

Joint Call to Action

**on Scaling Up the Implementation of the International Drug
Policy Commitments on Improving Availability of and Access
to Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes**

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H.E. Ambassador Ghislain D’Hoop

Chair of the 65th Commission on Narcotic Drugs

Opening Remarks

Greetings from Vienna! I am Ambassador Ghislain D’Hoop of Belgium, Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its 65th session. A very good afternoon to the Heads of the treaty-mandated United Nations entities, who are here with me today for the Joint Call to Action on scaling up the implementation of international drug policy commitments on improving availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. And a very warm welcome to all of you, from all over the world, who have joined us online for our Joint Call! In an effort to bring CND-related activities closer to the international community, we are, for the first time today, livestreaming through Twitter.

It is a pleasure for me to have 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, who is connected online; and the President of the International Narcotics Control Board, Ms. Jagjit Pavadia, joining me today. Each of our panellists will be making a statement on the importance of improving availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including in emergency situations.

Today's Joint Call is greatly warranted, seeing as how millions of people across the world continue to suffer due to lack of access to controlled medicines, despite the universally recognized medical indispensability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. It is my privilege to be here today, with the Heads of the UNODC, the WHO and the INCB to jointly call on the international community to devote attention to improving availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes at the national, regional and international levels, including in emergency situations. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly given rise to a global emergency situation by exacerbating interruptions of the controlled medicines supply chain in various parts of the world. Given this state of affairs, a unified global effort to improve availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes is especially critical today, to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensure that no patient is left behind by the world drug problem.

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs is the policymaking body in the United Nations system with prime responsibility for drug-related matters. Scaling up the implementation of international drug policy commitments on improving availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes is indeed one of our key priorities. 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 not to unduly restrict, the availability of narcotics drugs and psychotropic substances that are considered indispensable for medical and scientific purposes.

The Commission's strong commitment to enhance efforts at all levels, to improve availability and access to controlled medicines, is articulated in all of our main policy documents. This includes the Outcome Document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem, where Member States, for the first time, devoted a standalone chapter to discuss operational recommendations on ensuring availability and access to controlled substances, while preventing their diversion. In 2020, at our 63rd session, the Commission, by consensus, adopted Resolution 63/3, which enshrines our commitment towards promoting awareness-raising, education and training as part of a comprehensive approach to ensuring access to and the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. More recently, at our 64th session last year, our Commission issued a statement on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of Member States' joint commitments to address and counter all aspects of the world drug problem. In that statement, which the

Commission subsequently adopted as a resolution, namely Resolution 64/1, Member States reiterated the concern that the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and palliative care, remained low to non-existent in many parts of the world.

The Commission on Narcotics Drugs recognizes 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. Yet, studies show that approximately 75% of the world population, about 5.5 billion people, have no access to controlled narcotic drugs for pain relief. As the body entrusted with the responsibility for deciding on substance control in accordance with the three international drug control conventions, our Commission is alive to the need to ensure that controlled substances are available to all patients who need them.

I am proud to announce that this year, which is the 65th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, and also the 45th anniversary of the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines, our Commission will be devoting attention to scaling up the implementation of international drug policy commitments on improving availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. Starting with today's Joint Call, a series of awareness-raising events and discussions are lined up throughout the year. In our bid to reach out to a wider global audience, we have also started an information

media campaign on Twitter, under our Commission's handle "@CND_tweets", using the hashtag "#NoPatientLeftBehind".

I would like to conclude by reminding everyone that we have less than 8 years to 2030, which means that we do not have a long runway to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Failure is not an option, no one must be left behind. And in the same vein, no patient must be left behind. If we do not take affirmative action now, to improve availability and access to controlled medicines, we would not be able to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3 on Good Health & Well-being and Sustainable Development Goal 10 on Reduced Inequalities. Therefore, as Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, I call on all governments, all international organizations, civil society, and the world community to join forces now, to improve availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

Closing Remarks

I would like to conclude the Joint Call to Action by reminding everyone why the CND, UNODC, WHO and INCB have gathered together today to hold this Joint Call. The lack of access to controlled medicines is a global crisis. Unless national governments and the international community prioritize this issue, and are committed to enhancing cooperation to find joint solutions, people will suffer and patients will be left behind. So let us today make the choice to honour the international drug policy commitments on

improving availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. I call on each and everyone of you to do so.

Once again, I thank the the Executive Director of UNODC, Ms. Ghada Waly; the Director-General of WHO, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus; and the President of INCB, Ms. Jagjit Pavadia, for joining me today. And I thank all of you who have joined us for this Joint Call to Action. Thank you for caring!