

## **United Nations Office at Geneva**

### **Scaling Up the Implementation of International Drug Policy Commitments on Improving Availability of and Access to Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes – An Exchange of National Perspectives and Good Practices**

**6 September 2022, 12.00 PM**

**Room XXV, Palais des Nations**

**H.E. Ambassador Ghislain D’Hoop**

**Chair of the 65<sup>th</sup> Commission on Narcotic Drugs**

#### **Opening Remarks**

Good afternoon! I am Ambassador Ghislain D’Hoop of Belgium, Chair of the Vienna-based Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its 65<sup>th</sup> session. I am very happy to be here at the Palais des Nations in Geneva today, to hold this event, focusing on availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. This subject relates to universal access to essential medicines, which is a concern shared by both the Vienna and Geneva-based organizations, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the World Health Organization, and the International Narcotics Control Board, which are represented at the highest level on our panel today. I am heartened by the support received from Vienna and Geneva colleagues for this event,

which has undoubtedly strengthened the bridge between our two cities in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem.

A very warm welcome to all who have joined us today for this special event to raise awareness for the critical need to scale up the implementation of the international drug policy commitments on improving availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. In an effort to bring activities of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs beyond Vienna, we are holding this event in Geneva in a hybrid format and concurrently livestreaming it to a global audience on our Twitter page, “@CND\_tweets”. Thanks to all, from all around the world, who are with us here at the Palais des Nations as well as online!

I would like to begin by extending my sincere thanks to the co-sponsors of this event – the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations (Geneva), the Permanent Mission of Singapore to the United Nations (Geneva), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. I will first give the floor to my dear friend and colleague, H.E. Ambassador Umej BHATIA, the Permanent Representative of Singapore to the United Nations (Geneva and Vienna), acting also as the Chair of the Forum of Small States (Geneva and Vienna), to deliver welcoming remarks.

Ambassador BHATIA, the floor is yours.

*[... End of Ambassador's remarks]*

Thank you very much, Ambassador BHATIA, for your thoughtful welcoming remarks. It is also my pleasure to have with me today:

- the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Ms. Ghada WALY;
- the Director General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom GHEBREYESUS;
- the President of the International Narcotics Control Board, Ms. Jagjit PAVADIA;
- the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, Ms. Tlaleng MOFOKENG; and
- the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations (Geneva), H.E. Ambassador Paul Empole EFAMBE.

Millions of people around the world suffer due to lack of access to controlled medicines, despite the universally recognized medical indispensability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. The lack of access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes must, therefore, be considered a major global crisis. Developments in recent years have dealt a significant blow to this global crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic, for one, has exacerbated interruptions of the medicines supply chain. Coupled with other international developments, emergency shortages have been experienced in various parts of the world.

Given the state of international affairs, a unified global effort to improve availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes has become especially critical to ensure that no patient, or person, is left behind as a result of the world drug problem. For this reason, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, at its 65<sup>th</sup> session, is devoting attention to scaling up the implementation of the international drug policy commitments on improving availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs is the policymaking body in the United Nations system with prime responsibility for drug-related matters. Our mandates are drawn from the three international drug control conventions of 1961, 1971 and 1988, which collectively enshrine the commitment by the international community to make adequate provision to ensure, and to not unduly restrict, the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances that are considered indispensable for medical and scientific purposes. We recognize that a variety of internationally controlled substances are vital medications. Narcotic drugs like morphine are critical opioid analgesics for pain management and palliative care, while others help to treat mental disorders and drug dependence.

The Commission's strong commitment to enhance efforts at all levels to improve availability and access to controlled medicines is articulated in all our main policy documents, as well as dedicated resolutions. This year, which marks the 65<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines, I want to draw

attention to these commitments. I have, therefore, initiated an awareness-raising campaign aimed at scaling up the implementation of the international drug policy commitments on improving availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. To kickstart this initiative, a high-level event – namely the Joint Call to Action – was held on 14 March 2022, the opening day of the Commission’s 65<sup>th</sup> regular session. At that occasion, the Executive Director of UNODC, Ms. Ghada WALY, the Director General of WHO, Dr. Tedros Adhanom GHEBREYESUS, the President of INCB, Ms. Jagjit PAVADIA, and I came together to call on the international community to honour the commitments they have made towards ensuring availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including in emergency situations, to ensure that *no patient is left behind*. I am pleased to report that more than 13,000 people around the world watched the livestream of the Joint Call on Twitter.

Following the Joint Call, I held an event at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 8 June 2022, which focused on improving availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes in the context of building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic. That event included participation from an array of United Nations entities and international partners, including the WHO Office at the United Nations.

I am pleased to announce that the Commission has more in store beyond the **Joint Call in Vienna in March**, the **event in New York in June**, and **today’s event in Geneva**. The Availability and Access Initiative will culminate in a **One-Day Special Event, a Chair’s Forum in Vienna on 10 October**

2022, which will unite experts in the field and dedicate a day to discussing and raising awareness for the global crisis of lack of access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. Stay tuned for more details of this event on the Commission’s website, as well as on our Twitter page, “@CND\_tweets”. I also strongly encourage you to follow our Twitter campaign on availability and access, which uses the dedicated hashtag “#NoPatientLeftBehind”. I am counting on each and every one of you here today to support the Commission’s endeavours to ensure that all patients are able to access the controlled medicines they need, so that no patient is left behind.

### *Closing Remarks*

I would like to conclude today’s event by reminding everyone that the lack of access to controlled medicines is a major global crisis. The persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with other international developments, have created a complex landscape for ensuring access to controlled medicines. A year ago, on 8 September 2021, the INCB, UNODC and WHO released a joint statement on access to controlled medicines in emergencies in recognition of World Humanitarian Day 2021, which stated that “*urgent action is needed to ensure that national systems improve access to controlled medicines for people affected by emergencies, including pandemics, and climate-related disasters*”. It is, therefore, clear that unless this issue is prioritized, and all stakeholders are committed to enhancing cooperation and finding joint solutions, patients will continue to suffer and be left behind. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls on the international

community to leave no one behind, and seeks to achieve Good Health and Well-being through Sustainable Development Goal 3 and Reduced Inequalities through Sustainable Development Goal 10. With less than 8 years to 2030, time is running out to achieve the 2030 Agenda. So let us make the choice today to honour the international drug policy commitments on improving availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, so that no patient, or person, is left behind.

Once again, I thank my dear friends and colleagues for their support as panelists – Ambassador Umej BHATIA, Ms. Ghada WALY, Dr. Tedros Adhanom GHEBREYESUS, Ms. Jagjit PAVADIA, Dr. Tlaleng MOFOKENG, and Ambassador Paul Empole EFAMBE. And I thank all of you who have joined us for this event. Thank you for caring!