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Sixth intersessional meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs sixty-second session: Thematic sessions

16-18 October, Boardroom C, VIC

Opening Statement by the President of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)

16 October 2019, 10:00 a.m.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to speak to you today on behalf of the International Narcotics Control Board at the Commission's 6th Intersessional Meeting.

As we reflect on the accomplishments of the Commission and its members, and work towards meeting the commitments made at the 2016 special session of the General Assembly and in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, it is an opportune time to also give thought to the challenges ahead of us. Over the coming days, in the three thematic sessions, you will be examining the challenges set out in your multi-year workplan for 2019-2023.

Before you commence your work, I will briefly share the perspective of the International Narcotics Control Board, and offer our support in addressing these challenges.

Emerging challenges

The world is increasingly concerned about new psychoactive substances (NPS), non-medical synthetic opioids and non-scheduled precursors. To effectively respond to the complex landscape where we see an almost infinite number of substances, INCB is developing and expanding practical innovative partnerships and tools to protect people from exposure to these dangerous substances.

A core element of INCB's approach is the provision of its proprietary online communication platforms – PICS for precursors and IONICS for NPS and synthetic opioids – for sharing of information among Member State Governments in real-time. These platforms are at the cutting edge and serve users from various Government authorities related to drug control, namely the police, customs, postal inspection and regulatory authorities.

Access to medicines

At the same time, the lack of availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for legitimate medical use represents a pressing public health problem in many regions of the world today, a situation which has often been mistakenly attributed to the control requirements adopted by States in implementation of the international

drug control framework. Over all these years, the efforts in treaty implementation have been to find the right balance between making the substances available as a “remedy” and limit the risk that they became a “poison”.

Many ask whether the conventions have been successful or not. It is difficult to speculate what would be the world situation without a control system in place. We can certainly look at the impact that other psychoactive substances that are not as controlled, such as alcohol and tobacco, have had on the health and welfare of people in many countries.

Implementation

It is of utmost importance to safeguard the health and welfare of humankind by ensuring access to and availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their diversion and abuse. To achieve this, your peoples depend on your Governments to continue in carrying out their obligations under the drug treaties. I will make four points here:

- States need to ensure that proper safeguards are put in place to limit the diversion of controlled substances into illicit channels through legal and regulatory frameworks that effectively control the production, distribution, prescription and dispensing of these substances;
- Two, that the control measures applicable to medicines containing controlled substances must not lead to undue restrictions on their availability for legitimate medical and scientific purposes;
- Three, that any control mechanism must be supplemented by public awareness and prevention initiatives and appropriate training on rational and responsible prescription and dispensing practices for health care professionals, including as part of their curriculums; and
- The Board encourages States to share information on emerging trends with respect to drug production, consumption and trafficking, including through INCB platforms, to cooperate to disrupt trafficking networks and to share good practices.

Improving capacity

INCB has developed I2ES to facilitate the real-time electronic exchange of import and export authorizations between trading partners. Available free of charge to all Governments, increased participation by countries in the platform can only contribute to improved availability and expeditious and safer international trade in controlled substances.

We are also helping governments in building the capacity of their competent national authorities to implement the treaty requirements, to improve availability and reduce diversion to illicit channels. Under INCB Learning, 237 officials from 88 countries and territories have received training in regional onsite and online seminars. I encourage you to actively support and participate in these practical initiatives.

Closing and a word on human rights

In closing, I wish to emphasise that the work being done by your authorities has a direct impact on people’s well-being, whether it be the provision of medicine or preventing and treating drug use disorders.

An issue requiring attention is crime committed in the name of drug control and which violates human rights. On behalf of the Board, I wish to reiterate yet again that if drug control measures adopted by States violate internationally recognised human rights standards and norms, they also violate the international drug control conventions. No crimes should be committed in the name of drug control.

I wish you success in your deliberations this week. I am confident that together we can enhance our efforts to tackle the world drug problem while ensuring respect for human rights through strengthening treaty implementation and compliance.

Thank you.
