

Distinguished Chair, ladies and gentlemen

At last year's ministerial meeting, we all reaffirmed our shared commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem. Our commitment to a balanced, integrated, comprehensive, multidisciplinary and scientific evidence-based approach towards the drug problem is fundamental in accelerating the implementation of existing drug policy commitments and getting better results.

Despite all our efforts , working together for the health and welfare of humankind, the latest World Drug Report shows that worldwide the range of drugs and the number of drug markets are still expanding and diversifying. In the Netherlands for example we see an increase in the use of nitrous oxide or laughing gas. And we face the challenge of disruptive organized crime connected to illicit drugs.

The Netherlands is fully committed to strengthening the balance between protecting public health on the one hand and addressing organized crime and ensuring safety on the other hand. These are the two main pillars of the Dutch drug policy.

The public health aspect of our policy consists of a gradual approach. The first step is to discourage the use of drugs in general. Using drugs is never without risk. Our drug prevention policy contains various approaches aiming at different target groups. We focus on young people through school programs and to parents through social media like Facebook to mention some examples. In case of drug use, our focus moves to preventing negative health impacts and reducing

drug related incidents as well as early warning to prevent that people develop a drug addiction. In case of substance use and addiction, we ensure adequate treatment and where necessary harm reduction measures. In all these steps, our first and foremost goal is to help people. Decriminalization of drug use is essential in order to do this properly. In other words: prevention is better than cure, cure is better than harm reduction and harm reduction is better than doing nothing.

Regarding organized drug crime, the Netherlands is looking for both innovative and effective interventions. The Government is developing a broad offensive against disruptive organized drug crime aiming at disruption of drug gangs, confiscation of proceeds of crime and preventing people, especially youth, from being seduced by this kind of crime. We try to dismantle as many drug labs as possible. Organized crime, however, is unmistakably transnational in character. It's not just a national problem. A large amount of the drugs entering or being produced in the Netherlands are destined international markets. Therefore, we can only be effective if all countries involved cooperate to prevent and combat the trafficking in both precursors as illicit drugs.

To move forward it is vital that we keep examining the effectiveness of our approaches and their consequences for health and human rights. We must not forget that an evidence-based approach is not only crucial for the health aspect of the world drug problem, but it is equally important when it comes to developing effective crime prevention and criminal justice approaches. Learning from each other – from both

successes and failures – is crucial to improve our responses to the world drug problem.

A clear example of our evidence based and pragmatic approach is our cannabis policy. Local governments experience problems related to public health, public nuisance, safety and crime as a result of the current policy. In response to this, we are preparing to carry out a small-scale experiment which will be monitored and evaluated by independent researchers. The results of monitoring and evaluation are key determinants of our future policymaking.

In conclusion, we would like to once more underline the importance of advancing a balanced approach, focusing on protecting public health on the one hand and combatting organized crime and ensuring safety on the other hand. The collection and evaluation of data, both on national as on global level, is crucial to help us get a realistic picture to underpin our discussions and policy decisions as well as our interventions. We therefore welcome the steps taken towards improving the Annual Report Questionnaire. Only with solid data, on all terrains, we will be able to take stock of the progress we make in ten years' time. This requires close cooperation on a global level. We need to exchange information, good practices and lessons learned: this gives us the opportunity to learn and to continue making progress!