

**Co-operation Group to Combat Drug Abuse
and illicit trafficking in Drugs**

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**Statement by the Portuguese Presidency of the Pompidou Group
at the 62nd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs**

Excellences, ministers, representatives of member States and civil society – ladies and gentlemen.

The Pompidou Group is a Council of Europe entity that upholds the core values of the Council of Europe, in the promotion of human rights, democracy and rule of law.

The 39 member States of the Pompidou Group find it of extreme importance and relevance to emphasise that drug policy – as all other policy fields – must be developed, implemented and evaluated in light of and in full respect of human rights.

The Pompidou Group views the outcome document of the 2016 Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGASS) as the most recent consensus and the most comprehensive document and supports its provisions that the world drug problem requires an integrated and balanced response, evidence-based in the full respect of human rights and dignity of all individuals in the context of drug programmes, strategies and policies.

The Pompidou Group reaffirms, as conveyed at UNGASS 2016, that human rights must impact, among others, the following aspects of drug policy:

First and foremost, the application of the death penalty for drug related offences and the application of inhuman punishment and torture, as well as extrajudicial executions, are not in line with human rights international obligations. Every person has the right to a fair hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law.

Secondly, people who use drugs have an uncontested right to equitable access to health care and social services for their drug use disorder and other drug or non-drug related health problems. The right to health and health care includes access to, and availability of, controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

Human rights are a fundamental cornerstone in drug policy, and as such are accorded one of the seven chapters together with some 15 recommendations in the outcome document of the UNGASS 2016. The Pompidou Group urges Member States to implement the recommendations of the UNGASS outcome document, and stands ready to support Member States in the implementation process in order to ensure that all steps taken beyond 2019 by the CND and Member States acknowledge the need for enabling of the full respect of all human rights.

Understanding and placing emphasis on human rights is crucial for coherent drug policy interventions. In this sense, the Pompidou Group has included the preparation of a repository of applied human rights practices in its Work Programme 2019-2022, adopted at the 17th Ministerial Conference of the Pompidou Group, last November.

A new topic included in the Work Programme which also is of major importance is that of implementing measures to reduce drug related stigma. Discrimination, marginalisation and stigma towards drug users create barriers to the access to health, care and social services. The implementation of training programmes for law enforcement and health professionals, awareness raising initiatives and wide use of neutral and non-stigmatising language are to be considered in the framework of national drug policies.

Linking drug policy with practice and research is a core element of the Pompidou Group mission and it has responded to this objective with concrete examples.

In 2018, a statement was agreed “on the treatment of opioid dependence syndrome”, which presents four key courses of action to reduce barriers within existing regulatory national frameworks and improve access to opioid agonist and antagonist medicines for the treatment of opioid dependence syndrome. This will be further showcased in a side event next week organised together with our colleagues.

Furthermore, the Group adopted a “statement on costs and spill-over consequences of drug policy” which aims to support Member States to improve estimation methods and tools, to develop guidelines for the collection of data, to exchange information between countries and to promote international cooperation by supporting the networking of experts and cooperation between relevant institutions, namely with the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) in relation to the financial investment and outcomes of drug policy formulation and implementation.

Moreover, the Pompidou Group would like to underscore that civil society actors and those affected by the world drug problem, have a legitimate right to be heard and should be welcomed to voice their opinions in the debate and search for solutions. This led the Pompidou Group to adopt a policy paper entitled "Government interaction with civil society on drug policy issues: Principles, ways and means, opportunities and challenges". It is our goal that the policy paper will not only remain a useful tool for the Member States of the Pompidou Group, but also serve as an inspiration to other international organisations, as well as all governments.

MedNET, the Network on cooperation in the Mediterranean Region celebrated its 12th anniversary last year. Its key activities have promoted the exchange of experiences based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the development and implementation of drug policy, providing training for the development of treatment and care measures. Activities among the 16 member countries are helping to promote effective responses to drug use, through the exchange of good practice and regional cooperation in the field of research on the drugs situation, prevention, treatment and care, and in law enforcement.

The Pompidou Group also reaffirms the need to mainstream a gender perspective into the design and elaboration of drug policies, as included in the UNGASS recommendations. In order to achieve this, close collaboration and shared responsibility between States, international and regional relevant organisations, hereunder all relevant UN entities, including, but not limited to, the UNODC and the WHO, and the numerous NGOs working in the area, is of crucial importance.

The Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe is determined to continue and expand its efforts to further cooperate with UNODC, WHO, the European Union (the EMCDDA and the European Commission) and others as has been amply demonstrated in the past. The Group will continue to contribute to global drug policy development, implementation and evaluation by promoting debates on emerging issues, adopting policy papers and statements and cooperating with international partners.

We welcome the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 26 November 2018 on the cooperation between the UN and the Council of Europe, which encourages further cooperation with the Pompidou Group in the light of the recommendations made at the 2016 special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem.

The Pompidou Group stands ready and looks forward to continued collaboration with the CND and other UN entities towards our common goal to bring the public health and the respect of human rights to the forefront of drug policy as set by the recommendations adopted at the 2016 Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly and to recognise that drug policy efforts must be aligned to the efforts to accomplish the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

To conclude, I take this opportunity to share with you that at the Stavanger ministerial meeting, Portugal and Poland were handed the baton from Norway and Italy as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Pompidou Group. With the help and support of all member States, the Portuguese Presidency will make every effort to implement the decisions taken by the Ministers, in particular the statutory revision process which may lead to the adoption of a new mandate for the Pompidou Group in 2021, when it will celebrate its 50th Anniversary.