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**Statement by Jallal Toufiq, President,
International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)**

**African Union Continental Technical Experts' consultation on drug supply
reduction**

Abidjan, 19 July 2023

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address you during this important event organized by the African Union. I am particularly pleased to see so many delegates from almost all countries on the continent. Drug use, illicit drug manufacture and drug trafficking represent a critical challenge to our communities and all of us. INCB reiterates the importance of preventing drug use and ensuring access to evidence-based treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration services that respect human rights. At the same time, there is an urgent need to further strengthen supply reduction efforts, as recognized in pillar III of the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention.

As the independent, quasi-judicial monitoring body for the implementation of the international drug control conventions, INCB has a unique role in supporting the international community in this regard. With particular regard to the illicit manufacture and trafficking of drugs, we have been actively guiding and supporting governments in the implementation of Article 12 of the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances relating to precursor chemicals used in illicit manufacture of drugs. Based on those experiences, more recent efforts are focussing on drug manufacturing equipment under article 13 of the same convention as well as to New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) and non-medical synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl.

What the Board has noted in recent years, is that illicit drug manufacture, in particular illicit synthetic drug manufacture, has become even more sophisticated, and is often on an industrial scale. Driven to reduce risks of detection and maximize profits,

illicit drug traffickers feed the rapid evolution of the drug markets by both offering new products, such as NPS, and adjusting manufacturing processes according to the availability of the required chemical precursors, increasingly using chemicals that are not under international control, including “designer precursors”.

An increase in the sophistication of illicit manufacturing capabilities globally also means that control measures will become less effective as chemicals placed under international or national control will increasingly be replaced by traffickers. In addition, the pool of alternative chemicals is continually growing because illicit operators have learnt more complex manufacturing methods.

At the same time, any new controls imposed on chemicals will have to strike a balance between preventing their diversion for illicit purposes while not hampering their availability for legitimate uses.

Therefore, there must be an increased emphasis on voluntary measures by Governments and building on the achievements of the 1988 Convention. The overarching goal of all efforts is to prevent chemicals from being used in illicit drug manufacture. When you look at the global picture, no Government can achieve this goal alone: chemicals from Asia are used in illicit synthetic drug laboratories in Europe, and the end-products are trafficked from Europe to countries in East Asia and Oceania. These shipments may also reach, or transit through, Africa.

INCB has over the years developed and made available a number of tools to facilitate the exchange of actionable information and global cooperation to address these challenges. They include tools for the exchange of information on proposed shipments of precursor chemicals in legitimate international trade using the Board’s Pre-Export Notification Online system (known as PEN Online). According to data available to us, planned precursor shipments are notified to all countries in Africa, yet, currently, only 41 countries of the continent are registered to use the system, and of those 23 regularly view the incoming notifications. There may therefore be precursor shipments to countries in Africa of which the relevant authorities may not be aware of, thus posing a risk for diversion. You will hear further details tomorrow.

To complement this mechanism, in October last year, INCB launched PEN Online Light, which supports Governments in monitoring international trade in

precursor chemicals not under international control. but which can be used to substitute controlled precursors in illicit drug manufacture.

In 2021/22, timely action using these systems prevented the possible diversion of nearly 2 tons of pseudoephedrine preparations from international trade into countries in Africa and West Asia.

Another of the Board's precursor-related tools is a platform to facilitate the exchange of information on trafficking of both controlled precursors and chemicals not under international control. You may be aware of this system under its acronym, PICS, the Precursors Incident Communication System. The authorities of 22 Governments in Africa have at least one user registered with PICS.

PICS supports Governments in understanding which chemicals may have been smuggled into their territories, providing leads for investigators. PICS also serves as an early warning system for emerging chemicals, by helping Governments to understand what to look out for. For example, one case in PICS concerned the trafficking of a designer precursor of methaqualone from a country in East Africa to a country in the south of Africa.

Major trends in precursors, both in legitimate trade and trafficking, are available in the INCB annual report on precursors. The report is based primarily on the annual precursor statistics which Governments are required to provide to INCB by the end of June each year. Unfortunately, data from countries in Africa is limited, which makes our analysis difficult. For 2021, the last year for which we have complete data, only about 40 per cent of all Governments in Africa submitted their annual precursor statistics to INCB.

