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DRUG SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN DETERIORATING RAPIDLY: INCB

Unless Afghanistan takes swift measures to address the problem of corruption, Government efforts in drug control will be undermined, further hindering political progress, economic growth and social development in the country, says the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) in its latest Annual Report released today (1 March 2007) in Vienna. Progress in eradicating illicit opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is being impeded by corruption prevailing throughout the country, according to INCB.

The Board is seriously concerned that the drug control situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating. There has been little progress in drug control in the country, particularly with regard to the elimination of illicit opium poppy cultivation and opium production.

The Board regrets that illicit opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has not been contained but has instead reached a record high level in 2006. One third of the Afghan economy remains opium based, which contributes to the widespread corruption in the country. This situation needs to be urgently addressed by the Government of Afghanistan with assistance from the international community, particularly the donor countries.

The annual report also highlights the importance of strengthening the control of licit activities related to narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors in Afghanistan. The absence of adequate drug control regulations and mechanisms have contributed to a proliferation of unregulated retail outlets selling controlled substances, many of which have been smuggled into the country. The lack of evidence linking seizures of acetic anhydride to diversions directly from international trade raises concern over the controls exercised by Governments to prevent diversions from domestic distribution channels. The Board urges Governments to ensure that the distribution and consumption of acetic anhydride at the national level is properly controlled. The Board expects that the Government will take the necessary steps to ensure effective functioning of the newly established Drug Regulation Committee in complying with the provisions of the international drug control treaties.

In addition to problems linked to illicit cultivation and manufacture, Afghanistan is also facing problems of drug abuse. The first nationwide survey on drug abuse in Afghanistan identified approximately 1 million drug abusers, of whom 60,000 were children under 15 years of age.

The Report calls upon once again the international community, particularly the donor countries, to continue to assist the Government of Afghanistan in its efforts to eliminate the drug problem, thereby achieving the goals set out in the National Drug Control Strategy. The Government, for its part, should redouble its efforts to remove impediments to the rule of law.

The Board invoked article 14 of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961 vis-à-vis Afghanistan in 2000, in view of the fact that that country had become by far the world's largest illicit producer of opium and was seriously endangering the aims of the Convention. The Board has since then followed closely the drug control situation in Afghanistan and has maintained an ongoing dialogue with the Government to ensure that progress is made in drug control in that country.