

UK NATIONAL STATEMENT

Chair and distinguished guests.

Let me start by welcoming you, Ambassador, into the chair of the 59th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, and express the United Kingdom's support for your distinguished leadership.

We also express our appreciation for the Chair of the UNGASS Board and the other Board Members, who have expertly led the preparations for the Special Session.

I would also like to thank the Commission Secretariat for the timely information and support in the preparation for this CND.

UK National Drug Strategy

Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom is delivering a modern, balanced and evidence-based response to drugs within the UN conventions.

There are promising signs our approach is working, with a downward trend in drug use over the last decade and more people recovering from their dependency now than in 2009.

We are currently refreshing our 2010 drug strategy. Our refreshed drug strategy will build on our current approach of reducing demand, restricting supply and building recovery, and will tackle drugs as a key driver of crime. It will update our response to longstanding and emerging challenges in line with the latest international evidence.

For the first time in a United Kingdom drug strategy, there will be a chapter dedicated to global action. This will cover the United Kingdom's leading role in shaping international drugs policy and sharing evidence through our global networks.

It will also include our international priorities of enhancing access to controlled medicines, reducing HIV transmissions and promoting human rights.

UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs

Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom welcomes the Special Session on Drugs as a unique opportunity for enhancing the global approach to drugs.

The United Kingdom is looking forward to a rich discussion at the Special Session which identifies steps which will enhance our collective response and lay a clear roadmap to 2019.

In particular, discussions at the Special Session should focus on enhancing the international response to new psychoactive substances, implementing proportionate criminal justice measures and taking a comprehensive approach to recovery.

We must also ensure that our work at the Special Session, and here at the Commission, is fully integrated with the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Development Agenda and our efforts to minimise drug harms are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

Depending on outcome document progress, either:

We welcome the successful adoption of the outcome document, which will be the lasting legacy of the Special Session. It combines ambitious goals for a better future with operational recommendations that all Member States can take to achieve those goals.

Or:

We look forward to the adoption of the outcome document, which we hope will combine ambitious goals for a better future with operational recommendations that all Member States can take to achieve those goals.

We urge all Member States to agree on this document in Vienna shortly, allowing us all to take full part in the important discussions and events that will take place in New York.

UK Leadership on New Psychoactive Substances

Mr Chair,

Responding to the global challenges posed by new psychoactive substances is a priority for the United Kingdom.

In January we introduced new legislation, the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, which introduces a general ban on the supply of all new psychoactive substances.

This will complement our wider response, which includes innovative demand reduction programmes such as Project Neptune – a tailored programme developing clinical guidance, online training and treatment tools for clinicians and other frontline workers to identify and treat the harms of these substances.

Over the last three years the United Kingdom has worked to demonstrate global leadership on this issue.

This includes forming the International Action Group on New Psychoactive Substances – an informal group of Member States and international organisations which seeks to coordinate and drive the international response.

The United Kingdom's long-term objective is to establish a sustainable international system which can deal effectively with new psychoactive substances.

This would include:

- rich data-sharing between Member States and international organizations,
- policy exchange to assist governments in implementing a balanced, evidence-based response; and
- regular informed scheduling decisions by the Commission to bring the most harmful substances under international control.

The international community has made significant progress towards these goals, including controlling harmful new psychoactive substances under the conventions for the first time last year, and again today / yesterday / last week.

While much has been achieved, there is more to be done. The international community's immediate priorities in this area should include gathering and sharing information about the different legislative responses available, and enriching our understanding of the public health harms of these substances.

Proportionate Criminal Justice

Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom implements a smart, proportionate criminal justice response at each stage of the process.

This includes alternatives to incarceration for minor drug offences, and integration of criminal justice and health services to ensure that offenders who misuse drugs get the support they need.

Courts in the United Kingdom use independently-produced sentencing guidelines for

drug offences, which ensure consistency and proportionality in sentencing. This tool provides judges with guidance on taking the particular circumstances of each case into account.

Importantly, the United Kingdom delivers proportionality in criminal justice and good health outcomes while retaining a criminal offence for drug possession.

Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom has a proud history of championing human rights, and in this regard we oppose the use of the death penalty in all circumstances as a matter of principle.

In particular, we will continue to urge all Member States who still use the death penalty for drug offences to abolish this unacceptable and ineffective practice.

The United Kingdom does not provide criminal justice, or other assistance, which may result in a death sentence being applied. We will hold international agencies funded by the UK to account for compliance with this and all other human rights obligations.

HIV and blood-borne diseases

Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom remains fully committed to reducing the transmission of HIV and other blood-borne diseases among people who inject drugs.

The agreed target of reducing HIV transmission by 50% by 2015 has not been met, but we have the tools to achieve this reduction at our disposal.

We have clear evidence that the package of measures set out in the World Health Organisation's 2014 Consolidated Guidelines are effective.

We call on all Member States to increase access to proven interventions, including opioid substitution treatment, clean needle exchange programmes and access to antiretroviral treatment.

The United Kingdom is proud to be the second largest international funder of HIV prevention, care and treatment, and we will continue to take a leading role on this issue.

Ensuring access to controlled medicines

Mr Chair,

The UN drug conventions are founded on the dual goals of reducing the illicit use of dangerous substances and ensuring access to controlled substances for medical purposes.

Despite this, up to 5.5 billion people live in countries with low or non-existent access to controlled medicines. Too many people live and die in avoidable pain.

This is why the United Kingdom will continue to invest in supporting health systems across the world.

We must strengthen efforts to make material progress here, in accordance with the roadmap set by the Sustainable Development Goals.

Organised crime

Mr Chair,

Drug trafficking and other forms of organised crime pose a significant threat to the safety and security of all our nations.

To address this shared and complex problem, we need to ensure we continue to strengthen law enforcement and criminal justice responses.

We also need to address the vulnerabilities which drive, enable and perpetuate organised crime. We can achieve this by fostering strong, resilient governance and providing licit socio-economic opportunities which will help to prevent vulnerable people being drawn into organised crime.

Understanding what works is key to delivering this. We need to improve the availability and quality of impact indicators related to organised crime, so that we are better able to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of our responses.

Promoting a balanced, comprehensive approach that disrupts and prevents organised crime is the best way to tackle this threat.

Conclusion

Mr Chair,

I will conclude by reiterating the United Kingdom's support for a modern, balanced and evidence based international approach to drugs within the UN conventions.

We must seize the opportunities to improve our collective approach. The United Kingdom will continue to take a leadership role in delivering a response that tackles existing and new challenges through prevention, recovery and supply reduction.

Member States have much to gain through collaboration, and I look forward to what we can achieve together.

Mr Chair, thank you for this opportunity to address the Commission.