



Drug Commissioner
of the Federal Government

Drug Commissioner of the Federal Government of Germany Marlene Mortler

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Madame Chair,

On behalf of the German Delegation, allow me to warmly congratulate you on your election to the chair of the 61st Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

You have our best wishes and our full support.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The speakers before me have addressed many big and important matters.

Allow me now to draw your attention to another big concern: the **little** members of our society – namely children and young people.

- To the baby who, at this very moment, is being born addicted to opioids;
- To the little girl who had to get up alone this morning because, once again, her addicted mother did not come home last night;
- And to the boy who did not even go to school because he has to sell drugs to help support his family.

To quote Carol Bellamy, the former UNICEF Executive Director: “In serving the best interests of children, we serve the best interests of all humanity.”

Where could these words ring more true than when addressing the vicious circle of drug production, trafficking and dependence?

This is why the first point I want to make here is the following:

A responsible drug policy must take care of children and young people as potential substance user groups.

They are particularly vulnerable, curious, risk-taking and, all too often, left to their own devices.

Therefore, I want to see prevention, counselling, therapy and social welfare services in place that cater to children and youth -- literally everywhere.

Sadly, children and youth are exposed to a second form of risk:

They can easily be pulled into drug related crime.

Either

- exploited as cheap field hands for the cultivation of drug crops or
- used as drug mules with the aim of not attracting law enforcement agencies.

Many children and teenagers live in poverty and devoid of opportunity.

Particularly to those, crime appears to be a profitable career path to embark on – while, in reality, it is one that ends up in prison or correctional centres.

And, more often than not, their problems only get worse from there.

If, on top of that, they are paid in drugs for the work they do, this triggers yet another downward spiral of dependency and crime.

Our task, therefore, is to ensure access to education, social welfare and development opportunities.

Only children who grow up in a healthy social environment will be self-reliant enough to master whatever life throws at them!

This is particularly relevant for the children of substance-dependent parents.

These are

- children who, even as primary schoolers, look after their whole family;
- children who keep being shunted from one parent to the other, to foster families, to homes and back; or more dramatic still:
- children who are orphaned overnight because their parents have died of an overdose.

These children need special support.

Because we know for a fact that parental substance abuse is likely to be sustained across generations.

Unless we take action, one in three of these children will go on to develop an addictive disorder themselves.

Another one out of three will develop a different type of mental health disorder – begetting a cycle of disease, substance abuse and poor opportunities that lasts for generations.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very happy to see that, in fact, several of the resolutions we will be discussing over the coming days are dedicated to the situation of children and youth.

Let us grasp this opportunity.

Let us begin right here and now to be mindful of and responsive to the needs of children and youth – not just sporadically, but at all times!

Let us face the vicious circle that we allow to continue unless we finally take firm and targeted action.

And – once we are back home - let us all purposefully revisit our drug policies!

Our children and our young people are our future.

We quite simply cannot afford to deny them the attention they need.

Thank you very much.