

Foreword

The members of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) were deeply saddened by the passing of Mr. Bernard Leroy in February 2023. A member of the Board since 2015, Mr. Leroy served as Rapporteur of the Board in 2015, 2018 and 2020, and also served in various years as a member of the Board's Standing Committee on Estimates and the Board's Committee on Finance and Administration. Mr. Leroy conducted missions to Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Egypt, Jamaica, Luxembourg and Mauritius on behalf of the Board. He was renowned for his legal expertise and extensive experience at the national and international levels, as well as in civil society, and the Board pays tribute to his valuable contribution to the functioning of the international drug control system.

The year was characterized by emergencies resulting from natural disasters, climate change and conflict, which resulted in acute humanitarian needs – including for medicines containing internationally controlled substances. INCB has been calling upon Governments to ensure the unimpeded international availability of these medicines and raising awareness of the possibility of using simplified control procedures in such situations.

Chapter II, part B, of this annual report expands on this matter and presents an analysis of the global availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes. Data reported to INCB confirm persistent disparities between regions in the consumption of opioid analgesics such as morphine for pain treatment and anaesthesia, with use concentrated in Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Our analysis indicates that this disparity is due to countries not accurately estimating their medical requirements for these substances, many of which are considered by WHO to be essential medicines. Levels of consumption of affordable morphine in regions other than Europe and North America are also insufficient to adequately address medical needs.

To better guide Governments, international and regional organizations and civil society in their efforts to improve the situation, the Board has introduced for each regional section a summary on availability of controlled substances for licit purposes and related reporting. INCB is committed to supporting Member States in improving the availability of controlled substances for medical, scientific and industrial purposes and to this end was pleased to conduct training in 2023 for Central Asian and South American countries through the INCB Learning programme. We hope to count on increased support and participation of Member States to ensure that this capacity-building programme, including e-learning resources, can continue to benefit States in improving treaty implementation and availability of controlled substances for licit purposes.

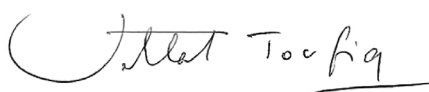
Regarding the illicit supply of drugs, we have witnessed a dramatic decline in illicit opium poppy cultivation and heroin production in Afghanistan. As affected farmers may not have alternative sources of income, alternative livelihoods need to be secured. Governments and the international community will need to closely monitor developments and the response of illicit markets globally, particularly with regard to the provision of evidence-based treatment and rehabilitation services and the serious threat posed to public health by potential substitution with highly potent synthetic opioids.

Trafficking in synthetic drugs and their precursors represents a growing threat to public health globally. During the 138th session of INCB, the Board met with Member States to discuss operational support provided within the frameworks of the INCB precursor control and Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) programmes, details of which are provided in the present annual report and the 2023 report on precursors. To address this threat, new initiatives have been put in place by INCB to support Governments in strengthening partnerships with chemical industry, mapping national chemical industry sectors, preventing diversion and misuse of specialized equipment used in illicit drug manufacture, and supporting public-private partnerships to prevent exploitation of Internet-based and postal/courier services for trafficking in non-medical synthetic opioids and new psychoactive substances.

The role of the Internet, including social media, in drug trafficking and use, is explored in the thematic chapter of the report. The chapter highlights both the challenges and opportunities faced by the international community in the Internet era, focusing on online drug trafficking and difficulties faced by law enforcement authorities due to encryption technologies and jurisdictional issues. The increasing use of social media platforms to market illicit drugs, including to children and adolescents, is highlighted, as are opportunities presented by these platforms, such as for prevention of non-medical use of drugs and awareness-raising. The chapter also sets out how legitimate e-commerce platforms are being exploited for drug trafficking and presents efforts being taken to foster cooperation between Governments and online industries. The Board held consultations with civil society on this topic during its 137th session in May 2023. The chapter concludes with a number of areas for action by Governments, including engagement with the private sector and participation in INCB operational activities. These activities are enabling law enforcement and customs authorities worldwide to share information in real time to prevent highly potent and potentially fatal substances from reaching members of the public.

Safeguarding health and welfare is at the heart of the three international drug control conventions. This report also reviews the functioning of the international drug control system, including INCB support to Member States to improve treaty implementation and promote health and well-being.

The past year saw the resumption of INCB country missions, with the first mission since the COVID-19 pandemic-related travel restrictions taking place in December 2022. We were pleased to work with the Governments of Canada, Cyprus, Kyrgyzstan, the United States and Uruguay, and also to meet with representatives of civil society in those countries. We look forward to continuing this dialogue with Member States, particularly in the context of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs mid-term review of implementation of drug policy commitments and in progressing the Sustainable Development Goals. At the mid-point for the implementation of the Goals and the 2030 Agenda, it is heartbreaking to see how little progress has been made towards Sustainable Development Goal 3 on good health and well-being. I urge Governments and international and regional organizations to apply the recommendations set out in this report, and encourage civil society organizations to be cognizant of these recommendations in planning their work. Each and every member of our global society has the right to the highest attainable standard of health. The evidence-based tools exist. With the political will of Governments and the targeted support of the international community and civil society, the health and well-being of all can be a reality.



Jallal Toufiq
President
International Narcotics Control Board