

Vienna International Centre, P.O. Box 500, A-1400 Vienna, Austria
Telephone: +43-1-26060, Telefax: +43-1-26060-5867 / 5868
E-Mail: incb.secretariat@un.org Internet Address: <http://www.incb.org/>

Check against delivery

**Statement by Ms. Jagjit Pavadia, President,
International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)**

**Extraordinary session of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs:
*Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters
in the Near and Middle East***

22 September 2021

Distinguished Chair, Ms. Waly, ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to join this extraordinary session of the Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East. Since its establishment almost half a century ago, the Subcommission has served as a valuable forum for members to study drug trafficking and related issues in the region, share experience and expertise, and foster cooperation.

INCB is pleased to participate in the work of the Subcommission. While it is regrettable that we cannot meet in person, the virtual mode of meetings does have some advantages in enabling for wider participation. Joining me today are my fellow members of the Board:

- Dr. Galina Korchagina, First Vice-President of the Board;
- Professor H. H. Sevil Atasoy, Second Vice-President and Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates; and
- Professor Jallal Toufiq, Chair of the Board's Committee on Finance and Administration.

The region faces many drug-related challenges which impact on health and well-being and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. I will briefly outline some of the trends in the region that the Board has identified and highlighted in the INCB annual reports.

On tramadol: countries in the Middle East continued to face the challenge of trafficking in and misuse of the substance. At the same time, the capacities of the subregion to collect, analyse and monitor the data to assess the full extent of the challenge remained limited. Through its GRIDS Programme, INCB facilitated Operation New Horizons on identifying key sources and re-distribution points involving consignments of non-medical tramadol and tapentadol - a non-scheduled synthetic opioid analgesic similar to tramadol - and targeted shipments trafficked primarily through the international post, express mail and courier services, air cargo and freight forwarders. The Board would like to thank the countries from this region who participated in that operation. The GRIDS Programme also supports Governments directly on the ground through the placement of INCB Regional Advisers and such advisers are already successfully operating in four strategic locations around the world, including in Egypt.

On “captagon”: trafficking in and, more recently, manufacture of falsified “captagon” continued to seriously affect the Middle East. While the markets for this substance are mostly within the subregion, and to a lesser extent in North Africa, some major seizures in Austria, Italy and Malaysia may indicate the emergence of new routes and/or markets.

In Central Asia, States continue to face increased trafficking in and misuse of synthetic drugs, including amphetamines, synthetic cannabinoids and various other new psychoactive substances. Traffickers have been observed to be using Internet and social messaging platforms for illicit sale and marketing.

In Southern Asia, trafficking in heroin and methamphetamine is increasing, in particular along maritime routes. The Internet - in combination with postal and courier services - is being increasingly exploited, in particular for trafficking in psychotropic substances.

Changes in the illicit manufacture and consumption of drugs are mirrored by the evolution of the situation relating to precursor chemicals. Besides traditional precursors, drug traffickers are increasingly resorting to sophisticated processes under which the required precursors are either recovered from other substances or totally replaced by new chemicals which are often available on licit national and international markets.

Further details are contained in the 2020 INCB Annual Report and Precursors Report. I take this opportunity to remind members of the Subcommittee to keep the

Board updated of drug trends and drug control initiatives in your countries, so that these can be reviewed by the Board and accurately reflected in our regional analysis.

INCB is supporting members of the Subcommittee in implementing the three international drug control conventions. Our country missions are a key vehicle for providing this support and from 2016 to 2019 we held missions to 7 of your countries. We have further missions under preparation to other countries in the Near and Middle East, and look forward to resuming these visits when the COVID-19 situation allows. We also highly value the consultations held with civil society during our missions to obtain a unique, grass-roots perspective of the drug situation and demand reduction issues.

In 2016, INCB conducted a high-level mission to Afghanistan, and in 2018, with the agreement of the country, INCB invoked article 14 bis of the 1961 convention with a view to bringing about compliance with the treaties. We hope that, once the situation in the country has stabilized, these efforts can continue. Implementation of the conventions remains critical to safeguarding health and wellbeing and achieving the SDGs.

On precursors, INCB is monitoring the international movement of precursors and the illicit use of internationally controlled and non-scheduled precursors, promoting worldwide cooperation and exchange of information on licit and illicit activity, through the Pre-Export Notification Online (PEN Online) system and the Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS), projects Prism and Cohesion and task forces.

Four e-learning modules are available through the INCB Learning programme for use by national authorities. I encourage your governments to register to benefit from these tools, and thank those countries who have already enrolled.

I wish you a successful meeting and look forward to our exchanges today. In closing, I reiterate the Board's commitment to supporting your Governments' efforts in implementing the international drug control conventions and making progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 3 on health and well-being, and SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

Thank you.

* * *