Speech by Ms Maria LARSSON, Minister for Children and the Elderly,
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Mr/Madam Chairperson, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sweden fully associate itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

As we meet at this year's CND, I am worried about the drug situation in the world. We can all see in the public debate, that different organisations advocate a more liberal policy. But now we can, for the first time, see that also states are moving in that direction.

Governments are leaving the path which we have all agreed in 2009. In the final conclusion from that meeting, and I quote: we all “decided to continue to raise public awareness of the risks and the threats posed to all societies by the different aspects of the world drug problem”.

Therefore I am compelled to ask: what has changed since 2009 that would cause such a change in the discussion among UN Members?

The main goal of the Swedish drug policy is a drug free society. That is an ambitious goal. It might be that we can never reach it but it reflects our ambition that we cannot leave anyone behind.

We know much more now than we did 2009 about the health risks connected with cannabis. In November last year the Swedish Government organized an international conference in Stockholm with some of the most experienced researchers in the field.

There are two main conclusions from that conference. One is that cannabis serves as a gateway to other drugs.
The other conclusion is that the effects on brain and body make it dangerous in itself. You will all find a summary from the conference in your pigeon-hole.

Let me say a few words about the development of the drug situation in Sweden over the last decades. In the 60's and the 70's the Swedish drug policy was rather liberal and the number of drug users was very high. There were even experiments where illicit drugs was prescribed to drug addicts, as an attempt to limit drug use.

However this policy turned out to be contra productive and resulted in an increase of drug abuse. At that time, the use of cannabis was widely accepted and we even accepted some small possessions for personal use. Drug dealers took advantage of this and never carried more than the accepted amount, and could carry on with the business.

Now, Swedish drug policy has changed. This change was not easy and the basic building blocks of our drug strategy have evolved over a long period of time. The objective of a drug free society is also a vision expressing optimism and a positive humanistic approach. The harmful effects of drugs can be restrained, and drug abusers can be rehabilitated.

Our national strategy includes a whole package of measures: Universal prevention, early interventions and treatment as well as supply reduction. To reduce the supply of drugs is of course an important part of prevention.

During the way we have learnt that it is of outmost importance to have strong public support. In my country today, there is a far-reaching consensus among the political parties and in public opinion regarding our drug strategy.

Let me end by recalling the Convention on the rights of the child. It is the most ratified human rights treaty and it requires states to take all appropriate measures to protect children from drug abuse. It is also the only human rights convention where protection from narcotic drugs is mentioned.

This year marks the 25 year anniversary of this Convention. I urge us all to make 2014 a year with a new commitment to turn the situation away from increased drug abuse and to renew our efforts to protect children.

Thank you.