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INCB WARNS ABOUT DRUGS BEING USED TO COMMIT SEXUAL CRIMES

VIENNA, 24 February (United Nations Information Service)—The International Narcotics Control Board is warning of an increase in the use of date-rape drugs by criminals to lure their victims. Despite efforts to curb their misuse, the abuse of these so-called date-rape drugs is on the rise. INCB is raising the alarm about new psychoactive substances that are easier to get hold of and under less stringent international controls.

The “date-rape drug” phenomenon, although fairly new, is evolving rapidly, as sexual abusers attempt to circumvent stricter drug controls by using substances not restricted by international drug conventions. Benzodiazepines, which are controlled under the 1971 Convention, have been frequently used by criminals to weaken the resistance of their victims and to exploit their property or body without their consent. Flunitrazepam, a benzodiazepine sold under the brand name Rohypnol, was once so commonly misused for sexual assault that it was called the “date-rape drug”. However, the adoption of stricter control measures by Governments, in close cooperation with the pharmaceutical industry, has proven effective: nowadays, reports of the misuse of Rohypnol for sexual assault have become rare.

At the same time, criminals are turning now to other substances—notably gamma-Hydroxybutyric acid (GHB), a psychotropic substance that was not under international control until recently, as well as substances that remain outside drug conventions such as ketamine and gamma-Butyrolactone (GBL). Since in many countries most of those drugs are easily available, they frequently fall into criminal hands.

What is alarming is the unscrupulous way in which those drugs are used upon unwitting victims—the drugs, which are usually disguised in food or drinks, are introduced in dosages that are significantly higher than the dosages used for therapeutic purposes—a practice which entails serious health risks for the victims. Sexual assault crimes are often committed in public places such as bars, restaurants, nightclubs but also in private surroundings.

In view of this serious menace, the international community has come together and shown commitment to address the problem. In March 2009, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs urged all countries of the world to adopt measures to combat the misuse of pharmaceutical products for sexual assault and to enhance public awareness about this serious problem (resolution 52/8). The Commission also invited the pharmaceutical industry to develop formulations with safety features, such as dyes and flavourings, to alert possible victims to the contamination of their drinks, without affecting the bioavailability of the active ingredients in legitimate drugs.

In its Report, INCB calls on all Governments to implement the Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 52/8 as soon as possible and to be vigilant about the worrying increase in “date-rape drug” abuse. The report also highlights the importance of cooperation with the pharmaceutical industry and calls on countries to solicit their support.