

**National Statement by James A. Walsh,
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law
Enforcement Affairs, U.S. Department of State, and
U.S. Head of Delegation to the
63rd Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
Vienna, Austria
March 2, 2020**

Thank you, chair. We welcome your leadership and commend UNODC for its work to prepare for this week. We congratulate Executive Director Waly on her appointment and wish her success as she guides our work here in Vienna.

As we face new drug control threats at the global, regional, and domestic levels, our Vienna-based community is an essential resource.

In the United States, synthetic drugs fuel the latest wave of an opioid epidemic. The CND has worked hard over the last four years to tackle this challenge, building on existing tools like the UNODC Global SMART Program and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB's) proprietary information-sharing tools. We have also launched new initiatives like the UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs and INCB's Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRIDS) program. The WHO has accelerated its efforts to review synthetic drugs, including fentanyl, so that the scheduling process can better keep pace with new threats. Member states have also invested substantial efforts in addressing their own domestic challenges in tackling synthetic drugs. These efforts are beginning to pay off: for example, in the United States, overdose deaths have declined for the first time in over 20 years.

However, we are only beginning to make progress against serious global drug control threats. In the United States, deaths from methamphetamine continue to rise. Drug traffickers use information and communication technologies, cryptocurrencies, as well as the international supply chain to expand their global reach and evade law enforcement. Our current response is not enough.

Domestically, governments must remain agile and strengthen their responses with new partnerships. For example, private sector entities play

a critical role in addressing 21st century drug threats. In 2019, the United States unveiled a series of advisories to help domestic and foreign businesses protect themselves and their supply chains from inadvertent fentanyl trafficking. Partnerships between governments and the private sector can help member states fulfill their obligations under the conventions to combat illicit production, diversion, and trafficking. The private sector can also bolster evidence-based drug use prevention, treatment, and recovery programs, including through financial support. This is why the United States has sponsored a resolution at the CND to deepen member states' collaboration with the private sector. We hope all of you will join us in adopting this resolution.

Member states also must support and utilize the international scheduling system provided in our treaties to respond to new and evolving challenges. Data should be the primary driver of this process. We support the role of the WHO to recommend changes in international control based on their scientific, evidence-based assessments of risks of abuse, dependence, and harm to health of substances.

As the WHO accelerates the rate at which it can assess substances, it is especially important that the CND respond to all WHO recommendations in a timely manner. This includes making difficult decisions on cannabis, so that the commission can return its focus to more urgent drug control threats that are killing many of our citizens and undermining our security and public health. The United States remains firmly committed to consensus-based decision making at the CND, including on this week's procedural decision to vote on the cannabis recommendations at the Reconvened CND in December. We regret that the CND was unable to take action on the WHO cannabis recommendations this week, given that Member States have been working hard since February 2019 to engage in an in-depth consultative process on the legal, administrative, social, and economic impacts of the recommendations. We would like to thank the WHO, the INCB, and UNODC for participating in those sessions. It is now the responsibility of Member States to continue this process through the CND in a manner that ensures they arrive at the Reconvened session in December prepared to cast their votes.

It is important to highlight that the WHO recommendations have drawn our attention to important questions regarding the proper administration of the drug control system. In the absence of a timely response from the CND, these questions may give rise to discrepancies and vulnerabilities that can be exploited by traffickers, ultimately weakening the international drug control system. This lends urgency to our efforts. We look forward to working

together to find creative and effective solutions to these challenges so the Commission can return to more urgent priorities.

The CND is a time-honored forum for sharing expertise and coordinating new and traditional partnerships. We must remain nimble to adapt to the drug-related challenges of today and tomorrow. The conventions give us the tools we need, and we look forward to working together with other member states to live up to our commitments and demonstrate our values through concrete action.