

Statement of Belgium
at 63rd session of Commission on Narcotic Drugs
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H.E. Mr. Ghislain D'hoop

Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Belgium

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

Belgium aligns itself with the statement expressed by Croatia on behalf of the EU and its member states. I will briefly elaborate on three points.

Firstly, regarding the resolution entitled *Promoting awareness-raising, education and training as part of a comprehensive approach to ensure the access to and availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes and improve their rational use*, tabled by the EU and Australia. The inadequate access to and availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes has been of great concern for my country for many years. Indeed, this challenge relates to avoiding human suffering and respecting human rights. The situation today is highly unequal. To give you an idea : less than 10% of the children who need pain medications in the world receive it. This is not acceptable.

The barriers impeding the access to these substances are well known. The commitments to tackle these barriers in a comprehensive and balanced way are there. But we should intensify our actions : focused, firmly and

sustainably. The lack of capacity among health care providers on the medical use of these controlled substances is the biggest barrier according to INCB's recent reporting of Member States opinions. This is the reason why the resolution focuses precisely on this issue. Medical doctors, nurses and pharmacists are in direct contact with this human suffering. We believe we should support them actively through the provision of evidence based guidelines, education, and training. But not only them. Patients, caregivers and the population at large should be made aware of the advantages of the substances, as well as of their rational use. Providing objective and adequate information tailored to the capacities of these groups is therefore indispensable. Ladies and gentlemen, we believe that many good examples and solid information sources do exist. But they should be more widely communicated and used. The needs are extremely high. Let us engage more strongly in capacity building and awareness-raising as a big step forward in alleviating this human suffering.

My second point relates to the trafficking in illicit drugs, such as cocaine. Les importations massives de cocaïne en direction de l'Europe, continuent de représenter un défi important pour la Belgique. En 2019, plus de 60 tonnes de cocaïne ont été saisies en Belgique et une quantité équivalente dans les pays d'origine de la cocaïne en direction de mon pays.

Les différentes actions des services répressifs belges, mises en œuvre se sont inscrites et s'inscrivent encore toujours dans un projet multisectoriel favorisant la coopération entre les acteurs concernés, tels que la douane, la police, la justice, le secteur privé et les autorités portuaires et administratives. L'objectif ambitieux de soumettre l'ensemble du trafic commercial à des mesures de contrôle et de profilage sera poursuivi, tout comme l'investissement dans de nouvelles technologies. Par ailleurs, les différentes actions entreprises afin de sécuriser l'environnement portuaire ont permis de mieux orienter les efforts d'enquête. Au plan international, les accords conclus avec plusieurs pays d'origine et l'engagement de ces mêmes pays ont permis d'augmenter de manière considérable les saisies

effectuées dans la région. L'on soulignera pour conclure l'engagement commun des forces de police locales et fédérales afin de contrer l'action grandissante des groupes criminels établis sur le sol belge.

Furthermore, I would like to address the issue of stigma towards people who use drugs. This stigma is widely present, also in my country. Stigmatizing attitudes and behavior often go hand in hand with exclusion and discrimination. That way, they constitute a major impediment in the access to, inter alia, health, care or social services causing the denial of basic human rights and equal opportunities of people who use drugs. Women have even higher risks of being stigmatized or discriminated against because of their drug use. We therefore very much welcomed the adoption of resolution 61/11 on promoting non stigmatizing attitudes to ensure the availability of, access to and the delivery of health, care and social services for drug users. We will closely analyze the report of the Executive Director of UNODC on the implementation of this resolution and hope this subject will gain further action-oriented attention in the coming years.

Finally, the mandate of Belgium in the Commission on Narcotic Drugs will end in December of next year. I can announce that my country will introduce its candidacy for a new mandate for the period 2022-2025. If elected, Belgium will continue working on supporting a balanced and evidence based approach to drugs policy, with a specific focus on improving access to controlled substances, and this fully in line with the policies and priorities of the European Union and its Member States.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.