manufacture 80 million tablets of ecstasy. Other international initiatives include Operation Purple and Operation Topaz, which aim at preventing the diversion of the key chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of cocaine and heroin to the illicit market.

Governments participating in these voluntary operations are expected to monitor shipments of these key chemicals. The authenticity of transactions is determined by carrying out background checks on the companies engaged in the transactions, to establish whether or not there is a legitimate need for the chemical. If there is any cause for suspicion, the shipment may be suspended, stopped or seized. Information on stopped or suspended shipments and seizures is shared with the INCB, and through them, with participating governments.

Over the past two years, governments have followed up numerous transactions resulting in more than 430 seizures, attempted diversions and actual diversions, with the assistance of the INCB. Some of these cases have led to the dismantling of clandestine laboratories and trafficking networks and the arrest of traffickers.

During 2004, Project Prism focused on monitoring ecstasy precursors, preventing diversions of some pharmaceutical preparations containing ephedrine, detecting illicit amphetamine laboratories in Europe and investigating the equipment used in illicit laboratories.

Since it is often the same criminal networks that are involved in smuggling drugs and in trafficking chemicals, the Board recommends that governments should make special efforts for the collection, analysis and sharing of intelligence information.

The Board is also supplementing the efforts being made to curb the manufacture of heroin in Afghanistan, by participating in capacity-building exercises in Afghanistan under Operation Topaz. The capacity-building exercises are aimed at tracking chemicals and particularly acetic anhydride, the key chemical used in the illicit manufacture of heroin, for which there is no legitimate demand in the country. The substance is smuggled in from abroad.