

## Ghada Waly

Director-General/Executive Director

# Opening of the 63rd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs *2 March 2020*

My thanks to the distinguished Chair, Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Distinguished delegates, friends and partners,

It is an honour to welcome you to the Vienna International Centre for the opening of the 63rd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

This is my first session as Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. But it is not the first time that I have had the privilege to attend the Commission.

Three years ago, I came to Vienna as the head of Egypt's delegation, in my capacity as Minister for Social Solidarity in my country, Egypt.

As Minister, I also served as chair of my country's anti-drug fund and its criminology research centre. Our national plan of action on combatting drug abuse was developed with the support of UNODC and engaged 11 ministries in the fight against drugs.

I found it tremendously beneficial then to join the Commission session in Vienna, where Member States were hard at work building on the momentum and commitments resulting from the landmark UN General Assembly Special Session on the world drug problem.

It was a chance to learn from my peers and contribute our own country's experiences and best practices. I could see first-hand how your work through the Commission translates into action by UNODC to support Member States, which has a direct and real impact on the lives of people everywhere.

Now I am proud to be here again, but this time as UNODC Executive Director and a member of the UN family, in the 75th year of the United Nations, at the start of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Challenging times but exciting times.

This is an opportunity and a responsibility, one that I take very seriously.

I am determined to ensure that Member States can make full use of the Commission to advance balanced drug control policies and share experiences, as I did in 2017.

I am equally determined to ensure that UNODC, with its unique, integrated mandates spanning all pillars of the UN's work, can live up to its full potential as we provide the support that people need, from headquarters in Vienna and in the field, in partnership with the UN system, civil society, academia, the private sector and you, our Member States.

I thank all of you attending this session. Through your presence you are highlighting the importance of the issues being discussed this week, and I thank you for demonstrating your

commitment to our global cooperation to address drug challenges that face all of our societies.

Some 35 million people around the world suffer from drug use disorders but only one in seven receive treatment. Far fewer women than men are able to get the treatment and services they need due to persisting barriers and stigma.

More than half a million have died annually as a result of drug use, the majority from opioids. Poverty and lack of opportunity force some one million households to illicitly cultivate opium and coca. Justice and law enforcement officials, police officers, are losing their lives to stop the flow of lethal drugs and precursors.

In response, UNODC will seek to further elevate our assistance to you, to implement the international drug control conventions and commitments in line with the 2019 Ministerial Declaration; to ensure access to essential pain medications in partnership with INCB and WHO; to find innovative solutions and public-private partnerships to support alternative livelihoods; and to network regional and inter-regional responses to combat drug trafficking. The UNODC Opioid Strategy is leading a global, integrated response to the opioid crisis, and to predict and prevent future crises, offering 220 practical tools and resources from across the UN system that has been accessed in 86 countries.

International standards developed by UNODC and WHO can help you to deliver science- and rights-based prevention and treatment of drug use disorders and related diseases, and enable effective rehabilitation and reintegration, all with the ultimate aim of protecting the health and welfare of our societies.

Our Office is continuously enhancing efforts to bring the world drug problem into sharper focus, including through support to Member States to improve data collection for the flagship World Drug Report.

Last year's World Drug Report benefitted from new surveys in India and Nigeria, both among the ten most populated countries. Thanks to improved data, the global estimate of opioid users changed from 34 million to 53 million people.

This is a staggering difference, and shows how crucial it is to improve data collection and analysis in all regions to better respond to real challenges on the ground.

With this in mind, UNODC is hard at work on the 2020 World Drug Report, which we will be launching on 26 June on the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, and which I hope will spark further dialogue and further action.

I am personally committed to tailoring UNODC support to address real needs, to take forward holistic and integrated approaches to the world drug problem and related problems of crime, corruption and terrorism.

You can rely on UNODC's steadfast support, as we look to this Commission to offer guidance about your needs and priorities, and to Member States to provide resources in solidarity and shared responsibility.

We are working with you and listening to you. I am elaborating a unified strategy for UNODC with my senior management and will be discussing this strategy with Member States and partners in the months ahead.

Since I joined UNODC exactly one month ago, I have heard many of you speak about the Vienna spirit of consensus. I find this idea quite inspiring, and we should take a moment to appreciate how important it is that we can overcome division to strive for peace, protect rights and sow the seeds for sustainable development, even as the very values of the UN and multilateralism have come increasingly under pressure.

Vienna can be proud of its hospitality and support to this UN headquarters as it fosters much-needed teamwork and dialogue.

I very much welcome the continuing devotion of the Vienna-based Commissions to building consensus, drawing on evidence and agreed frameworks, to solve shared problems. Every country, every region faces unique challenges and contexts, but working through diverging views to find and expand common ground remains an essential basis for effective action, to make a difference on the ground. That is the essence of the Vienna spirit.

Inspired by this spirit, and driven by the need to do better for all people, let us begin this week with determination and optimism, with a view to achieving concrete progress in strengthening responses to the world drug problem.

I commend and congratulate the Chair and extended Bureau for your hard work leading to this session, and I wish you productive discussions in the days ahead.

I look forward to meeting many of you bilaterally, and while attending many events during the course of the week that will highlight the many challenges we face, and showcase the many solutions we are developing and working on together.

Thank you and good luck.