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SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS ADDED TO HERBAL MIXTURES SUCH AS “SPICE” CONTINUE TO BE ABUSED—A CAUSE FOR CONCERN, ACCORDING TO INCB

According to the International Narcotics Control Board, the availability of herbal mixtures containing synthetic cannabinoids continues to be a matter of concern to governments. During recent years these mixtures, marketed under brand names such as “Spice”, have been increasingly available over the Internet and in specialized shops. Synthetic cannabinoids—correctly termed “synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists”—have psychoactive effects similar to cannabis. While cannabis is internationally controlled under the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, synthetic cannabinoids are not under international control.

Given the health risks posed by the abuse of substances containing synthetic cannabinoids, several governments have adopted national control measures to prevent trafficking in and abuse of these substances. Some countries have added specific synthetic cannabinoids to the list of substances controlled under national legislation. While this is a first step to protect individuals, a large variety of synthetic cannabinoids can be manufactured through minor chemical modifications, making it possible to circumvent legislation and place the modified synthetic cannabinoids on the market. Such cases have been reported by some countries, including Finland, Japan, the Russian Federation and Sweden. The Governments of these countries have reported that, since the adoption of national legislation to control specific synthetic cannabinoids, non-controlled synthetic cannabinoids were detected in herbal mixtures that had been seized in their countries.

To avoid this problem, some Governments have adopted measures to control groups of structurally related synthetic compounds. For example, Ireland and the United Kingdom have placed groups of structurally related synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists under national control. Recently, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration within its emergency scheduling authority took steps to temporarily control five chemicals commonly added to such herbal mixtures.

INCB welcomes the timely efforts of governments to prevent the trafficking in and abuse of synthetic cannabinoids but warns that they should continue monitoring the situation and adopting preventative measures as necessary.