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Statement by Professor Hamid Ghodse, President, International Narcotics Control Board

Mr. Chairman,

The World Health Organization and its predecessor bodies, the Health Committee of the League of Nations and the Office International d'Hygiene Publique (OIHP), have played very important roles in health and international drug control. Since its inception, WHO and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) have closely worked together in order to further advance the medical use of drugs and both our organizations have made efforts to ensure adequate provision of drugs for medical purposes while preventing their diversion into illicit channels. INCB has also been working towards the achievement of the health and drug-related Millennium Development Goals which call for, *inter alia*, increased access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries.

However, while the consumption of narcotic drugs has increased significantly, the benefits often do not accrue to populations in developing countries. The global use of morphine, for example, has increased from 3 tonnes in 1984 to 28 tonnes in 2003. Nevertheless, opioid analgesics are still in short supply and not always available for the people who need them, particularly in developing countries. As the International Narcotics Control Board pointed out in its most recent annual report, only six countries accounted for 79 percent of global consumption of morphine. Developing countries, which represent about 80 per cent of the world's population, accounted for only about 6 per cent of the global consumption of morphine. This shortage has important implications as Governments are not able to provide adequate care for the thousands of patients in their population suffering from cancer or AIDS. According to WHO projections, 10 million cancer cases per year will occur in developing countries by the year 2015. If the availability of drugs in developing countries is not improved, lack of access to opioid analgesics will cause massive amounts of unnecessary pain and suffering.

The situation becomes even graver when crises occur. One in five WHO Member States experiences a humanitarian crisis every year and thousands of people around the globe are in crisis conditions at this very moment. In situations of crises or natural disasters such as December 2004 Tsunami, essential drugs are part of the supplies needed. They should therefore be available at all times in adequate amounts and in the appropriate dosage forms to satisfy the health-care needs of the majority of the population.

The Board realizes that many nations will only make substantial progress in ensuring the availability of drugs if they get substantial support from the outside.

By developing a strategy to integrate the availability of opioid pain medication into palliative care for HIV/AIDS, cancer and other chronic diseases, WHO is already working on a first step which will bring us nearer towards this goal. INCB will also be working with WHO in the development of guidelines on the use of opioids for the management of opioid dependence.

Furthermore, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, at its last session in March, adopted a resolution which requests INCB and WHO to examine the feasibility of a possible assistance mechanism that would facilitate adequate treatment of pain.

I also call on the World Health Assembly to adopt resolution EB 114.R2 on cancer prevention and control which, if adopted, would urge Member States to ensure the medical availability of opioid analgesics according to the international treaties and recommendations of WHO and INCB.

Making narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances available to the large number of people suffering from cancer and AIDS pain are not only important objectives of public health but they will also bring peace to the suffering and their families.

In all these efforts, we have to keep in mind that there is an overuse of some psychotropic substances in some countries. The key to achieving appropriate use of controlled medicines and prevention of illicit use is education of health care professionals in the rational use of drugs in general and of the psychotropics in particular.

Thank you for your attention.