

61st Session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs

**Ireland National Statement delivered by H.E Ambassador Tom Hanney,
Permanent Representative of Ireland to the International Organizations in
Vienna**

Vienna 12th March 2018

Thank you Madam Chair.

Allow me to warmly congratulate you on your election to the chair of the 61st Commission on Narcotic Drugs, and to thank you and your predecessors for all the work you've done to on preparing for this 61st session and the 62nd session and ministerial segment next year. Ireland fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by Bulgaria on behalf of the European Union, and we reiterate our view that UNGASS 2016 represents a milestone in international drugs policy: we must build on this consensus and ensure the broad international implementation of the recommendations that we all agreed in 2016.

Since the 60th Session last year Ireland has launched its new drug national strategy which aligns with the UNGASS 2016 outcome document. ‘Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery – a health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland’ is a new departure for Ireland’s policy on drugs. It reflects a fundamental change in the way we address substance misuse. This new strategy promotes a more compassionate and humane approach to people who use drugs, with addiction being treated first and foremost as a health issue.

The values of compassion, respect, equity, inclusion, partnership and evidence-based policy-making form the backbone of this strategy. The importance of mobilising individuals and communities and building their resilience to respond to the drug problem is also highlighted. Drug-related intimidation is a concern to communities and represents a real threat to public health. This strategy recognises the need for a collaborative response to intimidation involving law enforcement, social services, schools and community organisation.

Ireland has always adopted a partnership-based approach to dealing with the drug problem. The development of this strategy provides evidence of this approach, with all relevant sectors of government, community and voluntary organisations, service users and their families and the general public involved in shaping the final policies. In addition, all relevant sectors and interests are represented on the structures that will lead and support the implementation of the strategy.

As the title of the strategy suggests, reducing the harms caused by drug use is a key focus. Ireland established its first needle exchange in 1989 and now there are exchanges in most parts of Ireland. However, our capital city still has a recognisable problem with street injecting, especially among people who use drug who are also homeless. To address this problem, last month a contract was awarded for the provision of Ireland's first supervised injecting facility on a pilot basis. This facility will be in a city centre location and it is hoped that it will be opened by the end of 2018.

In line with the UNGASS recommendation for proportionate responses in terms of sentencing and sanctions, we have established a working group to examine alternative approaches to the possession of drugs for personal use. This working group will consider if there is a case for decriminalising drug use in Ireland and will make recommendations to Government by the end of this year. Investigating alternative sanctions also reinforces the commitment in our strategy to reflect a person-centred, humanitarian approach. Therefore, Ireland maintains our objection to the use of measures of any kind that are not respectful of the human being. The death penalty is a concept that cannot be accepted under any circumstances.

Of course, Madam Chair, the global drug problem continues to evolve. New psychoactive substances (NPS) and the illicit use of prescription drugs are two current trends which constitute a serious threat to public health. Ireland has recently developed new regulations which strengthen the restrictions around possession and importation of certain prescription drugs. I am also delighted to say that Ireland was one of the first EU member states to introduce legislation regarding NPS in 2010. This innovative law led to the closing down of practically all of the 'head shops' that supplied these products. However, we have to be ever vigilant: national legislation can find itself circumvented due to the global nature of the drug problem and evolutions in technology. Therefore, we consider it important that NPS and illegal use of prescription drugs are dealt with through a collaborative approach at UN level.

Madam Chair, Excellencies, thank you for your attention.