

**Sixty-Second Commission
on Narcotic Drugs**

**Ministerial Segment
14-15 March 2019**

**New Zealand Statement
delivered by
Deputy Secretary
Todd Krieble**

(Check against delivery)



Thank you Chair.

I am delighted to be speaking today at this 62nd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. New Zealand has a long standing commitment to the CND and we greatly value the work of the Commission and all of those gathered here.

I will speak briefly on two topics today: developments in New Zealand and some wider thoughts on global drug policy.

Chair, we each face a distinct domestic landscape and unique challenges in developing appropriate policy to address it. Equally, we are all aware that we cannot manage our challenges alone.

In New Zealand our greatest challenges are with respect to Methamphetamine and Synthetic Drugs and Cannabis. The ongoing harm caused by the use of methamphetamines is well documented. We now face increasing harm from synthetic drugs with a significant number of deaths linked to or caused directly by, synthetic drugs.

Supported by the growing global evidence on effective harm minimisation, New Zealand is strongly of the view that the best way to deal with our crises is to take a health and people centred approach. We want to strike a balance between discouraging drug use, and recognising that people who use drugs need support from the health system, not necessarily a criminal conviction. The New Zealand Drug Policy calls for a modern approach that fulfils the fundamental goal of the three international drug control conventions, namely to safeguard the health and welfare of humanity. The government's current efforts have a number of strands focussed on wellbeing:

Firstly, in 2018 the New Zealand government concluded an extensive inquiry into mental health and addiction services. Although there are important distinctions between mental health and addiction, the results from this inquiry have emphasised the significant overlap between these two fields and the need for a holistic approach in finding solutions.

Secondly, in response to our synthetic cannabinoids crisis, the Government has provided a major boost in funding to support local responses to synthetic drugs, enhance community addiction services, and strengthen a Drug Early Warning System. This is particularly important as part of the broader harm reduction approach to support those suffering from the devastating effects of illicit drugs, particularly synthetic cannabis.

Importantly, we are amending our drug law to:

- classify two dangerous synthetic drugs as class A drugs,
- provide police with a discretion not to prosecute where a therapeutic approach would be more beneficial, and
- enable temporary drug orders to be issued for emerging and potentially harmful substances so that Police have the necessary search and seizure powers needed to interrupt supply.

Thirdly, in December 2018 New Zealand passed legislation to improve access to medicinal cannabis products. This legislation allows for quality standards to be set for the domestic manufacture of cannabis products and will help people requiring palliative care by making a wider range of safe products available over time.

Fourthly, New Zealand has also committed to a referendum on the regulation of cannabis for personal use at the national election in 2020. The overriding policy objectives of the referendum are consistent with global health and wellbeing outcomes. A public health approach seeks to better control and manage the health risks of cannabis use, particularly for youth.

Through these, and other strategies, we believe that New Zealand's compassionate, innovative and proportionate approach to drug issues will put us in a strong position to make significant progress on addressing the harm caused by drugs to our society.

Chair, we welcome the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration at the beginning of this Ministerial Segment. Agreement of the Declaration by consensus is a sign that the international community is collectively committed to the same objective; addressing and countering the world drug problem. We particularly welcome recognition of the need to improve, strengthen and streamline data collection, including through an update of the Annual Report Questionnaire.

New Zealand sees the three policy documents of the past decade as complimentary and mutually reinforcing, and looks to the 2016 UNGASS outcome document as the way forward in guiding modern and effective drug policy. For New Zealand, UNGASS is a milestone in drug policy that takes a more holistic approach to management of drug issues and expands on human rights matters in drug policy. With regard to human rights, New Zealand shares the concerns of other Member States regarding the disproportionate use of the death penalty in response to drug offending, and continues to advocate for the abolition of the death penalty.

In closing Chair, I wish to make one final comment on how we collectively approach the challenges that we are all facing. There is no perfect approach to drug policy. However, there is growing understanding about the effectiveness of a health approach in achieving harm reduction and national security. In order to achieve the objectives of the conventions, we need to give ourselves the space and flexibility to pursue new approaches to reduce harm and build up a body of evidence on what is effective. We can do this by being open to innovative solutions and previously untried paths. As our understanding grows, so does the need to establish a truly modernised drug policy.

Thank you