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DESPITE SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS, AFRICA REMAINS A WEAK LINK IN INTERNATIONAL DRUG CONTROL, SAYS BOARD

In its Annual Report released today (2 March 2005), the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) calls on African Governments to give a higher priority to addressing the drug problem in their countries. It also requests the international community to provide appropriate assistance and support to States in the region to enhance their efforts to combat drug trafficking and abuse.

Drugs are a growing problem in many countries of the region. Africa continues to be a major source of the cannabis found in illicit markets in the region or in Europe. The largest cultivator of cannabis on the continent is Morocco, with an estimated cannabis cultivation area of 134,000 hectares, producing about 3,000 tons of cannabis resin annually, according to a joint survey carried out by the United Nations *Office on Drugs and Crime* and the Government of Morocco. About 60 per cent of the cannabis resin seized in the world is of Moroccan origin. There is evidence to suggest that some of the civil conflicts in Africa are partly funded by profits from drug trafficking.

The fact that African countries have a limited institutional and technical capacity to deal with the drug issue in a comprehensive manner has negatively impacted the implementation of national drug control strategies in Africa, according to the Annual Report launched in Vienna. At the international level, inadequate control systems on the continent may lead to serious problems in the monitoring of international trade of drugs required for medical and scientific purposes.

Efforts by drug law enforcement authorities have been successful, albeit limited. African countries are working together in drug control through regular meetings of law enforcement authorities such as the meetings of heads of national drug law enforcement agencies, the operational meeting on drugs for Eastern African heads of criminal investigation departments and anti-narcotics units or the Eastern Africa police chiefs cooperation organization meeting.

Cooperation among the law enforcement authorities of the countries participating in the West African Joint Operations Initiative led to the seizure of more than 140 kilograms of cocaine in Cotonou, Benin, in April 2004. The year 2004 saw further record seizures of cocaine: 600 kilograms were seized in Ghana, some 450 kilograms were seized off the coast of Togo and about 200 kilograms were seized by the authorities of Cape Verde. Intensification of its seizure efforts at the national level has also yielded noteworthy results: the Government of Zambia, for example, has been able to seize 182 tons of cannabis in 2003 whereas only 30 tons were seized in 2001 and 2002.

Most countries in the region have inadequate legislative and administrative mechanisms for the control of precursor chemicals, which are needed in the illicit manufacture of drugs. However, South Africa and Nigeria have developed highly effective systems to prevent the diversion of chemicals into illicit channels. In 2004, 12 tons of methaqualone powder which is used to illicitly manufacture the sedative methaqualone (Mandrax) were seized in South Africa and Mozambique. Methaqualone is widely abused in Southern Africa, usually smoked in combination with cannabis ("white pipe"). Likewise, a shipment of 40 tons of potassium permanganate, a chemical needed for the illicit manufacture of cocaine, from the United States to Nigeria was stopped in 2004.

Injecting drug abuse related to heroin is increasingly being reported in countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, a development that could have serious ramifications for the spread of HIV/AIDS. The abuse of methcathinone ("cat"), a substance with an abuse potential similar to methamphetamine, is also of concern. The fact that psychotropic substances such as diazepam are often sold by street vendors in countries in West and Central Africa also leads to abuse.

On the other hand, the availability of legal narcotic drugs used for medical purposes, such as pain alleviation is especially low in Africa. More than 30 countries consume almost no narcotic drugs and even the largest consumer countries of these drugs use only a fraction of the amounts that are consumed in the United States or Western Europe.

The Board calls on the international community to intensify its efforts to support African Governments in their struggle against drug abuse and illicit drug trafficking.