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**REPORT OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON CHEMICAL SUBSTANCES AND PHARMACEUTICAL
PRODUCTS 2023**

I. BACKGROUND

The Group of Experts on Chemical Substances and Pharmaceutical Products of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (OAS/CICAD) is the hemispheric technical forum for the exchange of information, experiences, and best practices on the control of precursor chemicals used in illicit drug manufacture in the region.

During the seventy-second regular session of CICAD, held in Washington, D.C., in a hybrid format from November 8 to 11, 2022, the Commission elected Ecuador and Brazil to serve as Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, of the aforementioned Group of Experts for 2023.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CICAD Group of Experts on Chemical Substances and Pharmaceutical Products met in Quito, Ecuador, from May 23 to 25, 2023. The meeting was attended by 41 experts from the following 20 member states: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, and Uruguay; and by representatives from the following international organizations: the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).

As established in the schedule of activities ([CHEM/AGE.1/23](#)), the meeting began with a roundtable discussion in which participants had the opportunity to comment on the work undertaken by their agencies to control the illicit manufacture and trafficking of precursor chemicals and other chemical substances.

The main objective of the meeting was to provide a forum for OAS member states to exchange information and best practices on the control of precursor chemicals. To this end, various experiences and reference tools were presented to enhance awareness and strengthen the regulatory and oversight frameworks of the participating states. More specifically, the core issues addressed by the exchange of experiences and best practices were:

- Results of the second-year evaluation for the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM) eighth round on drug supply reduction;
- New trends in the region regarding illicit manufacture of drugs and trafficking of precursors and other chemical substances;
- Strategies to address new trends in trafficking of precursors and other chemical substances;
- Challenges and best practices in the safe handling and proper final disposal of precursors and other chemical substances used in the illicit manufacture of drugs;
- Working session for the drafting of a *Reference Guide for the Development or Updating of Regulations for the Comprehensive Handling and Final Disposal of Seized or Confiscated Chemical Substances*.

The final report of the meeting will be submitted for approval during the seventy-fourth regular session of CICAD, which will be held in a hybrid format in Washington, D.C. from December 11 to 14, 2023.

III. MINUTES

Tuesday, May 23

The following authorities offered **welcome remarks**:

- Raul Francisco Perez Tasigchana, Secretary of the Interinstitutional Committee for the Comprehensive Prevention of the Socioeconomic Phenomenon of Drugs, Ecuador
- Gina Paola Ochoa Santamaria, Representative of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Ecuador
- Angela Crowdy, Assistant Executive Secretary, Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (OAS/CICAD)
- Freddy Ramos, Vice Minister of Public Security, Ecuador

During the **roundtable**, the representatives of the delegations had the opportunity to introduce themselves and share the main lines of action being carried out by their institutions to counter the illicit manufacture and trafficking of precursor chemicals, as well as the challenges encountered in this area.

Presentation: Results of the second-year evaluation for the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM) eighth round on drug supply reduction

- Adrián Noble, Chief, CICAD/MEM

Mr. Noble explained that the MEM is the OAS mechanism to follow up and evaluate the implementation of the OAS's Hemispheric Drug Strategy 2020 and its corresponding Plan of Action (2021-2025). In this regard, the plan of action has 12 objectives on the thematic area "Measures to Control and Counter the Illicit Cultivation, Production, Trafficking and Distribution of Drugs, and to Address their Causes and Consequences". Mr. Noble indicated that these supply reduction measures were evaluated in 2022 and then presented the main results of the second-year evaluation for the Multilateral Evaluation MEM eighth round, focusing on the findings that could be of interest to the members of the Group of Experts. He mentioned that a substantial number of priority actions exceed 90% compliance, such as strengthening control systems to prevent the diversion and trafficking of precursor chemicals. However, additional efforts are needed in the control of new psychoactive substances (NPS) and synthetic drugs. In this regard, 63% of the countries have not made progress in establishing and/or strengthening their early warning systems, while 72% of the countries have not developed innovative regulatory approaches aimed at improving their national controls of NPS or synthetic opioids for non-medical use.