In the context of our discussions about the Pan African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (PAENDU) supply reduction data collection tool later this week, I would encourage you to review where improvements to the submission of data to INCB using all the tools available to enable us to better support your supply reduction efforts. I will now turn to how INCB supports Governments to address new psychoactive substances (NPS) and non-medical synthetic opioids.

The Board's Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (known as GRIDS) Programme builds the capacity of Governments to respond to fast changing

trafficking, illicit manufacture and marketing of non-medical synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances, fentanyl and related chemicals. This is achieved by training officers, facilitating real-time communications through state-of-the-art secure INCB systems such as IONICS and GRIDS Intelligence, ELITE and SNOOP, which will be described in more detail in the coming days, as well as through information exchange and intelligence development that support the interdiction of dangerous substances.

Since 2017, the GRIDS secure network of more than 3,000 law and regulatory officers from 199 countries and territories has received over 8,000 practical capacity building training courses linking safe interdiction and actionable intelligence exchange and access to targeting systems. This, in turn, has facilitated enforcement actions for nearly 70,000 cases, including for drugs such as so-called “captagon”, khat, tramadol, and tapentadol.

Intelligence exchanged through the GRIDS Programme platforms has supported the dismantling of numerous organized crime groups around the world. For example, in 2019, using intelligence provided through IONICS, the Tanzania Drug Control and Enforcement Authority was able to identify and take action against a large khat trafficking organization, seizing nearly one ton of the substance being trafficked to Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. In 2021, the GRIDS-led global Operation New Horizons prevented the trafficking of falsified, substandard or illicitly manufactured tramadol and tapentadol, resulting in seizures of 1.1 million tablets and 113 kg of tramadol, and 194 kg and 1.7 million tablets of tapentadol, affecting 34 countries and territories, many destined for Africa. In 2022, fentanyl trafficking potentially emerging from parts of Africa has been identified, with numerous fentanyl-related arrests being reported by the Nigerian National Drug Law Enforcement Agency.

These operational activities have been promoted through the GRIDS Regional Technical Officers located in Austria, Egypt, India, Mexico, Nigeria, and Thailand.

To achieve these results, cooperation with industry through public-private partnerships has been essential. It cuts across precursors, NPS, non-medical opioids and even drug manufacturing equipment. INCB has published Guidelines for Governments for establishing voluntary codes of practice for the chemical industry as

early as 2009. Since then, INCB has expanded its tools and activities in this area, encouraging the expansion of voluntary cooperation mechanisms to various sectors and levels of industry along the supply chain, from manufacture, to marketing, movement, and monetization.

As a neutral convener of international partners, governments, leading social media and e-commerce platforms, and online financial services, GRIDS has held 25 international events bringing together hundreds of governments and companies, whose actions on non-medical synthetic opioids, fentanyl and related chemicals have resulted in the disruption and dismantling of nearly 3,000 illicit online vendors. Based on this engagement with industry through governments, INCB has developed practical guidance to prevent exploitation of legitimate businesses, including express couriers, freight forwarding and third-party logistics, e-commerce and Internet-related services.

Public-private partnerships are now a key component of an effective, reliable and sustainable mechanism for addressing the diversion of controlled precursors, non-scheduled chemicals, NPS, non-medical synthetic opioids and other dangerous substances, and for preventing them from reaching illicit laboratories and markets.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the Board's appreciation for the convening of this continental technical experts' consultation against a backdrop of increasing concerns globally about illicit synthetic drug manufacture and use. While some indicators suggest a potential worsening of the situation given developments around the world, there is still significant potential to enhance national and collective efforts for coordination, timely data-sharing and, above all, use of existing systems and platforms. Regional and global cooperation is essential as the trafficking of drugs and their precursors knows no borders.

I wish you productive consultations over the coming days and look forward to continuing to support your efforts to safeguard health and wellbeing by addressing the illicit supply of drugs.

I will now turn to French to say that I am very happy to be here in Abidjan, which afforded me an opportunity to meet long-standing friends and I wish you every success in your consultations.

Thank you.