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WEST ASIA, AFRICA EMERGING AS MAJOR TRANS-SHIPMENT AREAS FOR CHEMICALS, SAYS INCB

Vienna, 5 March (United Nations Information Service)—The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) today warned that Africa and West Asia have become major trans-shipment areas for the diversion of precursors of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS). In its Annual Report released today (5 March 2008), the Board calls on West Asia and Africa to strengthen their control systems to monitor the diversion of these chemicals. It also requests neighbouring countries in the respective regions to take urgent action to combat this problem.

Operation Crystal Flow, a targeted six-month operation used to track orders for shipments of the precursors ephedrine and pseudoephedrine to countries in Africa, the Americas and West Asia, revealed that traffickers are taking advantage of the often non-existent controls over pharmaceutical preparations containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine to traffic such consignments to African countries or West Asia.

INCB recommends that countries and territories exporting ephedrine and pseudoephedrine confirm the legitimacy of these shipments with importing countries or through the Board to any country before releasing such shipments.

As regards pharmaceutical preparations containing ephedrines, INCB urges vigilance and requests Governments to control such preparations in the same way as they control the raw material. The monitoring of transactions in international trade has assisted in preventing the diversion of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine and Governments are invited to continue to use PEN Online, the online system for the exchange of pre-export notifications.

The Board announced that it has taken steps to initiate increased control measures over phenylacetic acid, a chemical frequently used in the illicit manufacture of ATS. Strengthened control over ephedra in the European Union is expected to lead to a decline in attempted diversions of ephedra from licit trade.

International initiatives on precursor control such as Project Prism (targeting chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of ATS) and Project Cohesion (focusing on potassium permanganate and acetic anhydride), as well as the newly established estimates system of legitimate requirements for precursors used in the illicit manufacture of ATS, have all contributed to preventing the diversion of precursor chemicals during the year.

With the accession of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Liechtenstein to the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 and only 12 States that are not yet parties, the Convention is one step closer to becoming a truly universal instrument for the control of precursor chemicals, according to the Board.