

## **World Cancer Day - INCB reiterates the right to access internationally controlled narcotic drugs for the relief of pain and suffering**

VIENNA, 3 February (UN Information Service) – At the opening of the 109<sup>th</sup> session of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), a day before the World Cancer Day on 4 February, INCB President Raymond Yans reaffirmed the importance of the international drug control conventions in ensuring the availability and rational use of narcotic drugs for the relief of pain and suffering. “All people have the right to access internationally controlled narcotic drugs for the relief of pain and suffering” said Mr Yans, pointing to the global increase in cancer cases, particularly in developing countries, and to the disparities in the availability of opioid painkillers.

Often seen as a disease of rich countries, international data show that over 70 per cent of cancer deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. There were 32.6 million people (over the age of 15 years) who had been diagnosed with cancer in the past five years, according to 2012 international data. Projections of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the specialized cancer agency of the World Health Organization, predict a substantive increase to 19.3 million new cancer cases per year by 2025, due to growth and ageing of the global population. More than half of all cancers (56.8 per cent) and cancer deaths (64.9 per cent) in 2012 occurred in less developed regions of the world, and these proportions are likely to increase further by 2025.

For many years, global consumption of opioid painkillers has been below the levels required for the most basic forms of treatment. As a result of growing recognition of the therapeutic value of these substances, as well as the efforts of the international community, substantial increases in consumption have been achieved. However, while consumption levels have risen in several regions of the world, the bulk of the increase has occurred in a limited number of countries, particularly in three regions: Europe, North America and Oceania. Within some countries or regions, consumption levels have stagnated or even decreased.

As long as these drugs remain inaccessible to the large majority of people around the world, patients will not be able to have the health benefits to which they are entitled under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In other countries, however, overprescribing opioid painkillers and their availability in quantities greater than those required for sound medical treatment may lead to the diversion and abuse of those substances with negative consequences such as overdose and addiction.

In 2010, INCB published a [report on the availability of internationally controlled drugs](#) in which the Board reported on the impediments to the availability of opioid painkillers as reported by countries.

These impediments include regulatory, attitudinal, knowledge-related, economic and procurement-related factors that adversely affect availability. In 2010 the most important impediments listed by countries were concerns about addiction, reluctance to prescribe or stock and insufficient training for professionals. Unduly restrictive laws and burdensome regulations were also commonly perceived as playing a significant role in limiting the availability of opioids. A smaller number of Governments reported that difficulties involving distribution and supply and the high cost of opioids were major obstacles to making opioids adequately available.

INCB invites countries and governments to implement the recommendations contained in the 2010 report with the overall goal of establishing a well-functioning national and international system for managing the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances that should provide relief from pain and suffering by ensuring the safe delivery of the best affordable drugs to those patients who need them and, at the same time, prevent the diversion of drugs for the purpose of abuse.

The INCB Annual Report for 2013, which presents the latest findings and recommendations of the Board, will become available on 4 March, together with the INCB technical publications on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, and the Board's report on precursor chemicals.

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*INCB is the independent, quasi-judicial body charged with promoting and monitoring Government compliance with the three international drug control conventions: the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.*

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