

Statement Kingdom of the Netherlands
Minister of Medical Care Mr Bruno Bruins
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Distinguished Chair, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Over the last years, important progress has been made in improving the global drug policy. We have come a long way: From drug control policies with an unbalanced focus on supply reduction to integrated, balanced and evidence-based approaches, with the UNGASS Outcome document as the most recent consensus.

The multilateral system is not perfect. It is under pressure and the playing field is changing as we speak. In his last annual report, Secretary-General Guterres wrote: 'Working together multilaterally is not optional; it is the only answer.' And I fully agree. I believe that this ministerial meeting and the achieved consensus illustrate the need for multilateralism in international drug policy. It shows that there is still more that unites us than what divides us in our approaches to face the world drug problem. Our meeting here today paves the way to work together even more closely. And to accelerate the implementation of the UNGASS commitments.

Many countries have made efforts in promoting health through prevention, education, treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration. We greatly value these efforts. We also appreciate the work of UNODC, together with UN agencies and other stakeholders, with regard to the prevention of HIV and Hepatitis C and harm reduction.

As the latest World Drug Report shows, however, it is clear that the range of drugs and number of drug markets are still expanding and diversifying.

To move forward it is vital that we keep examining the effectiveness of our approaches and their consequences for health and human rights. What works and what does not work? Learning from each other – both from successes *and* failures – is crucial to improve our interventions. We must continue to explore innovative, comprehensive and evidence-based solutions for current and new challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The promotion of the health and welfare of mankind is our shared and ultimate goal. Balanced national drug policies should promote human rights, equality, peace and security and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. The drug control conventions never called for control policies that violate human rights, including denial of appropriate medical treatment, psychosocial care to people who use drugs or disproportionate sentencing for drug offences.

The Netherlands is fully committed to strengthen a balanced focus on health and human rights on the one hand and law enforcement and crime prevention on the other hand.

Let me share the main elements of our national drug policy.

Our policy consists of a gradual approach where the first step is to discourage the use of drugs. In case of drug use, our focus moves to preventing the negative consequences to

health. Also, we use effective early signaling to prevent that people develop an addiction. In case of substance use and addiction, we move to ensuring adequate treatment and limiting damage to health. In other words: prevention is better than cure, cure is better than harm reduction and harm reduction is better than doing nothing.

Within Dutch drug policy, we also give attention to safety and combatting organized crime. The police is currently allocating extra capacity to its synthetic drugs cluster, both on intelligence and detection. By linking together experts in these fields essential information is shared better and faster. Every day we experience the disruptive and undermining effects of organized drug crime on our society. The Netherlands is looking for both innovative and effective ways to fight organized drug crime. An example of this you can experience in a side event on crypto phones organized by the Netherlands next Monday.

Dutch policy also focuses on preventing and limiting damage to the environment. Criminals who illegally produce synthetic drugs, dump the resulting chemical waste in natural areas. This often causes environmental damage and that is a serious problem. We try to dismantle as many drug labs as possible. Organized crime, however, is unmistakably transnational in character. Therefore, we can only be effective if all countries involved cooperate to prevent and combat both the trafficking in precursors and in synthetic drugs.

Another part of our approach is to find effective, evidence based and pragmatic solutions to problems in our drug policy. For instance on our cannabis policy. Local governments signaled that the current policy caused problems in their municipalities related to public safety, public order and law enforcement. Therefore we decided to conduct a small-scale experiment with a controlled supply chain. Part of this policy is always a prevention program aimed at decreasing the use of illicit drugs, because using illicit drugs is always a risk for people's health.

Lastly, the results of our national policy clearly matter. By monitoring and evaluating these results, we aim to expand the evidence base of our policy. We are committed to strengthening and streamlining data collection instruments and domestic capacities. Better data and statistics on the various elements of the World Drug Problem are also globally needed. They will help us get a realistic picture to underpin our discussions and policy decisions as well as our interventions.

This is a crucial part of the way forward after 2019. Only with solid data, we will be able to take stock of our progress in ten years time. We can learn which policy-measures are effective and which are not. We need to exchange information, good practices and lessons learned: this gives us the opportunity to learn and keep making progress!

Thank you!