

**Statement BE Day II : *Ensuring the availability of and access to controlled substances exclusively for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their diversion***

Madam Chair,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Belgium aligns itself with the statement delivered by Austria on behalf of the EU and its Member States.

Given the lack of access to and availability of controlled substances in many parts of the world, Belgium highly values the special focus on ensuring the availability of and access to controlled substances exclusively for medical and scientific purposes in the preparations for the Ministerial segment of the 62nd CND.

The data on inadequate access have been mentioned this morning and are alarming. In this context, Belgium is very pleased that the UNGASS Outcome Document of 2016 on the world drug problem brought us an important legacy : a joint commitment and specific operational recommendations to address this problem.

Ladies and gentleman, we would briefly like to focus on **the importance of a comprehensive and integrated healthcare system that features well-trained, quality healthcare professionals**. Belgium has financed a pilot in the Democratic Republic of Congo through the UNODC-WHO-UICC global program on increasing access to controlled substances. This project started in 2016 and ended in July this year. The main objective of the project was to build a **well-performing and quality healthcare workforce** that is responsive to the needs of the patient, allowing for the best possible health outcomes. Key leaders and decision makers in the DRC expressed the need for and participated in the strategy going forth with the implementation of the pilot. The formal participation of said key leaders will allow them to continue to take the steps to institutionalize and sustain a fully integrated initiative within the healthcare system, with increased access to controlled drugs for medical purposes for patients suffering in pain.

In Belgium we invest substantially in providing **evidence based information and support to health care professionals through group training, e-learning, technical documents, etcetera**. We are convinced that **expert knowledge and adequate skills in health care professionals are key for delivering quality care**. That is why the project in the DRC also had a clear focus on capacity building for health care professionals. With the technical support of UNODC and the expert knowledge of a NGO, called Pallia Familli, a science based training module has been developed and 30 health care professionals have been trained. Among these professionals were doctors, nurses, social workers and public servants from the health Ministry. This training did not only include diagnostics, prescription guidelines, etcetera, but also methodologies to implement pain relief policies in their own care settings. Moreover, the curricula of the training have been approved by the Ministry of Health of the DRC. This way, the training did not only have a direct impact on the knowledge of the trainees, but is a basis for more and sustainable work in this area.

Secondly a 'week without pain' campaign was launched through several Congolese media channels to raise awareness on the issue among health care professionals. This campaign was combined with focus group sessions conducted with multiple stakeholders, such as head of education institutions. The focus groups opened up discussions on attitudes of health professionals related to managing pain in patients, the provision of quality healthcare including the use of pain medication, ways to compassionately provide information to patients and families, and finally the importance of ongoing professional continuing education. The rich discussions of the focus groups not only allowed for open

dialogue but also engaged yet another layer of healthcare professionals in the critical issues related to increasing access to controlled medicines used in the relief of pain.

The support from the Ministry, and most importantly, the network and recognition of the civil society organization Pallia Familli has shown to be key for implementation of the project.

Mr. Chair, I will briefly underline also the importance of capacity building among authorities on implementing the provisions of the UN drug control conventions, such as on adequate estimates and assess the need for controlled substances. In this area, Belgium, together with France, has provided funding to INCB for its learning project. We hope this training will also have positive outcomes and sustainable results.

Our experience has confirmed that ensuring adequate availability and access requires a thorough engagement from all relevant stakeholders : policy makers, the scientific community, civil society, industry, patients and their families. We stress the importance of including patients and their families. Patients' well-being is what it is all about. Patients and their families can identify and address stigma and barriers from a community perspective, and can play a pivotal role in raising awareness among policy makers and health care providers.

To conclude, Madam Chair, **we would like to call upon the international community, the member states, health care professionals, and all other actors involved to substantially scale up the efforts to provide adequate access to and availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, and to pain medication in particular. In this context, Belgium organizes a side event on access to pain medication, supported by Australia, Panama, UNODC, WHO and INCB tomorrow during the UN General Assembly in NY.**

**We consider these medications** essential to provide quality care, avoid human suffering and improve the quality of life of patients in need.

Thank you.