Panel: New trends in the region regarding illicit manufacture of drugs and trafficking of precursors and other chemical substances

- Adriano Otavio Maldaner, Forensic Expert, Federal Police, Brazil

Mr. Maldaner presented on new trends in drug and precursor trafficking in Brazil. The Federal Police is in charge of conducting chemical analysis, forensic reports, investigations, police operations and the administrative control of precursor chemicals. Chemical profiling of cocaine in the State of Pernambuco revealed that Federal Police seizures have an average purity of 93%, while cocaine seized by the State Police, destined for the retail market, has an average purity of 16%. Street cocaine samples often contain caffeine and lidocaine as adulterants. In 2022, an operation named Garapa was carried out, resulting in the seizure of more than 168 tons of boric acid. The use of boric acid as an adulterant has been identified

for the first time in 2017 and, as a result, the substance has been added to the control lists in 2019. Since there have been no detections of boric acid as a drug adulterant in 2023, authorities are evaluating whether to continue its control, considering its multiple legitimate industrial uses. In terms of synthetic drugs, Mr. Maldaner reported that 78% of seizures in 2021 were of classic synthetic drugs, including MDMA, MDA, LSD, GBL, methamphetamine, among others. It is worth noting that in 2021 Brazil experienced a significant increase in methamphetamine seizures, and a decrease in MDMA and MDA seizures. Also, during that year, 32 NPS were identified for the first time in Brazilian territory.

- Daniel Willenbring, Drug Science Specialist, Drug and Chemical Evaluation Section, Diversion Control Division, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), United States

Mr. Willenbring mentioned the required administrative processes to place a chemical substance under control in the United States. The chemical substance must first undergo an initial report, followed by publication of a notice of proposed rulemaking and a comment period to allow for input from industry and other stakeholders. Once that period is over, the rule is published and the chemical substance is placed under control. When granting a registration for an operator, several aspects are considered, such as compliance with laws, effectiveness of control implementation, criminal records related to controlled substances, previous experience in manufacturing and distributing chemical substances, and other relevant factors related to public health and safety. Prior to granting a registration, an inspection of the company is conducted, and background checks are performed on its employees. Chemical operators must maintain movement records, report to the competent authority, implement a know-your-customer policy, and detect and report suspicious transactions. The competent authority has the power to address unauthorized activities through suspension or revocation of registration and the imposition of administrative and criminal penalties. In addition, Mr. Willenbring noted that the United States has implemented extended control for the precursor chemicals 4-anilinopiperidine and 4-piperidone, which includes their derivatives.

- Harry Matz, Acting Deputy Chief, Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section, Criminal Division, Department of Justice, United States

Mr. Matz commented that, during the period from 2018 to 2022, of the total number of cases analyzed by federal, state, and local forensic laboratories, methamphetamine accounted for the largest number of these cases (42%), followed by cocaine (20%) and fentanyl (19%). For methamphetamine, there was a decrease in the number of cases in 2021 compared to 2022, while the number of cocaine cases remained stable. Regarding fentanyl, there has been an upward trend in cases involving this drug since 2015, having almost doubled in number between 2020 and 2022, reaching approximately 100,000 cases. In terms of fentanyl seizures, there were 4.8 tons reported in 2020 and 14.7 tons in 2022, representing an almost threefold increase. On the other hand, the quantities of methamphetamine seized have remained relatively stable, with a total of 178 tons in 2021 and 175 tons in 2022. Mr. Matz also noted that, of all federal offenses in 2022, 31.5% involved drug offenses and most of these were linked to fentanyl. In the U.S. federal system, mandatory minimum sentences are set based on the amount in possession and the type of drug. For example, for 40 grams of fentanyl, sentences of 5 years' imprisonment apply, and for 400 grams, sentences of 10 years' imprisonment apply. In the case of fentanyl analogues, 10 grams is equivalent to 5 years imprisonment and 100 grams to 10 years imprisonment. Fentanyl trafficking cases increased 275% between 2018 and 2022, while fentanyl-analogue cases increased 161.7% during the same period.

- Marzia Deflorian, Marzia Deflorian, Regional Technical Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean, Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) Programme, International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)

Ms. Deflorian mentioned the work done by the GRIDS Program to identify and stop shipments of synthetic opioids. This Program is based on 4 pillars: i. intelligence sharing, ii. capacity building, iii. cooperation, and iv. technology and tools. The INCB's IONICS platform, launched in 2014, enables real-time communication of incidents related to trafficking of NPS and non-controlled dangerous substances. The GRIDS Intelligence tool, launched in 2020, processes the information provided through IONICS for the development of strategic and operational intelligence profiles of NPS trafficking. In IONICS, there have been 3,444 incidents reported in Latin America from 2022 to the present in 2023, with 28% related to synthetic opioids. 67% of the incidents were reported at airports, while 28% were intercepted as postal shipments. Ms. Deflorian highlighted public-private cooperation as a key tool to counteract the illicit commercialization of these substances.

Panel: New trends in the region regarding illicit manufacture of drugs and trafficking of precursors and other chemical substances (cont.)

