



Permanent Mission of Italy  
International Organisations - Vienna

**COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS**  
**63rd SESSION**

*Agenda item 3: General debate*

**Statement by**  
**Ambassador Alessandro Cortese**

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

Italy fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and I wish to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

There is ample evidence which points to the **growing complexity** of the world drug problem. Challenges are manifold and diverse, as recognized in the Ministerial Declaration adopted last year and in the World Drug Report 2019. To name just a few: illicit drug crop cultivation and plant-based manufacture remain at record levels; the market for synthetic drugs is expanding and new psychoactive substances continue to emerge; the number of deaths attributable to the use of drugs is rising; and public health responses fall far short of need. Confronted with these daunting challenges, the international community can rely on a *corpus* of **joint commitments** made over the past decade, in particular through the UNGASS Outcome Document of 2016. Now is time to **accelerate their implementation** – as stated in the Ministerial Declaration – and also to monitor progress. In this respect, the revised **annual reporting questionnaire**, to be adopted during this session, will represent a valuable tool to ensure that our efforts to address the world drug problem are informed by evidence.

Mr. Chair,

allow me to emphasize some lines of actions to which my Country attaches priority.

First, investing in **prevention**, with a specific focus on youth, and based on the principle of early detection for early intervention. Priority is given to supporting families, educators and teachers. For instance, one of the largest programmes currently implemented is aimed at providing specific training in drug prevention education to around 15.000 teachers.

When it comes to the promotion of evidence-based prevention, the UNODC-WHO International Standards represent an essential reference. In this regard, I am pleased to announce my Government's recent decision to **fund a project by UNODC** to

advance the implementation of these standards in Southeastern Europe, in particular through family-therapy interventions.

Second, the promotion of a **health-centered approach to drug dependence**. This is very dear to Italy, where access to **treatment** is provided by the public service, through a multidisciplinary approach. There are around 570 drug dependence units, which in 2019 provided free care to over 133,000 drug users, and they are complemented by 900 therapeutic communities accredited by the public sector. These communities offer both residential and non-residential services to around 16.000 drug users a year and provide a fundamental contribution to their recovery.

Third, the commitment to **counter illicit production and trafficking**, including through strengthened international cooperation. This commitment has been reiterated on the occasion of an international conference on addressing illicit drug trafficking that Italy hosted two weeks ago in Rome, with the participation of representatives from 58 Countries. Let me also mention the work carried out by the Mediterranean network for cooperation on drugs and addictions of the Pompidou Group, that Italy chaired last year.

In this same vein, we encourage all Member States to enhance the implementation of the 1988 Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and to make use of the tools provided by the **Palermo Convention**, with a view to **dismantling criminal organizations** involved in drug trafficking. From our side, we continue to invest, including through the strengthening of the National Warning System, in order to be able to identify in a timely manner **new psychoactive substances**, whose dynamic market - especially through the internet and the darknet - poses significant challenges.

Mr. Chair

Too many of us have experienced the drama of seeing a friend, a relative, a colleague falling prey to the self-destructing spiral of drug abuse. This should constantly

remind us that more than anything else, the world drug problem is a social, a humanitarian, a public-health problem. The need to promote **humanitarian drug policies** is pressing. This will be advocated on Wednesday morning in a side event promoted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and co-sponsored by Italy.

The fight against illicit drug trafficking therefore must not come at the expense of the respect of **human rights, fundamental freedoms and the inherent dignity** of all individuals. Upholding these principles also entails ensuring **proportionate responses** to drug-related offences, including through alternatives to conviction or punishment, as foreseen in the Conventions. And in this context, I wish to reaffirm our strong **opposition to the death penalty** in all circumstances.

To conclude, allow me to recall the importance of the engagement, including in the context of this same Commission, with **civil society**, non-governmental organizations and the scientific community. In this regard, my Government is glad to sponsor two side-events promoted by prominent Italian NGOs.

The role of civil society is indeed essential to address the drug problem, whose complexity requires strengthened partnership and coordination, both at the national and international level.

Thank you.