

SUMMARY RECORD (PARTIAL) II/ OF THE
SEVEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SEVENTH MEETING

held on Wednesday, 26 February 1975, at 2.50 p.m.

Chairman:

Mr. JASJIT SINGH

India

POPPY CULTIVATION UNDER PROPERLY CONTROLLED CONDITIONS SO AS TO MEET THE WORLD'S REQUIREMENTS OF OPIUM FOR MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PURPOSES (agenda item 11)
(concluded) (E/CN.7/571, E/CN.7/572 and Add.1, E/INCJ/25)

Dr. SMITH (Canada) said that, as he had pointed out at the Commission's third special session, what was lacking was a proper economic supply-demand model of licit opium and morphine production, which might eventually be extended to cover illicit supply and demand. Such models were needed not only by INCB but also by the international community as a whole, in order to evaluate the effects of changes in production of opium, morphine and their derivatives and substitutes. The Board's estimates were adequate up to a certain point, but it was also necessary to establish total supply-demand equations, even if only rough estimates could be made. Such a model would be particularly important for the evaluation of the effects of illicit demand reduction due to prevention and treatment. He requested that his suggestion should appear in the report of the Commission.

Dr. REXED (Sweden) said he wished to report the results of some genetic work on the opium poppy that was currently in progress in his country. It might be surprising that Sweden took an interest in the cultivation of the opium poppy, but the plant produced edible oil that had some excellent qualities. During the emergency period of the Second World War, no less than 2,300 hectares in Sweden had been under poppy plant cultivation for that purpose. Since the end of the war, interest had waned and edible oil had been obtained from other plants but, in the last two years, commercial interests had renewed research on the poppy with an eye to its value as an oil-producing plant. Experiments in breeding selection had been carried out by the Swedish Seed Association Laboratory and some interesting results were now emerging. The National Board of Health and Welfare had, for obvious reasons, maintained close contact with and control over the experiments.

The Laboratory had selected lines from a commercial Swedish variety, and had endeavoured to lessen the morphine content of the opium which, in the case of one line, had been reduced to 1-2 per cent. That was less than 10 per cent of the average morphine content of opium. He also mentioned in passing that some high-yielding lines had been found which produced as much as a 25 per cent morphine content in the opium. The low-morphine line appeared to be fairly stable, and research was continuing; the plant was grown in an area of some 4 hectares. One

II/ The rest of the meeting is not covered in the summary record.

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remarkable by-product of the research was that, from the low-morphine line, another line had suddenly emerged that produced a high content of thebaine (about 24 per cent), while having a morphine content of less than 1 per cent. That line was of interest to the geneticists who were currently cultivating it in a greenhouse in order to follow its development.

Commercial research would undoubtedly continue, since the use of the opium poppy for oil production would be very valuable to Sweden, which was currently importing much edible oil, particularly for margarine production.

There were several interesting aspects to that work from the Commission's point of view. In the first place, the results of the research might help the United Nations Laboratory in its efforts to select high-yield varieties. The second aspect was the prospect of discovering some high-yield thebaine lines. Possibly the most interesting aspect, however, was the fact that, if the Swedish experiments led to the commercial agricultural cultivation of low-yield morphine lines, they might constitute very useful substitute crops for farmers currently growing the opium poppy for morphine production.

Mr. CAPASSO (Observer for Italy), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said that the Commission should take account of the fact that the demand for codeine for medical purposes was increasing steadily in many countries, including Italy. Although long-term scientific research might produce valuable results, there was also a need for a short-term solution to the codeine shortage. His delegation believed that, if a producing country could guarantee an optimum control over poppy cultivation, there was no need for the Commission to limit its choice between the various courses of action open to it to meet the demand for codeine. The authorities of a producing country should be allowed either to increase the size of cultivated areas or introduce new cultivation methods that would produce higher yields. In making his comments on the item under consideration, he had taken account of the effectiveness of the controls introduced by the Indian Government over the production of the opium poppy.

Mr. LOGARAS (Observer for Greece), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, drew attention to the United States representative's observation (786th meeting) that there was no hope of the United States chemical industry being able to produce in the near future non-addictive synthetic substances to replace natural narcotic drugs. He himself was not surprised by that statement, since he still maintained that attempts to develop strong analgesic drugs not involving the danger of dependence were doomed to failure. The history of pethidine was instructive in that respect.

