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EMBARGO:

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YOUTH HAVE A RIGHT TO BE PROTECTED FROM DRUG ABUSE AND DEPENDENCE

INCB calls for more efforts to break vicious cycle of social exclusion and drug problems

Helping marginalized communities experiencing drug problems must be a priority, according to the Annual Report for 2011 of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). In communities the world over, in developed and developing countries, drug abuse and drug trafficking has become virtually endemic, part of a vicious cycle involving a wide array of social problems such as violence, organized crime, corruption, unemployment, poor health and poor education. The President of the Board Hamid Ghodse, warned: “It is crucial that the needs of communities experiencing social disintegration are urgently tackled before the tipping point is reached, beyond which effective action becomes impossible.” Fractured communities, with little sense of social cohesion, are more likely to experience multiple problems, including drug abuse, and these problems can contribute to the social disorder and violence that have been seen in cities around the world and which can impact the wider society. Such communities not only place their own residents at risk but can also threaten the stability of the wider community.

In the Report, the Board outlines a number of threats to social cohesion—including social inequality, migration, political and economic transformation, emerging cultures of excess, shifts in traditional values, rapid urbanization, conflict, growth in individualism and consumerism, breakdown in respect for the law, and the local drug economy.

“Although it will be a challenge to meet the needs of the communities experiencing social disintegration and drug problems, the consequences of failure are too high for society and should be avoided at all cost,” said the President of the Board. Recommendations for action put forward include: drug abuse prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services; educational, employment and recreational opportunities at levels similar to the wider society; addressing the signs of financial success of criminals associated with the illicit drug market and promoting positive role models; community rehabilitation; and community policing.

According to the President of the Board, “Youth of these communities must have similar chances to those in the wider society and have a right to be protected from drug abuse and drug dependence”.



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INCB regrets unprecedented step taken by Bolivia (Plurinational State of) to denounce the 1961 Convention on Narcotic Drugs, seeking to legalize the chewing of coca leaf

“Certain aspects of Bolivia’s drug control legislation and policy are in contravention of the international drug control conventions, specifically those which allow the cultivation and consumption of coca leaf for non-medical purposes, in particular, coca leaf chewing,” said the INCB President, noting the Board’s concern. As Bolivia (Plurinational State of) is a major producer of coca leaf, drug policy developments there may have repercussions in other countries.

Coca leaf is defined as a narcotic drug in the 1961 Convention and strict controls are applicable to it. In 2009, the Government of Bolivia made a proposal to remove certain provisions relating to coca leaf from the 1961 Convention. This proposal was rejected by other States parties to the Convention, and did not enter into force.

On 29 June 2011, the Government of Bolivia took the unprecedented step of formally depositing with the Secretary-General an instrument of denunciation of the 1961 Convention taking effect on 1 January 2012. At the same time, the Bolivian Government announced its intention to re-accede to the 1961 Convention with a formal reservation regarding coca leaf.

Mr. Ghodse said: “The Board notes with regret the step taken by the Government of Bolivia, which is contrary to the fundamental object and spirit of the 1961 Convention. The Board believes that if the international community was to adopt an approach whereby States parties use the mechanism of denunciation and re-accession with reservations to overcome problems in the implementation of certain treaty provisions, the integrity of the international drug control system would be undermined”. The Board is committed to an ongoing dialogue with the Government of Bolivia on this issue.

Drug-facilitated crime is on the rise worldwide

“Available evidence on drug-facilitated crime is increasing, globally and in particular in Europe, due to better recognition of the problem by authorities”, said the President of INCB. Psychoactive substances have frequently been used for the commission of sexual assault or other crimes. In such cases, these substances, which are often odourless and tasteless, have been administered covertly to the victims in public places, such as bars or airport lounges, and also in private settings mainly disguised in drinks. According to INCB, this problem has been seen in many regions and countries. Worryingly, there are indications that young men and women have repeatedly been victims of such crimes, mainly with a view to committing sexual assault or forcing them into prostitution.