- Noelia Diaz Martinez, Chief, Department of Control and Pharmacies, Directorate of Registration and Inspection, General Directorate of Intelligence, National Anti-Drug Secretariat (SENAD, by its Spanish acronym), Paraguay

Ms. Diaz Martinez briefly discussed the responsibilities and activities of SENAD's Directorate of Registration and Inspection, highlighting recent intelligence work carried out by the agency. In July 2022, SENAD carried out Operation Psycho, which uncovered a scheme for diverting precursor chemicals, specifically ergotamine, a chemical substance that can be used in the illicit manufacture of LSD, a highly potent synthetic drug with hallucinogenic effects. Through front companies, approximately 4.5 kilograms of ergotamine were diverted between 2020 and 2022. It should be noted that 1 kilogram of ergotamine can produce at least 6 million doses of LSD. Therefore, the diverted amount could have been used to manufacture approximately 33 million doses of LSD, valued at approximately \$660 million. Although ergotamine also has legitimate uses in drug manufacture, the pharmaceutical industry typically uses a maximum of 500 grams per year of the substance. In addition, in November 2022, SENAD conducted an investigation that led to the interception of a package of dietary supplements originating from Miami, Florida. However, the bottles, instead of containing the declared ingredients, held a precursor chemical used in the illicit manufacture of MDMA, a synthetic drug with stimulant effects.

- Antonio L. Mazzitelli, Chief, Precursor Control Section, INCB

Mr. Mazzitelli presented the key aspects of the INCB Precursors Report 2022, published in March 2023. In 2022, three fentanyl precursor chemicals were added to Table I of the 1988 Convention. In the past eight years, ten new substances have been added to the Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention, some of which are designer precursors with no legitimate uses. Additionally, seizures of non-scheduled substances were reported by 67 countries and territories to the INCB, indicating an increase in the use of alternative chemical substances by criminal organizations. As for cocaine precursors, the overall amount of potassium permanganate seized nearly doubled in 2022 compared to 2020. It is relevant to note that six of the sixteen countries reporting seizures of this substance are in Europe, confirming the existence of cocaine recovery and conversion laboratories on that continent. The report also highlights the need for countries

to step up their efforts to monitor and investigate suspicious online precursor sales as a countermeasure to precursor chemical trafficking. Mr. Mazzitelli concluded his presentation by describing the functionalities and new features of the INCB's online tools, such as the PEN Online, PEN Online Light and the Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS), as well as the latest publications related to cooperation with the private sector and laboratory equipment that can be used in illicit drug manufacture.

- Hector Hernando Bernal Contreras, Regional Technical Coordinator, Program for the Secure Treatment and Disposal of Seized Drugs and Chemical Precursors (STAND), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Mr. Bernal Contreras opened his presentation by discussing the evolving dynamics in cocaine cultivation and production. He highlighted how the creation of specialized production enclaves enables criminal organizations to enhance efficiency and boost their potential for producing hydrochloride cocaine. The incorporation of technology in production facilities, along with the recruitment of highly specialized personnel, has allowed these criminal organizations to produce a final product of significantly higher purity. Furthermore, it is common for these groups to use illicit manufacturing methods to obtain chemical substances such as potassium permanganate, sulfuric acid, hydrochloric acid, and ammonia. Notably, many of these substances are manufactured from precursors that, in many cases, are not subject to control. For example, potassium permanganate is obtained from a mineral known as pyrolusite. Additionally, Mr. Bernal Contreras mentioned the innovative camouflage techniques used in cocaine trafficking. These techniques involve combining the cocaine with materials like polystyrene, methacrylate, among others. In these cases, the chemist responsible for the mixture is usually the only individual capable of reversing the process to extract the cocaine from the material used.

Roundtable: Discussion and exchange of information on strategies to address new trends in trafficking of precursors and other chemical substances

During the **roundtable**, moderated by **Mr. Santamaria Lucero**, Chief Specialist, at the Directorate of Control of Scheduled Substances Subject to Supervision of the Ecuador Ministry of the Interior, participants exchanged information on strategies to counter and prevent trafficking of precursors and other chemical substances used in the illicit drug manufacture. Mr. Santamaria Lucero highlighted the innovative tool presented by Ecuador, which employs data modeling based on artificial intelligence. This tool generates alerts and enables targeted inspections to precursor chemicals operators, particularly those with higher levels of risk or suspicious activity.

Wednesday, May 24

Panel: Challenges and best practices in the safe handling and proper final disposal of precursors and other chemical substances used in the illicit manufacture of drugs

- Jose Luis Reyes Zelaya, Chief, Narcotics Unit, National Directorate of Medicines, El Salvador

