

**Ministerial Segment of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs**

**Ireland National Statement delivered by Catherine Byrne TD,**

**Minister of State at the Department of Health with responsibility for Health Promotion  
and the National Drugs Strategy**

**Vienna 15 March 2019**

Mr Chair,

On behalf of the Irish Government, I would like to warmly congratulate you on your election to the chair of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Commission on Narcotic Drugs, including this Ministerial Segment.

You have our best wishes, our full support, and our sincere appreciation for your excellent work so far.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by saying that Ireland fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by Commissioner Avramopoulos on behalf of the European Union.

The findings of the 2018 World Drug Report make it clear that the international community needs to step up its responses to cope with the expanding range and diversity of drugs and drugs markets.

With over 450,000 annual drug-related deaths worldwide and significant adverse health consequences caused by drug abuse, we have an opportunity today to take the lead and shape global policy on drugs for the next 10 years.

The 2016 UNGASS Outcome Document is a milestone for international drug policy and comprehensively reflects the complexities of the current drug situation.

Importantly, the UNGASS Outcome Document is a balanced text which looks at the health-related aspects of the drugs problem, including prevention, treatment, risk and harm reduction, but also reaffirms an unwavering commitment to supply reduction and related measures, including effective law enforcement and promoting judicial cooperation.

It also commits to developing policies based on evidence and best practice, supported by objective monitoring and evaluation systems.

I firmly believe that our priority in the coming years should be to effectively implement the operational recommendations from the UNGASS Outcome Document, and I believe our work at this Ministerial Segment will contribute to achieving these important objectives.

I would like to take this opportunity to speak about Ireland's drug and alcohol strategy, 'Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery'.

Our strategy is underpinned by the key values of compassion, respect, equity, inclusion, partnership and is evidence-informed.

It promotes a more compassionate and humane approach to people who use drugs, with addiction treated first and foremost as a public health issue, rather than as a criminal justice issue.

Our public-health-led approach promotes rehabilitation and recovery. It gives people who use drugs a say in their own treatment and supports them to play a role in their own recovery.

Our strategy also recognises the role that evidence-based harm-reduction initiatives can play in reducing deaths associated with drug use.

Initiatives such as needle-exchange services and the planned supervised injecting facility in Dublin city will help to reduce the harms caused by injecting drugs.

As part of our public health approach, we are currently considering alternative approaches to the possession of drugs for personal use.

A working group of experts is finalising its report on alternative approaches and I look forward to receiving this report later this month.

In relation to alcohol; in October 2018 we passed the Public Health (Alcohol) Act which addresses alcohol as a public health matter for the first time. It aims to reduce alcohol consumption and the harm that alcohol causes in our society.

The Act sets out a number of important measures including:

- minimum unit pricing,
- structural separation of alcohol from other products in mixed retail outlets,
- and the inclusion of health warnings on labels.
- it also, importantly, restricts advertising and sponsorship at events aimed at children.

I firmly believe that a strong partnership between government and civil society is central to improving the lives of people who get caught up in addiction.

This partnership approach is embedded in our monitoring structures to drive the implementation of our strategy.

Multilateralism is another essential part of tackling this problem that affects every country, big and small. Ireland has always been clear that our multilateral engagement defines and shapes our role in the world.

The progress that has been made here in Vienna over the last months and years in coming together from very different starting points to agree on the key issues, as evidenced by this Ministerial Declaration, reaffirms our faith in the multilateral system.

Our Government has recently launched a new international development strategy, entitled 'A Better World', which reinforces our ongoing commitment to multilateralism.

One of the core priorities under the strategy, is gender equality. I am heartened to see that this Ministerial Declaration acknowledges the importance of a gender-sensitive approach to tackling the world drug problem.

Gender is a critical aspect of these major and complex issues which touch on health, society, well-being and security, and it's for this reason that Ireland has donated €40,000 to the Global Programme on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in UNOV and UNODC.

Mr Chair, Excellencies, thank you for your attention.