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EMBARGO:

**2 March 2011,
1100 hours CET**

MEDICINES FOR TREATMENT OF PAIN AND ILLNESS MUST BE AVAILABLE FOR ALL—INCB CALLS ON GOVERNMENTS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO TAKE ACTION

More than 80 per cent of the world's population has no or insufficient access to pain relief drugs and are suffering unnecessary pain because of it, according to a special supplement to the INCB Annual Report published today.

“Ninety per cent of the licit drugs are consumed by ten per cent of the world's population in the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and some European countries,” Hamid Ghodse, President of the Board, expresses INCB's concern. Many countries in Africa, Asia and parts of the Americas have very little or no access to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical purposes.

According to the Board, there is enough raw material available to meet everybody's medical needs for opioid analgesics. However, there are a number of barriers preventing adequate access to these medicines. Although cost is often assumed to be the primary obstacle, low-cost preparations have been effectively distributed in a number of countries. This proves that economic barriers can be overcome.

Barriers to adequate availability of medicines include lack of education of health professionals, regulatory constraints, difficulties in distribution, and the absence of a comprehensive health policy that includes pain treatment. Drug control systems can help to ensure that enough narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are available for medical and scientific purposes and at the same time prevent their inappropriate use and abuse.

While the lack of availability of controlled medicines can deprive patients of their right to health benefits and relief from pain and suffering, excessive availability can lead to abuse and subsequently drug dependence. In the Report, the Board draws attention to the problem of abuse of pain relief drugs, which in some countries has even exceeded the levels of abuse of illicit drugs.

The Board urges Governments, with the assistance of the international community, to adopt the recommendations included in the Report in order to identify the barriers to adequate availability and take remedial action as appropriate. The recommendations of the Board cover a full spectrum of areas affecting the availability of drugs for medical and scientific purposes, for example, the collection of statistical data on licit drug requirements, legislation, education and training, national control systems, and prevention of diversion and abuse.