

**Third Global Congress on combating
counterfeiting and piracy
30-31 January 2007**

Statement by Dr. P. Emafo,
President of the International Narcotics Control Board

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates,

Counterfeit medications have been identified as a growing and increasingly worrying problem for a number of years. The World Health Organization estimates that counterfeits could account for more than 10 per cent of the global medicines market. While counterfeits can be found in all world regions, developing countries are disproportionately affected by the problems of counterfeit drugs. It is suspected that about a quarter of medications used in developing countries are counterfeit, with even higher levels of up to 50 per cent in some countries. The International Narcotics Control Board examines the role of counterfeit drugs in its most recent annual report which will be released to the public on 1 March.

In addition to violating copyright provisions and constituting an economic crime, counterfeit medicines pose serious health risks to their users and may even result in their death. Trafficking in counterfeit drugs should therefore be considered a potentially life-threatening crime.

The case of counterfeit medicines that contain narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances deserves special attention. As with other counterfeit medicines, use of counterfeit drugs poses significant risks to the user because they may contain ingredients that are either inactive or have a dangerously low or high content of active ingredients. The result of their use can entail therapeutic failure, drug resistance and, in the worst case, death. Counterfeit narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances constitute an increased risk as they are within the group of medications that should be used exclusively under medical guidance.

Narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances also deserve special attention because of their addictive properties. Due to their abuse potential, these drugs are tightly controlled and difficult to obtain. However, this also means that they become more attractive for potential counterfeiters as they will reap a higher price than most other medications.

All in all, traffickers in counterfeit narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances are in an enviable situation: Not only is the demand for these substances high, the dangers of being caught are low as users of illicit drugs are not likely to denounce the providers of counterfeits. It is therefore not surprising that providing counterfeit drugs to the illicit market is a growing trade and in the case of drugs in high demand in illicit markets, such counterfeit drugs are manufactured exclusively for the purpose of drug abuse.

An example is the illicit market for flunitrazepam (often marketed as Rohypnol), a drug that has gained notoriety as “date-rape” drug. In Scandinavian countries, the demand for this drug used to be met by diverting the substance from the legal trade. However, after methods of diversion had been uncovered and counteracted effectively, counterfeits are now manufactured and trafficked to the countries concerned. A similar counterfeit industry has developed for fenetylline (known as Captagon) which is illegally manufactured in South-East Europe and trafficked to countries on the Arabian peninsula.

Over the past years, the Board has witnessed the rise in the abuse of counterfeit narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, several of them with lethal consequences for their users. The clandestine manufacture of counterfeit fentanyl and oxycodone, both potent narcotic drugs, has resulted in numerous deaths in the United States and Europe.

Counterfeiting medications is a lucrative criminal activity and the proportion of counterfeit medications, including narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, is rising. According to the Centre for Medicines in the Public Interest in the United States, counterfeit drug sales will reach US\$ 75 billion globally in 2010, an increase of more than 90% from 2005.

A major factor in the increasing distribution of counterfeit drugs has been the facilitation of contact between suppliers and consumers through the Internet, which offers almost limitless marketing opportunities for counterfeit drugs. Illegally operating Internet pharmacies are among the main suppliers of counterfeits and their number continues to rise and has long surpassed the number of licensed and accredited Internet pharmacies. Counterfeit drugs are also sent through postal and courier services.

Mr Chairman,

Clandestine manufacture and trafficking is facilitated by weak drug regulations and insufficient control mechanisms. Insufficient weight attributed to such crimes by legislation and the judiciary limits the risk for potential offenders. However, if sanctions are not commensurate to the enormous profits that are made, they do not act as a deterrent and consequently increase the appeal to engage in such illicit activities.

Effective action also requires competent national drug regulatory authorities with a sustained resource base that will ensure control and regular inspection of entities involved in the manufacture, trade and distribution of pharmaceuticals.

These actions at the national level need to be complemented by strengthened concerted international preventive and investigative efforts. Just like counterfeiters, all those affected by counterfeit drugs need to globalize their activities and cooperate effectively. This includes drug regulatory authorities, law enforcement agencies, manufacturers of pharmaceuticals, professional associations of medical practitioners and pharmacists, as well as consumer protection groups. Without action at all levels and cooperation of all concerned, we stand no chance to overcome this problem.

The International Narcotics Control Board has repeatedly called the attention of the international community to these problems, particularly on the role of the Internet in the illegal supply of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Currently, the Board is engaged in developing guidelines for governments to counteract the spread of illegally operating Internet pharmacies. The Board will continue to alert countries with regard to specific cases and developments and stands ready to support and facilitate international cooperation efforts.

Thank you for your attention.