Statement by The Netherlands on the occasion of the High Level Segment of the 57th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

Vienna, 14 March 2014

Thank you Mr Chairperson,

The Netherlands associates itself with the statement made by the Greek Presidency on behalf of the European Union.

The Dutch drug policy is specifically based on both supply and demand reduction: a balanced approach.

The drug phenomenon is dynamic and constantly raises new challenges for us to address. To do so effectively demands a flexible, innovative and creative approach and we have to make full use of the insights offered by scientific research and evaluation. Since all interventions in demand and supply reduction could have unintended consequences or even counterproductive effects, we must strive for evidence based approaches.

When it comes to demand reduction, the Netherlands focuses on prevention, early intervention, treatment, harm reduction, rehabilitation and social integration. All elements are equally important and indispensable.

Let me focus on harm reduction, since this topic was also debated at length during the discussions on the ministerial outcome document. Harm reduction is not about legalization or promotion of drug use, it is about improving the quality of life of drug users and reducing the nuisance that drug use may entail for the wider society. The drug consumption rooms for instance fit in this framework. These locations are set up to establish contact with difficult-to-reach populations of drug users, provide an environment for more hygienic drug use to avoid the spread of infectious diseases, and to promote drug users' access to other social, health and treatment services. Research shows that prevalence of injecting drug use is declining in the Netherlands, and less than 1 % of all new HIV-infections are attributed to drug use. In short, drug consumption rooms achieve the goals they were set up for.

Mr. Chairman,

Let's be clear. The sale of all illicit drugs is prohibited in The Netherlands. However, under strict conditions the sale of cannabis is condoned in coffeeshops. I would like to note that the Dutch coffeeshop policy aims at preventing cannabis smokers from getting involved in organized crime and from being exposed to more harmful drugs like cocaine, heroin and new
psychoactive substances. This policy has had a positive outcome, whilst rates of cannabis use in the Netherlands are similar or lower than in comparable countries.

The examples I just gave very briefly indicate how the Netherlands is taking the necessary measures, both on the supply and the demand side, on the basis of concrete evidence, and with due regard and commitment for its legal, international, as well as health-related obligations.

Let me now draw your attention to the draft decision tabled by the Netherlands regarding the rescheduling of dronabinol from Schedule II to Schedule III of the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances. The World Health Organisation has clearly shown in its reports to CND that dronabinol has proven medical usefulness in the treatment of a number of very serious diseases and that there is no risk of abuse of this substance. The rescheduling could facilitate international trade in dronabinol and therefore increase its availability, helping both doctors and patients worldwide. I would like to call on all CND-members to support this draft decision.

Mr Chairman,

Human rights are at the heart of the Dutch foreign policy. International drug control must be carried out with full respect for human rights. Unfortunately, human rights violations continue to be carried out under the name of drug control policy. Twelve UN agencies, among them UNODC, have called for the closure of compulsory drug treatment centers, where patients, instead of receiving appropriate treatment and care, too often become a victim of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and human rights violations. I fully support this call.

In a number of countries, the death penalty is very regularly applied for drug related offenses. The Netherlands, and many other countries, strongly opposes the use of the death penalty in all cases and under any circumstances. The Secretary-General of the UN and the Executive Director of UNODC also regularly take stance against the death penalty. In this regard, I welcome the recent Board Decision of INCB to call on States Parties who have not yet done so, to consider abolishing the death penalty.

I thank you, Mr Chair.