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## **International cooperation through the drug control conventions has helped people across the globe, says International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) in its Annual Report**

Through working together States are better able to effectively tackle the challenges posed by illicit drugs

VIENNA, 26 February (UN Information Service) – The health and wellbeing of people worldwide have been protected by international cooperation through the framework of the drug control conventions, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) says in its 2025 Annual Report. The collective action of States has played a vital role in lessening the social and economic harms of illicit drugs, the report says.

The President of the International Narcotics Control Board, Professor Sevil Atasoy said: “Tackling the trafficking and misuse of drugs while ensuring the availability of essential medicines has been carried out effectively over the last 60 years through the drug control conventions, a robust framework for working together with almost universal support. Our role is to reinforce the cooperative efforts of countries and territories through our work.”

States have understood that the most effective way to protect their citizens and provide for their medical and scientific needs is through coordinated and universal action. The three international drug control conventions provide a common approach for taking joint measures to address the world drug problem.

### **International success story**

Under the conventions Governments need to provide INCB with information to enable it to effectively monitor the licit cultivation, production, manufacture and consumption of and trade in controlled substances with a view to ensuring their availability for licit purposes while preventing their diversion. Due to the efficiency of this system of estimates and assessments, the level of diversion of licitly produced controlled substances into illicit channels is very low and the diversion of licitly produced psychotropic substances into illicit channels has virtually stopped, which are unheralded international success stories.

The estimates system has proved to be effective because it applies to all states, regardless of their status as parties or non-parties to the conventions.

### **Operational platforms with real-time information sharing**

Real-time, data-driven information-sharing services on shipments of chemical substances likely to be used in illicit drug manufacture are offered to Governments by INCB. These tools help to minimize the risk of diversion to illicit drug manufacture while ensuring the smooth and efficient conduct of international trade in controlled precursors.

Through the PEN platforms developed by INCB, Member States are notified in advance of planned exports of internationally scheduled precursor chemicals or of shipments of precursors that are not under international control but have been used to illicitly manufacture drugs.

The INCB platform PEN Online (Pre-Export Notification Online) was used in March 2025 to prevent the diversion of 3 tons of a fentanyl precursor which was only scheduled in the 1988 Convention in December 2024. If the shipment had not been stopped, it could have been used to illicitly manufacture an estimated 1.4 to 3.3 tons of fentanyl.

The INCB secure online PICS platform boosts real time communication and information sharing between national authorities on incidents concerning illicit laboratories, precursors and related equipment. The International Import and Export Authorization System (I2ES) allows countries to securely exchange electronic import and export authorizations for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, eliminating the need for physical documents which reduces the risk of fraudulent authorizations.

### **Cooperation beyond Governments**

INCB uses its mandates and unique convening powers under the relevant international drug control conventions to enable voluntary international cooperation among Governments, their enforcement agencies including police, customs, postal and regulatory authorities and relevant private sector partners.

For example, the GRIDS programme addresses the trafficking in dangerous substances not scheduled under the conventions. Nearly 200 Governments, territories and international partners such as the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU) use the GRIDS tools and resources to strengthen coordination and enhance the exchange of intelligence.

### **Partnerships with the private sector**

Close cooperation is also needed with private sector manufacturers, importers, exporters, wholesalers and retailers in the chemical industry for an effective precursor control system. More than 100 global companies in 19 different sectors regularly share information on emerging synthetic drugs and chemicals with Governments through the GRIDS programme.

In addition, INCB encourages public-private partnerships with key sectors that are exploited by drug traffickers such as e-commerce, social media, marketing, payment and financial services, freight forwarding and postal and express courier services.

### **Access to pain relief medicines and their affordability is still a problem for low-and middle-income countries**

Despite the overall sufficient supply and stable global stocks of medicines for pain relief requirements as reported by Governments, unequal access to affordable opioid analgesics is a persistent issue. Many countries continue to report difficulties in procuring medications containing morphine.

Increasing the availability and affordability for low- and middle-income countries of psychotropic substances used for several health conditions, including epilepsy, would also benefit global health.

### **Regional threats and trends**

A wide variety of drugs can now be found in **Africa**, with consumption rising. Cocaine traffickers are targeting the region, but the main concern is trafficking in pharmaceutical opioids, including substandard ones.

**In North America**, while the number of synthetic drug overdoses has decreased both in Canada (by 17 per cent) and the United States (by 27 per cent), it is too early to assess whether this is a sustained trend.

The cocaine market in **South America** is the fastest-growing illicit drug market, with increased production leading to a market expansion across Asia and Africa.

In **East and South-East Asia** methamphetamine remains the dominant synthetic drug threat, with record seizures. **South Asia** continues to be the largest consumer market for opioids worldwide, comprising one third of the globally estimated number of people who used opioids. Opium poppy cultivation remained at a historic low in Afghanistan, with 10,200 hectares used for illicit cultivation in 2025.

Cocaine trafficking to **Western and Central Europe** has dramatically increased in recent years as evidenced by the widespread availability of the substance and the total amount seized. The illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs in **Europe** is expanding and the proliferation of new psychoactive substances continues to pose a significant challenge.

Drug trafficking in **Oceania** through Pacific Island States to Australia and New Zealand continued at unprecedented levels. Drug use has surged as a critical public health and social concern across the Pacific, particularly in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Tonga.

### **Working together to deal with the world drug problem**

INCB President Professor Sevil Atasoy said: "Protecting the health of people around the world from the dangers of illicit drugs is a common and shared responsibility. The international drug control system relies on the willingness and capacity of countries to work together."

The Board recognizes the positive steps taken by countries to work together across borders and the progress made by States in implementing the conventions. INCB continues to encourage further international cooperation in combating drug-related challenges to achieve effective national action.

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*INCB is the independent, quasi-judicial body charged with promoting and monitoring Government compliance with the three international drug control conventions: the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. Established by the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, [the thirteen members of the Board](#) are elected in a personal capacity by the Economic and Social Council for terms of five years.*

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