

The therapeutic use of cannabis

1. A growing number of Governments around the world have authorized the use of cannabis for medicinal purposes. Such use is permissible under the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended by the 1972 Protocol, provided a number of conditions are met.
2. As a first step, Governments should estimate the anticipated consumption of cannabis for these purposes and submit an estimate, together with supporting details such as the expected number of persons using cannabis for medicinal purposes, to the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). If there are plans to cultivate the plant, even for scientific trials, the estimate should also include information on the area and the geographical location of such cultivation.
3. In case cannabis is cultivated, Government authorities also have to establish a national cannabis agency, in line with articles 28 and 23 of the 1961 Convention. The overall objective of such an agency is to manage the cultivation of cannabis and the resulting crops. Duties of such an agency include in particular the designation of the areas in which and the plots of land on which the cultivation will be permitted and the establishment of a licensing system.
4. Statistical reports on the consumption, stocks and production of cannabis should be furnished to the INCB annually, information on exports and imports of the drug on a quarterly basis. As with other drugs scheduled under the 1961 Convention, Governments should require export and import authorizations. In addition, it is recommended that Governments only accept imports of cannabis from countries where there is an approved estimate from the INCB.
5. The INCB has urged in the past all Governments that have established programmes for the use of cannabis for medical purposes to ensure that the prescription of cannabis for medical use is performed with competent medical knowledge and supervision and that prescription practice is based on available scientific evidence and consideration of potential side effects. There is a large variety of cannabis-based preparations in various regions of the world, with different dosage forms, concentrations of psychoactive ingredients, for the alleviation of a wide range of symptoms, using different routes of administration. If the symptoms of certain clinical conditions may be relieved by treatment with cannabis derivatives, it is important for countries to carefully establish the therapeutic value of such treatment through the collection of concrete evidence, and to clearly establish the active principles and the dosages to be used.
6. The World Health Organization, the leading international medical authority is currently in the process of reviewing the therapeutic usefulness of cannabis as well as its abuse and dependence liability, public health and social harm potential. The results of its review will become known in due course.

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.

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