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President of the International Narcotics Control Board addresses the General Assembly High-level Meeting on Non-communicable Diseases

VIENNA, 19 September (UN Information Service) - Today in New York at the General Assembly High-level Meeting on Non-communicable Diseases, the President of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) emphasized that millions of people around the world are afflicted by mental illnesses, which are non-communicable diseases and which include substance use disorders. Substance abuse requires prevention and treatment and is a contributing factor to some other non-communicable diseases.

Addressing the Roundtable on strengthening national capacities and policies, the President of the Board, Professor Hamid Ghodse, highlighted the importance of the availability of internationally controlled drugs in the treatment of non-communicable diseases and for the relief of associated pain. He stressed that appropriate medical use of controlled medicines can improve the quality of life of patients, with opioids being essential in the palliative care of cancer patients and psychotropic substances being a key component in the treatment of mental illness. However, there are considerable disparities in the availability of controlled substances. Ninety per cent of global consumption of analgesics is accounted for by a number of developed countries. In some countries, there is even overconsumption of some controlled substances, which results in additional health risks and can cause additional conditions or further compound existing conditions. In contrast, eighty per cent of the world's population has no or limited access to these essential medicines.

Professor Ghodse reminded Member States of the right of all people to be free from the pain and suffering caused by non-communicable diseases and said that prevention should be the primary means of achieving this. Well-functioning regulatory systems within each country are essential in ensuring the availability of controlled medicines, including for non-communicable diseases, and in preventing the diversion of drugs to illicit uses. The President of the Board indicated that many countries do not have a functioning drug control regulatory system in place and that the first steps to reverse this include the development of national drug policy and national capacity.

In closing, the INCB President stressed the need for Governments, civil society and international organizations to work together to ensure the availability of internationally controlled substances for the relief of the pain and suffering associated with non-communicable diseases and to prevent substance abuse, and to prevent and treat substance use disorders.

The Board is an independent, quasi-judicial, expert body established by the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1954 and mandated to promote and monitor Government compliance with the provisions of the international drug control conventions.

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