

**Statement by Mr. John Curran, T.D.,
Minister of State at the Department of
Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs**

Ireland

**at the High Level Segment of the
52nd Session of the
Commission on Narcotic Drugs**

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I would like to begin by congratulating you, Your Excellency, for chairing the High Level Segment of the 52nd Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and, with our European Union colleagues, Ireland assures you of our full cooperation. I wish to associate myself with the statement delivered by the Czech Republic as Presidency of the European Union.

I very much welcome the agreed Political Declaration. This Declaration provides a framework within which we can drive forward in our combined efforts to tackle the global drugs problem. The Political Declaration, in tandem with the EU Drugs Action Plan 2009-2012 and National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016 in Ireland, will facilitate a robust response to illicit drug use in my country.

Illicit drug use is a complex and difficult problem that stretches across international boundaries and is truly global in nature. Through our commitment to the Political Declaration, to co-operation in our response to drugs and to sharing information of our experiences, we are increasing the potential for effective interventions within and beyond individual jurisdictions. As a major contributor to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and as a strong advocate of system-wide coherence within the UN family, Ireland is ensuring that it plays its role in combating the global drugs problem.

The world drug problem has evolved since the 1998 UN General Assembly Special Session when the international community adopted the last Political Declaration and Action Plans. We welcomed the increased focus on drug

demand reduction at that time, but overall it is accepted that the ambitious goals set then have not proved to be achievable. It is now time to look forward and to tackle the drugs problem with renewed vigour.

In Ireland we are currently finalising our National Drugs Strategy for the period 2009-2016. The Strategy will fully take into account the EU Action Plan on Drugs 2009-2012, and demand reduction and supply reduction will continue to be major aims.

In relation to supply reduction, our Police and Customs personnel will continue to work together to reduce the amount of illicit drugs entering our country, and circulating within it. Obviously, given the international aspects of this work, it is carried out in a spirit of co-operation and help to the mutual benefit of Ireland and other countries. Indeed, Ireland is one of the seven EU countries (Ireland, Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, UK & Netherlands) involved in the establishment of the Maritime Analysis and Operational Centre – Narcotics in Lisbon. This centre was set up to co-ordinate a real effort to counter the movement of cocaine, in particular, into Europe. We have seen the direct results of this international co-operation, particularly through a large seizure of cocaine that was made off the south coast of Ireland towards the end of last year.

Turning to demand reduction, our Strategy will continue to incorporate prevention, treatment (including harm reduction and prison-based initiatives) as well as rehabilitation measures.

The further development of prevention measures aimed primarily at those most at risk of becoming involved in illegal drug usage, and at the younger adult population generally, is crucial to any new Strategy. Along with this, it will be necessary to develop awareness among the general population with

respect to drugs, including problem alcohol use and the misuse of prescription drugs.

There has been significant progress in the range and quality of treatment services provided in Ireland since 1998. The numbers on methadone treatment for heroin addiction has increased substantially to approximately 8,600 people, approximately 60% of our opiate users. At the same time we need to be much more proactive in exploring ways towards helping people to exit successfully from opiate substitution treatment and this is something that I intend to pursue. When a person enters drug treatment they should have a realistic prospect of becoming drug free. Overall, I believe that the future development of services must be based on having in place a system that guarantees a continuum of care for people presenting for treatment and rehabilitation. The development of integrated service provisions and enhanced inter-agency cooperation is fundamental to achieving successful outcomes. We must aim to empower clients to access the social, economic and cultural benefits of life in line with their needs and aspirations.

Other key areas that merit renewed focus include:

- initiatives around the prevention and treatment of blood borne viruses, particularly HEP C;
- a continued focus on treatment services in prisons, and a continuum of care for people on release;
- the further expansion of family support services; and

- control of Headshops – outlets selling a range of mind-altering substances. Issues arising here include the legality of products on sale, the health risks arising, the seeming acceptability of those products on sale in prominent locations and the probability that these outlets become gateways to wider illicit drug use for some of their customers.

In my work as a politician I am very much aware of the devastating impact that a person's drug use can have on his or her family and friends. I would stress in particular the need for a greater focus on helping the families of drug users. They need help in their struggle to accept the problem that has arisen in their families, to cope with this problem and, given the necessary support, to fulfill a role in the meaningful re-engagement of their loved ones back into society.

I am determined to tackle the issue of problem substance use in Ireland over the coming years. This will require a National Drugs Strategy that has relevant targets that are demanding but achievable, with the optimum structures in place to facilitate their implementation. Working with my colleague Ministers, with all Government Departments and Agencies and across civil society at national level, and with the EU and the wider international community beyond, I am confident that real strides forward can be made to the benefit of all of us.

Thank you.

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