

**Statement of the Netherlands – 4<sup>th</sup> CND Intersessional meeting – 22 October 2018**

Thank you madam chair,

As is well-known, the Netherlands always advocates in this forum a pragmatic and balanced approach with regard to the illicit drug problem. For us health is at the center of such an approach. At the same time we invest in law enforcement. In the Netherlands we take strong action against criminal groups, in order to reduce the supply of illicit drugs. For instance by dismantling illegal cannabis plantations and production sites for synthetic drugs.

Also, we face a serious problem in the harbour of Rotterdam where shiploads of cocaine enter the European Union. The Belgian harbour of Antwerp faces the same problem. So that is why our police forces work closely together and with Europol to dismantle this form of organized crime. It is an uphill battle because demand for cocaine in the EU is growing and prices are low as we have seen in the World Drug Report 2018.

For us, an integral approach is crucial in combating organized crime. This means that police, prosecution, tax services and local governments work closely together, share information and use all available measures in order to disrupt the criminal industry as effectively as possible.

In recent years, strides have been made in combating new trends in the illicit drug trade, such as illegal marketplaces on the so-called dark web and the use of post and parcel services. In this last respect, our police and customs services are closely cooperating with their partner organisations across the world.

Our current government is strengthening this integral approach in combating organized crime by further investing in both regional and national capacity, and by improving legislation pertaining to both drug precursors and new psychoactive substances.

Another part of our approach is related to our so called coffeeshops, where since the 1970's cannabis is being sold under strict conditions, with the aim of separating the cannabis market from the markets of more harmful drugs such as heroin and cocaine.

Let me be clear: cannabis for recreational use is illegal in the Netherlands under our Opium Act. However, the sale and purchase of small amounts of cannabis in coffeeshops for personal use is tolerated. This pragmatic policy of separating markets has brought us positive health and public order results. The problematic

use of highly addictive drugs (such as crack, heroin, crystal meth) for example is very low in our country.

In recent years however, local governments signaled that the current policy, where the small sale at the so called "front door" of the coffeeshop is tolerated, and the supply at the back door is prohibited, caused problems in their municipalities related to public safety, public order and law enforcement.

Therefore, the government decided to initiate a small scale experiment with a controlled cannabis supply chain to coffeeshops. The aim of this experiment is to examine whether it is possible to achieve a quality-controlled, decriminalized supply of cannabis to coffee shops and to monitor what the effects of this would be on public health and safety, crime and antisocial behavior.

Please allow me to explain this experiment in some more detail:

- The experiment is designed with the assistance of an independent advisory committee of scientists and experts in the field of law enforcement and public health.
- It will last for 4 years and will take place in 6 to 10 large and medium-sized municipalities.
- The government has made a draft bill as a first step for the experiment which describes the purpose and duration of the experiment. The bill is necessary to allow an exemption from the Dutch Opium law for the participating municipalities. The government has sent this draft bill to parliament earlier this year.
- The experiment will be closely monitored and after four years will result in an independent scientific evaluation. It is important to state that the extent and duration of the experiment will have a legal base in the mentioned bill. The experiment will not lead to a point of no return. It is reversible. The results of this evaluation will be the basis for the government to decide on the follow up of the experiment.
- It is important to note that both in extent and duration the deviation of international regulations will be small: the experiment has a small scale of six to ten large and medium-sized municipalities and the duration is limited to four years.
- And as said there will be a scientific based evaluation. We expect that with this experiment we will gain valuable new scientific insights.
- In this light, given the serious problems that local authorities are facing with public safety and order at this moment and given the purpose to find solutions for these problems, the Dutch government considers the experiment to be justifiable. It is an adequate and proportionate way to gain new insights.

- The Dutch government will be transparent about the progress and results of the experiment. We therefore already informed INCB of this policy approach at an early time and we take this opportunity to inform the CND members. Therefore, all relevant documents will be translated into English and we will share relevant documentation during the experiment.

From this short oversight you can see that the Netherlands is looking for both innovative and effective ways to fight organized drug crime. It is our hope that we can share such experience with other countries and thus find evidence based solutions that arguably diminish harm caused by drug trafficking.

I thank you.