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**Statement by Mr. Cornelis P. de Joncheere, President,
International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)**

**Special Event of the sixty-third session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, on the
occasion of the United Nations International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit
Trafficking:**

**2020 SPECIAL DISCUSSION: IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE WORLD
DRUG SITUATION, A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

26 June 2020

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the COVID-19 pandemic, INCB has continued to provide support to Governments and competent national authorities in a number of ways.

Despite the measures put in place by governments to contain the spread of COVID-19 and new ways of working, it remains essential for governments to ensure continued access to controlled medicines for all COVID-19-related medical needs and also for other ongoing critical medical needs such as those related to pain relief, palliative care and for neurological and mental health disorders, including for the treatment of drug use disorders.

In a comment published in [The Lancet on 22 April 2020](#), I joined a number of experts in calling on health responders to apply the principles of palliative care to focus on compassionate care and dignity, providing rational access to essential opioid medicines and mitigating social isolation at the end of life and caregiver distress.

INCB has called on competent national authorities of all countries and territories to ensure the maintenance of sufficient buffer stocks of controlled substances to guarantee availability of those medicines throughout the duration of the pandemic.

Suppliers and distributors play a crucial role in ensuring that internationally controlled substances urgently needed for medical treatment remain available within and across national borders. The Board remains in contact with national authorities and is closely following the developments related to the COVID-19 pandemic and any possible impact on the international supply chain for these substances.

The Board has also reminded Governments that in acute emergencies, and where competent national authorities are not able to operate as normal, it is possible to utilize simplified control procedures for the export, transportation and provision of medicinal products containing controlled substances.

INCB's electronic [International Import and Export Authorization System \(I2ES\)](#) is a critical tool for Governments in facilitating trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances while preventing diversion and abuse, especially during the pandemic, and provides a secure forum for national authorities to exchange ideas and innovations regarding COVID-19 contingency measures.

Given the circumstances of the COVID-19 lockdown measures and the plunge in both domestic and international air and land travel, there has been a significant increase in express consignments and home deliveries for vital supplies, providing ample opportunities for traffickers to hide substances.

INCB's [Pre-Export Notification System \(PEN Online\)](#) and [Precursors Incident Communication System \(PICS\)](#) are helping governments prevent and investigate diversions of precursor chemicals, while the Project Ion Incident Communication System (IONICS) is helping national authorities exchange information on seizures of new psychoactive substances, including fentanyl-related substances and other non-medical synthetic opioids.

Under INCB's [Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances \(GRIDS\) Programme](#), webinars have been held to raise awareness of new trafficking trends in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and provide practical approaches, including training on INCB tools, and Project Ion and Project OPIOIDS are providing practical tools to interdict illicit manufacture, marketing, and movement of dangerous new psychoactive substances, fentanyl-related substances and their precursors.

As mentioned earlier, INCB Learning is continuing to build the capacity of competent national authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic through webinars and the INCB e-learning modules, offered in both English and Spanish. In the last three months alone, 394 government officials of 33 countries and territories have enrolled in the e-learning modules.

INCB is committed to continue working with all Governments towards full implementation of the international drug control treaties and achieving their objectives, including the health and well-being of our peoples.

To this end, we count on the ongoing cooperation and support of Governments and active participation in INCB initiatives. Only in this way can we meet our obligation to ensure availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing diversion, illicit manufacture, trafficking and abuse, including during times of pandemics.

Thank you and stay well.
