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**57th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
High-Level Segment
Vienna, 13-14 March 2014**

General Debate

Statement by the delegation of Finland

14th March 2014

Mr Chair, distinguished participants,

Finland aligns itself fully to the Statement made by Greece on behalf of the European Union.

Mr Chair,

We welcome an open discussion on the international drugs policy. We consider that this debate must be transparent and inclusive.

We would like to stress that in Finland implementing harm reduction measures has not weakened our commitment to and implementation of the international drug conventions. We do have a comprehensive ban on drugs. We underscore that the international drug conventions constitute the cornerstone of the international drug control system, and that they should be respected fully. We continue to call on their effective implementation and universal ratification. At the same time those who need help have a right to treatment and harm reduction services.

Our national experience has shown that harm reduction services are indeed effective. Key to the success has been low threshold and accessibility. Needle exchange, vaccinations, anonymous HIV/aids and hepatitis testing, counselling, sexual and reproductive health measures, as well as maintenance and substitution treatment have improved health of the target populations. Last year HIV infections decreased to only three new cases. Further, evidence shows that these measures have also reduced drug-related criminality and increased security in the communities.

Finland started these services already almost two decades ago. Thanks to our NGO community. At that point in time these were new innovations. Now they are a regular state practice. Low threshold harm reduction services have also been the key to the inclusion of people who use drugs.

We also acknowledge the need to further improve the services we provide. We are increasing focus on addressing gender dimension. Women have already been a specific target group; further effort is now needed to better include sexual minorities.

Mr Chair,

In Finland, our own national concept is target prevention. That means that in a determined and systematic manner we focus the scarce resources of the law enforcement authorities on the right place at the right time. One of our country's operative strengths is close and well structured cooperation between Police, Customs and Border Guard. Criminal intelligence gathered by all law-enforcement and other relevant authorities is kept and analysed in one place in order to make a common situational picture.

We also wish to mention the experience that Finland has on the joint crime investigations with other countries and in particular on the implementation of the concept of Joint Investigation Teams (JIT). These teams enforce cooperation with other countries. Furthermore the investigation becomes more efficient and the criminal liability will be established in the right and appropriate place. We have found this form of international cooperation very successful.

We also wish to raise our concern over the emergence of new psychoactive substances and the new challenges they impose.

Mr Chair,

We regret that in the negotiations on the High-Level Statement, there were issues that could not be addressed. We reiterate the call made by the European Union in its opening address for the universal abolition of the death penalty.

Mr Chair, in conclusion,

In Finland we have well-functioning cooperation between the different sectors: health, social, and law enforcement. The police whose main responsibility is supply reduction also has an important role on demand reduction. The police does not only cooperate with the schools and communities, but also refers people who use drugs to harm reduction services and treatment. Another example is the early intervention sessions lead by prosecutors for youth who experiment with drugs.

We very much welcome the new focus given to health in this High-Level Segment. The question is not whether to support health or control. Health and well-being are best promoted in cooperation by all sectors. It simply means that the international drug conventions need to be implemented with human rights based approach.

Thank you Mr Chair.