

United Nations Headquarters

Scaling Up the Implementation of the International Drug Policy Commitments on Improving Availability of and Access to Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes – Building Back Better from the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Conference Room 11

H.E. Ambassador Ghislain D’Hoop

Chair of the 65th Commission on Narcotic Drugs

Opening Remarks

Good afternoon! I am Ambassador Ghislain D’Hoop of Belgium, Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its 65th session. I am very happy that the improved COVID-19 situation has made it possible me, as Chair of the Vienna-based Commission, to travel to New York to hold this event, on a very important topic, in the margins of the June 2022 Economic and Social Council Management Segment.

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 and closer to the international community, we are holding this event in New York and concurrently livestreaming it to a global audience. Thanks to all, from all around the world, who are with us here in the United Nations Headquarters as well as online!

I would like to begin by extending my sincere thanks to my dear friends and colleagues, Ambassador Philippe KRIDELKA, the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations (New York), and Mr. Hans ALMOSLECHNER, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations (New York), for being here with us today and would like to give them the floor first, for their opening remarks.

Ambassador KRIDELKA, the floor is yours.

[... End of Ambassador's remarks]

I now give the floor to Mr. ALMOSLECHNER, please.

[... End of Mr. Almoslechner's remarks]

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

- the President of the International Narcotics Control Board, Ms. Jagjit PAVADIA;
- the Representative of the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency to the United Nations, Ms. Vivian OKEKE;
- the Director of the World Health Organization Office at the United Nations, Mr. Werner OBERMEYER;
- Senior Adviser of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS New York Office, Mr. Ninan VARUGHESE; and
- the Treasurer of the New York NGO Committee on Drugs, Mr. Benjamin PHILLIPS.

Each of our panellists will be delivering remarks on the importance of improving availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, as part of efforts to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to their unique perspectives on the matter, we also have a video message from the Chief of the Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Ms. Giovanna CAMPELLO, who is unfortunately not able to join us today.

While the global COVID-19 situation appears to be improving, and many of us are beginning to leave the pandemic behind us, we must not forget that there are still parts of the world that are afflicted by the pandemic, and vulnerable groups of people all around the world who continue to be disadvantaged by the adverse effects of the pandemic. One such group are

patients who require access to controlled medicines, which includes people living with HIV and AIDs.

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 ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has escalated the situation by exacerbating interruptions of the controlled medicines supply chain in various parts of the world, thereby giving rise to emergency shortages in several countries. 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 to ensure that no patient or person is left behind as a result of the world drug problem.

As the policymaking body in the United Nations system with prime responsibility for drug-related matters, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs is committed to scaling up the implementation of the international drug policy commitments on improving availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. 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 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.

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. 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 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, remains low to non-existent in many parts of the world.

This year, which marks the 65th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the 45th anniversary of the World Health Organization Model List of Essential Medicines, we have translated our commitments into action by initiating 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. On the opening day of our 65th regular session in March, a Joint Call to Action was organized. 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, 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. More than 13,000 people around the world watched the livestream of the Joint Call on Twitter.

I am pleased to announce that beyond the Joint Call and today's event, our Commission has more awareness-raising events and discussions lined up in the coming months on the subject of availability and access. 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 hope that all of you here today will continue to support our endeavours to ensure that all patients are able to access the controlled medicines they need.

Closing Remarks

I would like to conclude by reminding everyone that the lack of access to controlled medicines is a global crisis. The persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic has created a complex landscape for ensuring access to controlled medicines. 2021 saw unprecedented trade restrictions, shortages of medicines, surges in infections and new variants of COVID-19, all of which have compounded problems in maintaining a steady supply of controlled medicines. 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. And this would mean that we have not achieved Sustainable Development Goal 3 on Good Health and Well-being, as well as Sustainable Development Goal 10 on Reduced Inequalities. With less than 8 years to 2030, time is running out to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 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.

Once again, I thank my dear friends and colleagues for their support – Ambassador Philippe KRIDELKA, Mr. Hans ALMOSLECHNER, President Jagit PAVADIA, Ms. Giovanna CAMPELLO, Ms. Vivian OKEKE, Mr. Werner OBERMEYER, Mr. Ninan VARUGHESE and Mr. Benjamin PHILLIPS. And I thank all of you who have joined us for this event. Thank you for caring!