

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

**Ministerial meeting to launch the Global Coalition  
to Address Synthetic Drug Threats  
7 July 2023**

Madam Chair, Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to join the launch of the Global Coalition, and I would like to congratulate Secretary Blinken and the participating countries on prioritizing health and welfare by addressing synthetic drug threats. INCB looks forward to supporting the Global Coalition in three areas: preventing diversion from licit international trade; addressing designer precursors and pre-precursors; and building capacity to counter trafficking in NPS and non-medical synthetic opioids.

The guiding principle should be, borrowing from the preambles of the 1961 and 1971 Conventions, to ensure – and not unduly restrict – the availability of drugs considered indispensable for medical and scientific purposes. Governments should at the same time aim at preventing diversion. In short, “access without excess”.

INCB’s 2022 availability report confirms persistent disparities in the consumption of opioid analgesics for pain treatment. Almost all consumption is concentrated in Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand where over-prescription and non-rational prescribing have also largely contributed to opioid use disorder and overdose deaths.

Increasing availability of “designer benzodiazepines” also poses a challenge because of their harmful effects and difficulties in detection and monitoring.

The illicit drug industry is rapidly evolving. Designed to address mostly cocaine and heroin, the international precursor control system established by the 1988 Convention is challenged by the almost infinite possibilities offered by chemical science.

Currently, 33 precursors are under international control. Of these, ten were added in the last eight years, including 3 fentanyl precursors added in 2022. That same year, 67 countries reported seizures of non-scheduled chemicals.

This is a global challenge that requires continued international scheduling coupled with flexible responses. Last year, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs adopted resolution 65/3, outlining possible approaches such as national scheduling and extending scheduling to entire groups of related precursors.

Efforts should be also expanded to the markets for specialized equipment and materials as suggested by article 13 of the 1988 Convention. Tableting machines are encountered for methamphetamine pills in South-East Asia, “ecstasy” in Europe and Oceania, fake “Captagon” in the Middle East, counterfeit tramadol in Africa, and synthetic opioids in North America. This is one element of the renewed strategic approach of INCB to address illicit drug manufacture.

Under the framework of the Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme, the Board enhances Governments' capacity to respond to fast-changing trafficking and marketing of NPS and fentanyls. INCB's technical cooperation aims at building national capacities and facilitating communications through state-of-the-art information exchange and intelligence development platforms.

Since 2017, GRIDS has networked more than 3,300 law and regulatory officers from 199 countries and territories and supported enforcement actions through the provision of information related to nearly 70,000 cases.

Illicit synthetic drug manufacture and trafficking cannot be addressed without the engagement of relevant industry through public private partnership. INCB supports governments in their dialogue with industry to prevent the illicit manufacture, marketing, movement and monetization of precursors, designer precursors and dangerous synthetic drugs. This also includes the development of tools and initiatives for preventing exploitation of licit web markets and platforms. In this regard, INCB has facilitated initiatives resulting in the dismantling of nearly 3,000 online marketplaces and illicit vendors of synthetic opioids and related precursors.

In closing, I would like to highlight the importance of the Coalition's third priority area, namely promoting public health interventions and services. As a psychiatrist and addiction specialist, I myself have witnessed first-hand the difference this makes to the lives of so many people. INCB emphasizes the importance of a balanced approach to drug control, reducing both supply and demand, and evidence-based approaches that respect human rights. This is essential to achieving the ultimate objective of the drug control conventions, to safeguard the health and welfare of humankind.

To this end, INCB looks forward to contributing to the efforts of the Global Coalition and to continuing cooperation with Governments to ensure the implementation of the conventions.

Thank you.