According to information available to the Board, only one Government requires routine analysis of blood and urine of all rape victims. Scientific research has indicated that drug-facilitated crimes are committed more frequently than generally assumed. Mr. Ghodse said: “Unfortunately, the information received so far remains indicative rather than comprehensive. We are encouraging all



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Governments to take measures to ensure that forensic proof is obtained whenever a drug-facilitated crime is suspected.” The Board has already alerted the international community to the misuse of “date-rape drugs” such as flunitrazepam to commit sexual assault. As a result of Government efforts, the use of this substance for such purposes has diminished. The Board is continuing to monitor the situation and will keep Governments and international bodies informed of developments.

Ordering drugs online: illegal Internet pharmacies target young audiences via social media

Illicit drugs are being ordered online via illegal Internet pharmacies, along with prescription medicines. The enterprises seem to target a young audience: the President of INCB noted that “disturbingly, illegal Internet pharmacies have started to use social media to publicize their websites, which can put large audiences at risk of dangerous products, especially given that the World Health Organization has found that over half of the medicines from illegal Internet pharmacies are counterfeit.”

Key aspects of illegal Internet pharmacies’ activities include smuggling their products to consumers, finding hosting space for their websites and convincing consumers that they are, in fact, legitimate. INCB is calling on Governments to close down illegal Internet pharmacies and to seize substances which have been illicitly ordered on the Internet and smuggled through the mail.

The Board has received information on over 12,000 seizures of internationally controlled substances sent via the mail in 2010, including over 6,500 seizures of internationally controlled licit substances and over 5,500 seizures of drugs of illicit origin. India was identified as the leading country of origin for these substances, accounting for 58 per cent of the substances seized, while the United States, China and Poland were also identified as significant countries of origin.

The Board published “Guidelines for Governments on Preventing the Illegal Sale of Internationally Controlled Substances through the Internet” but, according to a recent survey on the implementation of the Guidelines, further progress is needed. Barriers to implementation that need to be addressed are inadequate legislative or regulatory frameworks, insufficient technology and lack of staff. Action to address the problem continues, with new initiatives being undertaken at international and national levels. “International cooperation in counteracting this issue is essential,” said the INCB President, “For instance, Governments that identify illegal Internet pharmacies operating within other territories should notify the relevant Government; and technical assistance cooperation should be strengthened.”



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Criminals increasingly turning to “designer” chemicals for the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants; shared responsibility as important as ever, says INCB

In its Annual Report for 2011, the Board draws attention to the increasing use by criminals of pre-precursors or “designer” precursors, for the illicit manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants. Due to increased controls, trafficking of scheduled precursor chemicals has become more expensive and difficult. Traffickers have increasingly been forced to seek non-scheduled chemicals to avoid detection.

For example, phenylacetic acid—a precursor under international control—and some of its uncontrolled derivatives now play a far greater role in the manufacture of methamphetamine, particularly in Mexico. More than 183 tons of phenylacetic acid were seized globally in 2010, which if diverted into illicit drug manufacture could have yielded up to 46 tons of pure amphetamines. Over the course of 2011, the Board observed that many countries in Latin America had now expanded their control measures to include derivatives of phenylacetic acid.

Other countries are responding to the use of new precursors in illicit drug manufacture by enacting legislation which will allow them to proactively counter this new trend. For example, Canada broadened its legislation to prohibit the possession of anything that might knowingly be used for the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine and MDMA (“ecstasy”).

The Board has noted that the diversion of acetic anhydride from domestic distribution channels remains very important for illicit heroin manufacture. In addition, potassium permanganate, used in the manufacture of cocaine, is illicitly being produced or substituted with other substances.

The launch of the Board’s Pre-Export Notification (PEN) Online system in 2006 has been instrumental in limiting access to precursor chemicals by criminals. The number of Governments registered to PEN Online has grown to 126, with now more than 20,000 pre-export notifications sent annually. Recognizing the success of the system, the Board urges those countries who have not yet done so to register for PEN Online as soon as possible.