There were, of course, several patterns of dependence. The opiates were not intrinsically very toxic but the dependence they produced truly enslaved the individual, in view of the fact that the powerful reinforcement experienced with intravenous opiates led inexorably to a compulsive pattern of addiction.

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A number of representatives had expressed concern regarding the shortage of morphine. His delegation did not share that concern, since it felt that morphine requirements could easily be met by the use of pethidine and other synthetic derivatives. His country had ceased to produce opium as from January 1972, and the cultivation of the opium poppy had been prohibited since that date.

Unfortunately, Greece was still in the very difficult position of a transit country, and his Government had to spend a considerable proportion of its limited resources, without any financial aid from abroad, to control the illicit traffic in drugs produced in other countries. Consequently, his delegation shared the hope expressed by many previous speakers that research into Papaver bracteatum would, in due course, succeed in solving the problem of codeine requirements.

Mrs. KOTCHKOVA (Observer for Bulgaria), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said that cultivation of the opium poppy had, in the past, been widespread in her country but was now diminishing rapidly. The main reason for that phenomenon was the low profitability of the crop as compared with intensive crops such as tobacco and cotton. As a result, the country's opiate requirements (particularly codeine) were largely covered by imports and, in recent years, it had been difficult to obtain the quantities needed. Her Government had now initiated research into the possibility of increasing the cultivation of the opium poppy within the country. Control was not a serious problem in Bulgaria, since the opium poppy was cultivated by State or co-operative agricultural undertakings.

The scientific research carried out in her country and summarized in an article published in the Bulletin on Narcotics in 1973 ^{12/} had been concentrated on finding varieties which were resistant to cold and which had a short growth period. It had culminated in the development of the new poppy varieties S-180, S-230 and P-360. In Bulgarian climatic conditions, those species produced a high yield and offered greater resistance to cold than any other of the varieties tested. The preliminary results were very encouraging, and the research, which was still in an early stage, would continue.

Mr. FRYIES VALLASEDA (Observer for Spain), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said that the chief purpose of the licit cultivation of the opium poppy was to meet codeine requirements, since codeine and its salts were widely used in pharmaceuticals. Consequently, it appeared necessary for adequate steps to be taken to increase production of the opium poppy, and at the same time to ensure adequate control.

In the short term, the obvious solution was to increase the production of poppy straw but, in the longer term, research on other varieties, particularly Papaver bracteatum, should produce results. His country, in which soil and climatic conditions were particularly suitable for experimenting with such varieties, was conducting research along those lines.

^{12/} Ibid.

Mr. JOHNSON-DAGBENYIKIN (Togo) said it was a notable fact that a large proportion of the Commission's resolutions dealt with the need to control, or eradicate, the cultivation of the opium poppy, cannabis plant or coca bush but that there had been no attempt to control the licit manufacture of psychotropic substances. That was no coincidence, since the crops he had mentioned were cultivated almost entirely in the developing countries, while the psychotropic substances were manufactured in the developed countries.

The fact that such production was uncontrolled had most unfortunate effects on many developing countries, since the surplus production of psychotropic substances was channelled towards them, accompanied by unprincipled advertising calculated to increase their consumption of such substances.

In that connexion, it should not be forgotten that, under the 1961 Convention, INCB had the function of limiting the cultivation, production, manufacture, international trade in and use of drugs to the amount required for medical and scientific purposes (E/INCB/25, para.137). It was high time that the 1961 Convention was implemented in respect of manufacture.

Dr. BERTSCHINGER (Switzerland) said that his delegation fully agreed with the comments made by the United States representative concerning the difficulties encountered in obtaining supplies of opium alkaloids in 1974. Switzerland had been able to obtain only half the quantity of opium it had notified to the Board as constituting its requirements for the year. The situation regarding 1975 appeared no better, and it was clear that that state of affairs could not be allowed to continue.

It was regrettable that the INCB report for 1974 had devoted only two pages to the question of opium supplies, whereas in the report for 1973 (E/INCB/21 and Corr.1 13/) 15 pages had been devoted to the subject. His delegation hoped that, as proposed by the Indian representative (786th meeting), a discussion could be held between the producing and the manufacturing countries on the subject of those raw materials. It also hoped that future INCB reports would devote rather more space to the subject. In that connexion, he wished to remind the Commission of article 8 of the 1961 Single Convention, which authorized the Commission to call the attention of the Board to any matters which might be relevant to the functions of the Board. For that matter, the report for 1974 itself mentioned in paragraph 137 the fact that the Board's functions included ensuring the availability of drugs for medical and scientific purposes.

