

Check against delivery

Statement by Dr. Zukiswa Zingela

**2nd Vice-President of the International Narcotics Control Board
and Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates**

**Commission on Narcotic Drugs Thematic Discussions on the Implementation of
All International Drug Policy Commitments, Following-up to the 2019 Ministerial
Declaration**

“Health and regulatory challenges posed by synthetic opioids and non-medical use of
synthetic drugs”

5 December 2023

Excellencies, distinguished Chair, ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we gather to address a pressing global issue - the synthetic opioids crisis and the challenges it presents in the realms of health, regulation, and international collaboration. We have already heard from a number of member states in terms of the concerning trend and trajectory. I will cover the efforts undertaken by the International Narcotics Control Board to navigate this intricate landscape.

Established under the 1961 United Nations Convention, INCB plays a crucial role in monitoring the implementation of international drug control conventions, and it ensures the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes, while also overseeing the accessibility of precursors for legitimate industrial uses.

The gravity of the synthetic opioids crisis was also recognized by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018. Disparities in access to legitimate medicines have fuelled this crisis, leading to a staggering 500,000 deaths worldwide annually. This is the conservatively estimated figure by the World Health Organization. Developed countries, where over-prescription and non-rational prescribing are problematic, bear a significant burden, while developing nations face restricted access to opioids for essential pain treatment.

INCB's 2022 Annual Report underscores these disparities, emphasizing the need for a balance between ensuring access to scheduled opioids for medical and scientific purposes while preventing excess that can fuel organized crime and trafficking of dangerous substances.

To address this crisis, the INCB has implemented the global OPIOIDS Project in 2017. This initiative, supported by public-private partnerships, enhances governments' capacity to respond to the trafficking, illicit manufacture, marketing, and sales of non-medical synthetic opioids. The GRIDS Programme facilitates real-time communication, information exchange, and intelligence development to intercept the distribution of dangerous substances at the source.

The challenge lies not only in regulating known substances but also in the emergence of new synthetic opioids with no known medical uses. A key tool has been the INCB lists of fentanyl-related substances and synthetic non-fentanyl opioids with no known legitimate uses, successfully encouraging governments and industry partners to refrain voluntarily from the manufacture, marketing, import, export, or distribution of these substances, except for limited research and analytical purposes.

The exploitation of legitimate manufacturing, marketing, movement, and monetization sectors is a growing concern and the Board would like to highlight this. These industries lack the specialised knowledge to advise them on the legitimate uses of such substances, exposing them to legal, reputational, and health risks. In collaboration with international partners and governments, the GRIDS Programme has conducted numerous expert group meetings and workshops, fostering awareness, trust, and cooperation with these industries. Private sector partners, once aware, have actively taken measures to prevent, monitor, and respond to traffickers. The global OPIOIDS Project, utilizing the SNOOP tool, has identified and exchanged intelligence on over 1450 global synthetic opioids marketplaces in 2022 alone.

Please allow me, Mr Chair, to reiterate that the Board has commitment which is unwavering when it comes to this type of problem. We rely on dialogue and collaboration with governments, industry partners, and international organizations to achieve our goal.

The challenges are formidable, but our collective efforts have resulted in tangible impacts, dismantling illicit marketplaces and identifying numerous traffickers.

As we move forward, as the INCB, we remain dedicated to addressing the synthetic opioids crisis, promoting access to essential medications, and navigating the intricate challenges presented by the evolving landscape of illicit substances. Through commitment, cooperation, and innovation, we strive to create a safer and healthier world for all.

I thank you.