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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

In 2021 the international community continued to battle with the relentless coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The pandemic has shown no signs of easing, prolonging the immense suffering of individuals, placing an incredible burden on national health systems, slowing the progress made by States on the Sustainable Development Goals and posing an additional challenge to achieving the objectives of the drug control conventions.

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is supporting Member States throughout this difficult period in addressing the drug control challenges that predated the COVID-19 pandemic alongside those that have arisen as a consequence of the pandemic. Examples of the latter were evident in the 2020 Annual Report where INCB analysed both how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the global supply chain of medicines and the increased demand for controlled medicines to treat patients with COVID-19.



In the 2021 Annual Report, INCB addresses traditional topics such as how it has supported Member States to achieve the goals of the drug control conventions and progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. The availability of controlled medicines used in the treatment of COVID-19 is also discussed in the report.

This year, the thematic chapter in the 2021 Annual Report focuses on illicit financial flows, how they relate to drug trafficking, and their wider impact on society. INCB considered illicit financial flows worthy of special attention and scrutiny because drug trafficking is a highly lucrative industry for organized criminal groups and these groups rely on illicit financial flows to expand and sustain their criminal activities. Illicit financial flows related to drug trafficking have a wide societal impact as they promote bribery, crime, corruption and inequality and lead to political and social instability. Illicit financial flows also divert precious resources needed for sustainable development. As illicit financial flows know no borders or nationality, collective action is required. To support Member States in addressing the problem, INCB presents a set of recommendations.

Cannabis is another topic of interest discussed in the Annual Report. Numerous Member States have decriminalized and depenalized the use of cannabis for non-medical purposes. This has been interpreted by many entities as the legalization of the non-medical use of cannabis. However, the legalization of the non-medical use of cannabis contravenes the drug control conventions. The Annual Report thus examines the important differences in the meaning of terms such as “legalization”, “decriminalization” and “depenalization”.

The role of the Internet in relation to drug use is discussed in the Report, specifically the sale of drugs over the Internet and how social media contribute to drug use. The Annual Report investigates how organized criminal groups exploit the Internet, e-commerce platforms and the darknet to sell drugs. The Annual Report finds that social media not only promote negative behaviours



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related to drug use by glamourizing those behaviours, but also offer users the opportunity to buy cannabis, prescription pain killers and other controlled substances on many platforms. This is of great importance not just because young people are the main users of social media platforms, but also because there is increasing evidence of a link between exposure to social media platforms and drug use. It is therefore imperative that this be addressed not just for users now but for future generations who will come to use social media platforms in everyday life.

INCB remains committed to supporting Member States in implementing the drug control conventions. INCB Learning and the INCB Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme are important examples of that support. Despite the challenges that have arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic, INCB Learning was able to hold three online training sessions for 95 officials between November 2020 and November 2021. The GRIDS Programme was also able to support Member States in numerous ways, including offering training and access to INCB tools. INCB encourages Member States to make use of all its available programmes to meet the objectives of the drug control conventions.

The fundamental aim of the drug control conventions is to safeguard the health and well-being of humanity, and I take great pride in the work that INCB has been able to accomplish to meet this objective in a period when our collective well-being is being threatened. Collective action is required at all levels of society if we are to meet the objectives of the drug control conventions and make progress on the relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

Jagjit Pavadia

President

International Narcotics Control Board