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Governments to take measures to ensure that forensic proof is obtained whenever a drug-facilitated crime is suspected.” The Board has already alerted the international community to the misuse of “date-rape drugs” such as flunitrazepam to commit sexual assault. As a result of Government efforts, the use of this substance for such purposes has diminished. The Board is continuing to monitor the situation and will keep Governments and international bodies informed of developments.

Ordering drugs online: illegal Internet pharmacies target young audiences via social media

Illicit drugs are being ordered online via illegal Internet pharmacies, along with prescription medicines. The enterprises seem to target a young audience: the President of INCB noted that “disturbingly, illegal Internet pharmacies have started to use social media to publicize their websites, which can put large audiences at risk of dangerous products, especially given that the World Health Organization has found that over half of the medicines from illegal Internet pharmacies are counterfeit.”

Key aspects of illegal Internet pharmacies’ activities include smuggling their products to consumers, finding hosting space for their websites and convincing consumers that they are, in fact, legitimate. INCB is calling on Governments to close down illegal Internet pharmacies and to seize substances which have been illicitly ordered on the Internet and smuggled through the mail.

The Board has received information on over 12,000 seizures of internationally controlled substances sent via the mail in 2010, including over 6,500 seizures of internationally controlled licit substances and over 5,500 seizures of drugs of illicit origin. India was identified as the leading country of origin for these substances, accounting for 58 per cent of the substances seized, while the United States, China and Poland were also identified as significant countries of origin.

The Board published “Guidelines for Governments on Preventing the Illegal Sale of Internationally Controlled Substances through the Internet” but, according to a recent survey on the implementation of the Guidelines, further progress is needed. Barriers to implementation that need to be addressed are inadequate legislative or regulatory frameworks, insufficient technology and lack of staff. Action to address the problem continues, with new initiatives being undertaken at international and national levels. “International cooperation in counteracting this issue is essential,” said the INCB President, “For instance, Governments that identify illegal Internet pharmacies operating within other territories should notify the relevant Government; and technical assistance cooperation should be strengthened.”