

Notes for an Address by

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during the

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General Assembly on the World Drug Problem

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OPENING REMARKS:

Mister Chairman, Heads of State and Government, Ministers and distinguished delegates.

Canada is very pleased to participate in this special segment, as members of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs work together to prepare for UNGASS.

Canada views UNGASS 2016 as an opportunity to reflect on our progress, as well as to engage in discussions on the many new and continuing challenges posed by illicit drug-related activities and by the social harms that they cause.

Recognizing the vast array of challenges involved in drug control, Canada believes that we should focus our domestic and international efforts on priority areas that provide the greatest opportunities for improvement.

First, we believe that a strong emphasis should be placed on a comprehensive public health approach. This includes addressing the problematic use of drugs through the implementation of prevention initiatives, providing treatment and care, supporting recovery and reducing harms associated with drug use.

In our view, harm reduction is critical. Canada supports the use of evidence-based harm reduction measures such as needle exchange programs and supervised injection sites. With one long-standing supervised injection site already operating in Canada, we have recently approved a second, and anticipate that there will be others in the future.

In addition, earlier this year, in response to a devastating increase in overdoses related to illicitly produced fentanyl, Canada has begun the process to remove naloxone from prescription status thereby enabling wider access to this life-saving drug, to assist in

the immediate treatment of opioid overdoses wherever they occur.

The Government has also recently invested in a new prescription drug abuse strategy building on the work of the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, and including all those with a role to play in tackling this complex issue.

Finally, a public health approach also includes ensuring access to essential medicines. There is wide acknowledgement in the international community that lack of access is a serious issue in many countries and that more needs to be done to ensure that patients do not have to endure needless pain and suffering. As a physician who worked for many years in Africa, Canada's new Minister of Health understands that improving the availability of essential medicines will require both national action to address such barriers as well as international support for those efforts.

A second priority area where Canada believes we should focus our collective efforts is on ensuring appropriate legislation and regulation to establish international and domestic frameworks for the control of new psychoactive substances. Given the rapid rate at which they are appearing on the illicit market, such substances pose a significant risk to public health and safety. Ensuring appropriate controls is challenging. Canada therefore supports proactive measures to address this issue, emphasizing the need for strengthened national control measures, tailored to each member states individual circumstances, international coordination and efficient processes to control the most prevalent, persistent and harmful of these substances at the international level.

Thirdly, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of sound data and information. Canada supports evidence-based policy and program design that is informed by reliable data, thorough analysis, rigorous evaluation, sound science and the sharing of

best practices. Canada also supports the development of improved, broadened metrics to better evaluate our success in ameliorating drug control and addressing problematic substance use, and which also take into account the harms associated with illicit drug activities, such as their impact on health, peace and security, development and human rights. We acknowledge that this may require some member states, including ourselves, to rethink how information and data are collected and prioritized.

Lastly, and above all, Canada believes that any drug policy should be rooted in the recognition of and respect for human rights and that sanctions for crime, including drug-related crime, should be proportionate to the nature of the offence. In this regard, Canada opposes the use of the death penalty in all cases, everywhere

Mr. Chair, members of the Commission will likely be aware that Canada has committed to legalize, strictly regulate and restrict

access to marijuana. The Government of Canada in its electoral platform stated that the current national approach is not working. Canadian youth use marijuana at rates among the highest in the world. Thousands of Canadians are dealing with the consequences of having criminal records for non-violent drug offences every year while organized crime is reaping the benefits of billions of dollars in profits from the illegal marijuana trade. And, finally, most Canadians no longer believe that marijuana should be subject to harsh criminal sanctions, and support the Government's commitment to legalize, tax and regulate marijuana.

Canada recognizes that this is both a serious and a complex undertaking. The Government remains committed to strong international cooperation to combat the world drug problem and wherever possible, will seek to align its objectives for a new marijuana regime with the objectives of the international drug control framework and the spirit of the Conventions. We will keep

these shared objectives front and center as Canada's Ministers of Justice, Public Safety and Health move forward to establish a task force to consult with experts, our provinces and territories, and Canadians leading to the design and implementation of a new regime.

Mr. Chair, we recognize that in order to further progress on global drug control issues, there must be an ongoing commitment to international cooperation. This includes stronger collaboration between UN agencies which deal with different aspects of the world drug problem, including the UNODC, the INCB, the WHO and UNAIDS, as well as civil society organizations and the scientific community.

In closing, Mr. Chair, Canada will continue to do its part in advancing the international drug policy agenda. We look forward to finalizing the text of the UNGASS outcome document here in this session of the CND, and we look forward to fruitful and

informative discussions at UNGASS. You can be assured of
Canada's full support and engagement in this process.

THANK YOU.