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**19 February 2009,  
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## Centennial of the Drugs Control System

### **INTERNATIONAL DRUG CONTROL CONVENTIONS A MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, SAYS INCB**

*Challenges remain, particularly on access to controlled medicines, inconsistent application of provisions over cannabis, and drug abuse prevention*

VIENNA, 19 February 2009 (*United Nations Information Service*) – Drug control Conventions have reached major achievements, but face many challenges, the Vienna-based International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) stated today.

The achievements and challenges of the three drug control Conventions – the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances – are the focus of the first chapter of the INCB Annual Report 2008, launched today in Vienna, Austria.

#### Achievements

The international control system for narcotic drugs can be considered one of the twentieth century's most important achievements in international cooperation, the INCB Report states. Over 95 per cent of United Nations Member States are party to the three Conventions – covering 99 per cent of the world's population – making them some of the most widely accepted international instruments in the world.

The number of substances controlled under the 1961 and 1971 Conventions have risen steadily and licit demand for drugs controlled by the Conventions has soared: Global consumption of morphine rose from less than five tons in 1987 to 32.6 tons in 2006. Despite this considerable increase in volume, no cases of diversion from licit trade to the illicit traffic of narcotic drugs were detected in 2007. Some progress has also been made towards reaching the goals set at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs in 1998.

#### Challenges

On challenges that should be addressed by the international community, the Report points to the fact that at the time the 1961 and 1971 Conventions were drawn up, neither HIV nor the hepatitis C virus had been identified and it was not until the adoption of the Declaration on the Guiding Principles on Drug Demand Reduction of 1998 that specific international policy guidelines were introduced to reduce the demand and reduce the adverse consequences of drug abuse to individuals and society.

Although the access to controlled medicines, including morphine and codeine, is considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be a human right, it is virtually non-existent in over 150 countries. The WHO estimates that at least 30 million patients and possibly as many as 86 million annually suffer from untreated moderate to severe pain.



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Another challenge is the inconsistent implementation of cannabis control provisions. Cannabis has become the most widely used illicit drug worldwide and in the last two decades more potent forms have been developed that contain tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) levels considerably higher than were common during the 1980s. This development may be associated with the increased demand for cannabis-related treatment services in several countries. There are also indications that cannabis use may be associated with an increased risk of psychotic disorders and schizophrenia.

Given that cannabis tends to be the first and most widely used illicit drug, the issue of cannabis is closely related to primary prevention for young people. Youth is particularly vulnerable to marketing pressures and the importance of image. The challenge for Governments is to identify and disseminate appropriate policies that encourage individuals to value and manage their own life. Within the last 10 years, progress in drug abuse prevention has been “modest at best”, the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs argues.

Another alarming development highlighted in the Report concerns “rogue” Internet pharmacies, which are promoting drug abuse among vulnerable groups, in particular youth. Cybercrime is of particular concern, as drug traffickers are among the main users of encryption for Internet messaging and by this means evade law enforcement, coordinate shipments of drugs and launder money. A coordinated, global response is needed to meet this challenge.

## Recommendations

The INCB encourages Governments to make greater investments in preventing drug abuse, especially with regard to youth and vulnerable groups, and to utilize the experiences and best practices tested in a variety of settings.

In order to alleviate unnecessary suffering of millions of patients, the Board encourages Governments to stimulate the rational use of opioid analgesics, where their consumption is low. Governments might consider working with the pharmaceutical industry with a view to making high quality opioid analgesics more affordable to the poorest countries.

The INCB Report 2008 concludes that the “international drug control system has stood the test of time with credit, but it is not perfect. It is undoubtedly capable of improvement, and procedures for modification exist for this purpose.” The Board invites Governments “to adopt constructive approaches to overcoming obstacles rather than seeking individual solutions that may undermine the coherence and integrity of the whole system.”