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Statement by the President of the International Narcotics Control Board

Thematic debate of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly on drugs and crime as a threat to development on the occasion of the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

*High-level interactive panel on challenges in mainstreaming drug control into development
initiatives, and ways of improving the international community's coordinated efforts
to address illicit drugs' adverse impact on development*

26 June 2012, New York

Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

As the quasi-judicial and independent body mandated to monitor and promote the implementation of the three international drug control treaties, we at the International Narcotics Control Board work to ensure that States comply with the provisions of these treaties. Effective national drug control systems and international cooperation with regard to the licit trade in drugs and precursor chemicals have been very successful in preventing diversion from international trade to illicit channels.

We are, however, all concerned by the persistently high level of drug abuse, which is harmful to the health of countries across the world, and the growing drug-related violence.

The International Narcotics Control Board has paid particular attention to these questions in our recent annual reports. I am therefore pleased that the General Assembly has convened this important debate today on the occasion of the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

In areas and regions acutely affected by drug abuse, trafficking and related criminal activities, there are often high levels of violence. Without determined and targeted interventions aimed at strengthening social justice, societies are in danger of being caught up in a vicious circle of drug abuse, despair, crime and violence. The consequent impact on the development and potential of their citizens, particularly young people, can act as a significant impediment to the long-term prospects of society as a whole.

The spillover of drug abuse into countries or regions of production and transit is common and adversely affects health, productivity and education, often with an attendant increase in crime and family and social disintegration. Illicit drug activity can also contribute to a loss of community cohesion and erode social capital, without which long-term development is at risk.

Drug abuse itself, not least in the richest countries, lies at the heart of the problem. Tackling the demand for drugs through prevention measures should be an integral element of action against drug trafficking and crime. Much remains to be done, in all regions and countries, to prevent and treat drug abuse. Deficiencies in drug abuse prevention and treatment and in rehabilitation and recovery services must be fully addressed in order to ensure strict compliance with the international drug control

conventions and their full implementation. National laws and practices in the areas of drug abuse prevention and control must be fully aligned with the international treaties in order to avoid sending a mixed message to young people and society, giving the impression that drug abuse can be considered normal. Such situations transmit ambiguous signals to the authorities of countries where coca leaves or opium poppies are cultivated.

Such situations must be rectified, since they have a double impact on societal development, particularly with regard to the young, whose potential is lost both through drug abuse and dependence on cannabis or other drugs and by the criminal behaviour that results.

Societies cannot and must not accept the loss to drug abuse of their young people, who are the engine of growth and development. Consequently, prevention programmes must be vigorously implemented by all countries, accompanied by consistent policies that respect international law and the United Nations drug control conventions. This is crucial to the promotion of the rule of law at the national level.

Given the cross-border nature of the illicit drug trade, international cooperation is essential. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link. If the chain of drug control is broken in one country or region — and I am thinking now of certain projects in Uruguay — the entire international drug control system may be undermined. All regions must continue to work tirelessly to achieve the full implementation of the treaties. The range of effective and intensified demand reduction activities, particularly in countries where prevalence rates are high, needs to be further developed.

The International Narcotics Control Board has long called for the better integration of multilateral mechanisms for dealing with drugs and development within the United Nations system and elsewhere.

Development programmes aimed at building national capacities in areas such as health and education, governance and the rule of law should all include measures to deal with drug abuse and trafficking. Law enforcement capacities should be developed so as to reduce the illicit supply of drugs. Furthermore, the capacities of the health and education sectors should be developed as a counterbalance in order to reduce illicit drug demand and to provide treatment, rehabilitation and recovery services.

It is imperative that demand reduction efforts, in which preventing the abuse of drugs, including cannabis, must play a pivotal role, should be fully integrated into education programmes at all levels. Such integration constitutes an essential link with the Millennium Development Goal of ensuring access to universal primary education, which is itself essential to prevent the loss of young people and ensure that they fulfil their potential.

Similarly, action against illicit drug cultivation must be accompanied by measures of social justice, fairness, land distribution and sustainable alternative development in order to be effective in the long term. This represents a link with two other Millennium Development Goals, namely eliminating hunger and poverty and ensuring environmental sustainability in rural areas.

The International Narcotics Control Board calls on States and the international community to ensure that development programmes incorporate all aspects of drug control, not simply law enforcement, in accordance with the treaties to which you are all party. Sustainable drug control and regulation of the licit medical use of drugs are essential elements of development and social well-being. Such action will avoid the vicious circle of diversion to illicit channels, drug abuse, trafficking, related criminal activity and money-laundering and ensure access to the benefits of economic development, including improved performances in the education, health and prevention services.

We live in a world that is interconnected and interdependent. Development, action against illicit drugs and crime, the promotion of the rule of law and the realization of the Millennium Development

Goals can no longer be seen as isolated and individual activities or as objectives to be attained independently of one another.

On the contrary, measures taken in these areas should be seen as part of an integrated and multifaceted approach. They must be implemented by every Government in a context of shared responsibility, as envisaged in the international drug control conventions.

Thank you for your attention.