

ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR HEALTH, SENATOR FIONA NASH, 58TH SESSION UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS, VIENNA, MARCH 2015

His Excellency Ambassador Shamaa Chair of the UNGASS Board, Honourable Ministers, and Delegates to the 58th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs,

Australia is pleased to participate at this most important Session.

It is an opportunity to share problems and, I trust, solutions in our common fight against the world drug problem.

At this fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Australia's policy focus is on medical access to internationally controlled medicines and health and law enforcement collaboration, while building on previous work of the Commission on new psychoactive substances to incorporate broader trends in synthetic drugs, including methamphetamines.

I know these matters are of concern for many member states of the Commission and we look forward to working constructively with members to reach positions that will benefit people in all countries.

Australia's approach to drug policy is well-developed, balanced and evidence-based.

Key to our domestic policy is recognising the health and law enforcement aspects of drug use. We believe an emphasis on prevention and treatment can reduce demand for drugs and should be integrated with law enforcement efforts to disrupt the manufacture and supply of drugs.

And while we agree that people and organisations that would supply illegal drugs to our young people and communities should be punished, I want to affirm here today – in the strongest possible terms – that Australia opposes the use of the death penalty in all circumstances, including in relation to offences of a drug-related nature.

We strongly call for its universal abolition. Australia considers the death penalty an inhumane form of punishment. There is an extensive body of international research that disproves any suggestion that the death penalty has a deterrent effect on crime. Any miscarriage or failure of justice in its use is irreversible and irreparable.

We call on the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), as an entity of the United Nations system, to continue its efforts in advocating for the abolition of the death penalty in all cases.

An increasing challenge for public health and law enforcement over recent years has been the continued and rapid emergence of many new synthetic drugs, including amphetamine-type stimulants and new psychoactive substances.

I am sure member states share our deep concern about reports of increasing purity and availability of synthetic drugs, and about the potential opportunities for transnational organised criminal groups to exploit the market for these substances.

I am personally deeply concerned about the spread of the drug ice in Australia - the purest form of methamphetamine. I'm particularly concerned about the use of ice in our regional communities. This drug destroys lives. It destroys families and it destroys friendships. We must do all we can to stamp out the use of ice wherever it occurs.

Australia's National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2013 reported that the proportion of recent methamphetamine users using ice increased from 22 per cent in 2010 to 50 per cent in 2013. This percentage has more than doubled in just three years. Furthermore, in some Australian jurisdictions, purity of methamphetamine has tripled since 2010.

While this is a deeply worrying trend, our law enforcement agencies are becoming increasingly adept at blocking the supply of drugs. Australia's police and customs seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants – both at the border and domestically – are currently the highest on record.

Nevertheless, we are concerned that the increased purity, in addition to frequency of use, will result in the effects of methamphetamine use being more extreme and difficult to manage, leading to greater impacts on families of drug users and Australia would welcome the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other member states in combating the use and supply of synthetic drugs including methamphetamine and new psychoactive substances. We would also be pleased to learn of any innovating treatments that emerge globally as abuse of these substances can be very difficult to treat.

Of course, in future sessions of the Commission, Australia will be glad to share our own experiences for the benefit of all parties to the international drug control treaties.

His Excellency.

The Australian Government continues to work with health and law enforcement officials in all jurisdictions to decrease the harms associated with illicit drug use, guided by our National Drug Strategy. Our national, state and territory governments are working together to revise this strategy. Tackling the issue of ice will be an increasing priority.

At this session, Australia urges all Member States to tackle the trade in; distribution and manufacture of synthetic drugs including methamphetamine and new psychoactive substances – and to continue to monitor emerging trends, share information, reduce demand, and share treatment models.

Australia further urges the Office to enhance the collection of information on emerging new psychoactive substances, including through existing mechanisms such as the global SMART programme, to which Australia has been a significant contributor since it was established in 2008.

We also look ahead to next year's United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the world drug problem – and reaffirm our position that the Commission on Narcotic Drugs should continue to be the lead UN agency on international drug policy. The Special Session will be an important opportunity to take stock of our collective progress at implementing the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation Towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem.

Finally, His Excellency, I take this opportunity to reassure the international community of Australia's continued commitment to being a safe and secure producer of licit poppies.

We are pleased to support the Office's position relating to availability and accessibility to controlled drugs for medical purposes. We also value the important role that the International Narcotics Control Board plays in maintaining that balance and reiterate our shared concern with the Board that the international community should work together to prevent and prohibit the proliferation of sites used for the production of opiate raw materials.

We recognise that it is important to achieve a balance between the demand for and the supply of medical opiates and other controlled drugs for legitimate medical and scientific needs. In particular, more needs to be done to ensure that lower and middle-income countries have access to opium-based pain medication. Australia is a proud supporter of the Office's Global Program on access to controlled drugs, and we call on other countries to consider supporting this important program.

In closing, Australia looks forward to further discussions this week with other countries to share our experiences, our successes and our ongoing challenges in tackling the world drug problem.