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DRUG INJECTION ROOMS – NOT IN LINE WITH INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

The explicit or tacit approval of so called drug injection rooms -- or "shooting galleries" -- are seen as a step in the direction of drug legalization, according to the views of the Vienna-based International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). In its just released annual report, the Board points out that the existence and acceptance of facilities, where addicts may inject themselves with illicit substances, not only promotes tolerance towards illegal drug use and trafficking but also runs counter to the provisions of the international drug control treaties. Drug injection rooms have been established in a number of developed countries and are under consideration in others.

The Board, which is mandated to monitor how Governments implement the provisions of the international drug control treaties, examined whether such drug injection rooms are in conformity with the provisions of the treaties and concluded that they are not in line with the international drug control conventions.

In its current 1999 report, the Board stresses its belief that, "any national, state or local authority that permits the establishment and operation of such drug injection rooms [...] also facilitates illicit drug trafficking."

The Board further reminds Governments that they, "have an obligation to combat illicit drug trafficking in all its forms. The United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988, requires parties [...] to establish possession and purchase of drugs for personal (non-medical) consumption as a criminal offence."

The drug control treaties also require Governments to take action against illicit drug trafficking. "By permitting injection rooms, a Government could be considered to be in contravention of the international drug control conventions by facilitating in, aiding and/or abetting the commission of possession and use crimes, as well as other criminal offences including drug trafficking. In this regard, it should be recalled that many decades ago, the drug control conventions were established, inter alia, precisely to eliminate places such as opium dens, where drugs could be abused with impunity."

Instead of establishing injection rooms or similar outlets, the Board "encourages Governments to provide a wide range of treatment facilities including the medically supervised administration of prescription drugs in line with sound medical practice and the international drug control conventions."

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