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EMBARGO:

**2 March 2011,
1100 hours CET**

GREATER EFFORTS NEEDED TO LIMIT DAMAGING EFFECTS OF DRUG-RELATED CORRUPTION

Vienna, 2 March (United Nations Information Service) — Preventing corruption must be a higher priority in the fight against drug trafficking, the Vienna-based International Narcotics Control Board says in its Annual Report 2010, launched today in Vienna.

“Nothing has the same damaging effect on the efforts to combat drug trafficking as the successful attempts of criminal organizations to intimidate and corrupt public officials,” Hamid Ghodse, President of the Board, says, underlining the need for urgent action and lasting commitment.

He notes that the “police and justice officials often face tremendous pressure from organized crime when working to stop drug trafficking. Without adequate protection they find themselves confronted with a difficult choice between becoming victims of violence and possibly losing their lives or their integrity and becoming accomplices of criminals”.

The Report points out that the vast profits generated in the illicit drug markets often exceed the financial resources of state institutions, thus posing a major threat to public and international security. Criminal organizations with drug trafficking empires have in some cases become political forces with the power and authority of legitimate institutions. The very authorities established to control and repress drug trafficking are then themselves compromised by corruption.

Corruption is used strategically

Evidence shows that the most successful criminal organizations make a strategic and systematic use of violence and corruption to ensure an unimpeded flow of illicit drugs, says the Board. What they cannot achieve through bribery, they can still achieve through violence and intimidation and vice versa, notes the Report. This is why areas with intense drug trafficking often suffer a very high incidence of violence and corruption.

In order to maximize the profits of drug trafficking, most criminal organizations seek and find ways to obtain the complicity of key public officials.

Measuring the actual prevalence of corruption is not easy. Official national data on corruption are usually drawn from national crime statistics and are more indicative of the success of anti-corruption initiatives than the actual level of corruption. Official data is also affected by public confidence in the police and the victim’s willingness to report the crime. Surveys that capture public perception are used to complement the official data.

The impact of corruption however is easy to spot. The Report describes corruption as having a detrimental effect on the credibility and efficiency of the criminal justice system and weakening the rule of law. Countries where narco-trafficking exists are particularly vulnerable.

Narcotics control units that handle large sums of money and quantities of drugs are the most affected, along with the respective judicial and customs units. Officers working in these units not only have more corruption opportunities than others, but they are also aggressively recruited by criminal groups.



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Combating drug-related corruption

The Report sets out strategies for tackling drug-related organized crime and implementing preventive measures. With globalized criminal networks commanding enormous resources and having access to sophisticated technologies, they are able to quickly adjust to new drug control tactics and can exploit weaknesses of drug control agencies. Preventive measures thus become ever more important, the Report emphasizes.

The Report calls on Governments to establish efficient, transparent and objective systems of recruitment and promotion of public officials as well as a system of performance measurement and rotation of staff. All agencies involved in drug control should have in place procedures for disclosure of conflicts of interest, registration of assets and disciplinary mechanisms.

Increasing transparency is vital to preventing judicial corruption. Proceedings should be public and judges must qualify their decisions—and these decisions must be recorded and accessible to the public and media.

The President of the Board calls on policymakers to provide adequate resources to the rule of law sector to enable it to fulfil its duties. Assistance should be provided to States which require technical or other forms of assistance. While primary responsibility lies with the Governments to protect their citizens against intimidation and corruption, international cooperation is essential to enable relevant law enforcement agencies to cooperate with each other.