Mr. Reyes Zelaya mentioned the synthetic drugs and NPS recently identified by El Salvador's National Civil Police (PNC) Controlled Substances Laboratory. These include MDMA found in blotter papers and tablets, 2C-B and 25B-NBOMe in blotter papers. Some tablets contained multiple substances simultaneously, such as cocaine and methamphetamine. These seizures underscore the need for efficient methods for the final disposal of chemical substances and synthetic drugs. El Salvador's best practices include fluid communication at both the inter-institutional and international levels, with ongoing

cooperation on drugs and precursor chemicals matters with regional countries. Additionally, Mr. Reyes Zelaya highlighted El Salvador's active participation in international activities and its support for initiatives to improve final disposal processes. This includes the Resolution "Safe handling and disposal of synthetic drugs, their precursors and other chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs", proposed at the 66th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in March 2023. The Resolution addresses the proper handling and disposal of precursor chemicals, exposure risks for frontline officers, the need for appropriate practical procedures, monitoring measures and safe storage of the material until disposal, along with strengthening technical and regulatory capacities. In this context, Mr. Reyes Zelaya emphasized the potential value of the guide on handling and final disposal of chemical substances, to be prepared by the Group of Experts during this meeting, as a support and incentive for countries in tackling this issue.

- Ernesto Cabezas Fiallo, Specialist, Directorate of Administration of Scheduled Substances Subject to Supervision, Ministry of the Interior, Ecuador

Mr. Cabezas Fiallo commented on the responsibilities of the Undersecretariat for the Administration and Control of Scheduled Substances Subject to Supervision, these include the deposit, storage and destruction of seized drugs and precursor chemicals. In the case of precursors, activities like donation and legal transfer of ownership are also undertaken. In 2023, Ecuador destroyed approximately 70 tons of drugs and 106 tons of precursor chemicals. The country has implemented several best practices for the management and disposal of seized chemical substances, including standard operating procedures. Furthermore, specific protocols have been established for the donation and legal transfer of precursor chemicals, and storage sites for these substances are equipped with safety measures, such as personal protective equipment. Additionally, Ecuador has established technical regulations for transporting, storing, and handling hazardous materials. Regarding destruction methods, Ecuador employs burial, encapsulation, and inertization, which are more efficient for large quantities of seized substances than incineration. The country has also developed a guide for landfill destruction of substances like calcium chloride and sodium bicarbonate.

- Luisa Fernanda Fernandez Valenzuela, Regional Coordinator, Program STAND, UNODC

To conclude the panel, **Ms. Fernandez Valenzuela** addressed the main global cocaine and methamphetamine trafficking flows, based on seizures reported between 2016 and 2020. She also highlighted regional and sub-regional trends, such as the increased demand for chemical substances and precursors for cocaine manufacture, as well as synthetic drugs in some countries. The rise in seizures of chemical substances and drugs poses challenges in their management, storage, and final disposal. These substances pose a risk to the environment, communities, and custodial staff, in addition to the danger of being reintroduced into the illicit market. Ms. Fernandez Valenzuela emphasized the support of the STAND Program in enabling countries to develop and strengthen their capacities for the safe management and disposal of seized drugs and chemical substances. In the context of the Americas, she mentioned three cases of good practices: first, Colombia for its approach to the legal transfer of ownership of seized chemical substances, leading to the decongestion of storage spaces; secondly, Ecuador, for its implementation of partnerships between the public sector and local government bodies, and the application of drug encapsulation, a sustainable and environmentally friendly disposal method; and finally, Guatemala, for having a national final disposal facility that allows the use of five different methods for the destruction of substances.

Working session for the drafting of a Reference Guide for the Development or Updating of Regulations for the Comprehensive Handling and Final Disposal of Seized or Confiscated Chemical Substances

During the working session, delegates provided technical input for the development of a *Reference Guide for the Development or Updating of Regulations for the Comprehensive Handling and Final Disposal of Seized or Confiscated Chemical Substances* ([DOC 12](#)). This document aims to support member states in addressing the challenges associated with the management and disposal of chemical substances seized or confiscated by law enforcement and control agencies. Its goal is to ensure these operations are carried out safely and appropriately. The guide serves as a tool for competent national authorities to strengthen their institutional frameworks and operational work, specifically for the final disposal of seized or confiscated chemical substances. It addresses the main challenges that currently characterize the regional problem. Additionally, this tool will help standardize and implement best practices to enhance procedures related to the handling, storage, transport and final disposal of seized or confiscated chemicals.

Closing Remarks

Closing remarks were delivered by **Mr. Rafael Parada**, Chief of CICAD's Supply Reduction Unit.

Thursday, May 25

On the last day of the meeting, a **technical visit was made** to the permanent storage center for seized drugs and precursor chemicals of Ecuador's Ministry of the Interior. Organized by the Ecuadorian authorities, the visit provided participants with the opportunity to learn about the best practices implemented by the country in the handling and storage of seized drugs and precursor chemicals. During the visit, several best practices were highlighted, such as the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), the implementation of a computer system to ensure traceability and chain of custody of confiscated substances, the creation of internal guidelines for the proper handling and disposal of seized precursors, the availability of safety data sheets at storage sites, as well as the training of personnel in charge of these processes in safety and security, among other measures.