It was certain that, for many years to come, codeine would not be replaced by any other drug, since it was used not only as a minor analgesic but also as an anti-tussive, and it would be extremely difficult to find another substance combining the two qualities without any disadvantages. Codeine was very rarely abused and that fact also rendered it indispensable as a drug.

Poppy straw was hardly likely to appear in illicit traffic in view of its enormous bulk which also made it extremely difficult to transport in licit traffic. The solution might be to process the straw on the spot into a more readily transportable concentrate.

Mr. ARIL (Turkey) said that his Government's decision to resume poppy cultivation stemmed not only from humanitarian reasons but also from the need to fill the gap between supply and demand. His Government was most concerned to avoid the risks of diversion. The new method of poppy straw production was therefore being introduced, and that called for major efforts by his country's authorities. Turkey would thus be able to produce unincised poppy straw for export and also for processing into alkaloids in the very near future at a new factory that was to be built. His Government would also co-operate with the United Nations Laboratory in efforts to maximize the yield of existing varieties and to develop higher-yielding varieties of Papaver somniferum. In view of the progress that had been achieved in poppy research projects being carried out by the United Nations Laboratory, he hoped that priority would continue to be granted to its work.

The CHAIRMAN said there was no doubt that a gap existed between demand and supply as far as codeine was concerned, and the recommendation contained in the report of ILCB for 1974, which contained a relatively short chapter on the supply of raw materials for the licit manufacture of opiates, was effectively being endorsed by the Commission. In that connexion, he referred to the estimates of world production for 1975, which should be kept in mind.

Many representatives had repeatedly referred to the need to establish controls over licit production. In his view, however, that concern was of less importance than the problems arising from illicit cultivation, which was the main problem. Licit cultivation could be perfectly properly controlled by the producer countries, which were not daunted by their responsibility for ensuring that there were no diversions. No one could say when licit opium supplies might become surplus to over-all demand, and at present there was no reduction in demand pressure. A possible excess production of licit opium should not be a matter of serious concern at present, and the Commission should take note of the fact that the producing countries were well aware of their duty to ensure that proper controls existed.

Summarizing the views that had been expressed on how the present shortage might be overcome, he said that six points had emerged from the debate. Firstly, realistic estimates of the requirements of opium or poppy straw should be drawn up by the pharmaceutical manufacturers in each country and, so as to ensure that no exaggerated requirements were submitted, they should be endorsed by the Governments concerned. Second, exporters of opium or poppy straw should plan their production on the basis of those estimates and extend areas of cultivation only in a manner compatible with proper controls and safeguards. Third, countries manufacturing technical morphine should expand production as much as possible. Fourth, countries which lanced poppy straw for opium might direct their efforts towards obtaining technical morphine even from lanced straw. Fifth, there should be vigorous effort to obtain codeine from Papaver bracteatum. Sixth, there should

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be active pursuit of further progress, in which connexion the changed circumstances in Turkey should be noted. Moreover, the United States Government would, in 1975, release from its strategic stockpile a certain quantity of opium for the United States pharmaceutical industry. In conclusion, he felt that if all the foregoing steps were taken, the position might improve.

Mr. VAILLE (France) agreed with the Chairman's summary and, with reference to the Chairman's third point, suggested that thebaine should be included in addition to morphine.

Dr. MARTENS (Director, Division of Narcotic Drugs), replying to a point raised by the representative of India at the 786th meeting, said that the press release of 8 October 1974 had indeed been issued by the Secretariat, although the reference to the decision taken by the Government of Turkey was clearly a factual statement rather than an expression of its opinion.

The CHAIRMAN said it would be noted that the Secretariat should not express opinions on controversial issues.

Mr. ABU KHADRA (Observer for Kuwait), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, asked whether it was really possible to equate the amount of land to be allocated to poppy cultivation with the estimates of possible demand, even allowing for the increased demand for codeine and morphine for medical purposes.

Mr. DITTERT (Secretary, International Narcotics Control Board) said that the Board would consider the point raised by the observer for Kuwait at its next session.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 4 p.m.