

**Opening Statement of the
Portuguese Secretary of State Assistant and of Health,
Prof. Fernando Araújo,
at the 60th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
*Vienna, 13th March 2017***

Dear Madame Chair,

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to congratulate you, honourable Ambassador, on your election as Chair of this Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and I would like to assure you our full cooperation in ensuring the success of our work.

It is for me a great honour to address the Commission in its sixtieth anniversary and to underline that Portugal associates itself with the statement made by the European Union.

Madame Chair, it is with great pleasure that we have seen a reorientation in the international drugs policy, since the early 20th century, from punitive enforcement to a public health and human rights approach that enhance the international, national and local response to the world drug problem.

Portugal considers the adoption of the UNGASS 2016 outcome document a milestone in the international drug policy development, that it should be the basis of a new approach towards the global drug problem.

Indeed, the seven thematic chapters of the outcome document provide a framework that will allow us to move forward a balanced and integrated approach. We do believe that it is of utmost importance that we focus our efforts in the effective implementation of the operational recommendations that we all agreed upon, in New York, in April 2016.

The inclusion of a chapter on human rights in the outcome document opens an opportunity and encourages human rights mechanisms to play a much more assertive role in the current drug policies.

Portugal firmly believes that our efforts in addressing the world drug problem should follow a human rights based approach. In that way, it is of major importance to implement at national level the recommendations on this issue of the outcome document and consolidated that recommendations in future discussions on international drugs policy.

Portugal welcomes that the UNGASS outcome document calls for the principle of proportionality in sentencing and alternatives to coercive sanctions for drug law offences and drug-related crime, which means, among other things, the non-imposition of the death penalty for any kind of offences, including for drug related offences.



It is our belief that the death penalty is a violation of the basic human right to life and it is a disproportionate and largely counterproductive instrument. Portugal had a pioneering role in the abolition of the death penalty. In that way, I would like to underline our country's opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances, including for drug-related offences. We therefore call on all countries that retain the capital punishment, to establish an immediate official moratorium, with a view to its permanent abolition.

Still on the topic of proportionality and alternatives to coercive sanctions, allow me to mention, Madame Chair, that Portugal introduced a model of decriminalization at the beginning of this century as part of a broader approach designed to discourage drug use and promote measures directed to public health concerns. Drug use and possession for use remain illegal, although are no longer a criminal offence.

If someone is not violent and not causing direct harm to others, we believe that prison is a disproportionate and ineffective way to address drug use, in particular because it often initiates or reinforces a negative cycle of marginalization.

Madame Chair, indeed, decriminalization created a legal framework for implementing policies to reduce the harm caused by drug consumption and to socially reintegrate drug dependent persons, developing targeted and cost-effective interventions. We do believe that the availability and access to evidence-based risk and harm reduction measures is a key factor of our policy, as they have proven effective in improving the health and well-being of drug users and their families.

Some positive impacts of these measures are the decreasing trend in the total number of notifications of HIV and AIDS cases associated with drug use since the beginning of the century, as evidenced by the decrease in injecting drug use.

Madame Chair, we welcome the reference made to some risk and harm reduction measures in the UNGASS outcome document and we would encourage other Member States to consider this recommendation as a priority when implementing this document.

Portugal firmly believes that the UNGASS outcome document will remain the basis for the current international drugs policy discussion. In that way, it is important to consolidate and to build upon the political commitment agreed last year, ensuring over the coming years a broad implementation of the outcome operational recommendations and seeking further progress beyond the UNGASS consensus.

Madame Chairman, we are ready to continue to share our experience towards the implementation of a more health oriented and human rights based drugs policies, which have proven to have a positive effect on the efforts to achieve the objective of the three international drug conventions for the promotion of the health and welfare of humankind.

Thank you.