

**Statement by The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
on the occasion of the 63rd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
Vienna, 2–6 March 2020**

Agenda item 3: General debate

Distinguished Chairperson and Honourable Members of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs,

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the new Executive Director of UNAIDS, Winnie Byanyima. She asked me to convey her greetings and sincere hopes from UNAIDS that this 63rd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs will be different.

That this CND will mark a change to evidence-based approaches to HIV prevention and support among people who use drugs. That this CND will be the beginning of the end the criminalization and detention of people who consume drugs. And particularly important for UNAIDS and the goal of ending AIDS by 2030, that this CND will keep the promise made by every member state to leave no one behind in the SDG era by protecting the health and human rights of people of use drugs.

UNAIDS is a joint UN programme, not an agency. As such, UNAIDS reflects and supports the common position of 11 United Nations organizations—including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the World Health Organization—for an urgent, evidence-based response to HIV among people who use drugs.

At a time when we should be entering the last mile in the decade of action for the SDGs, UNAIDS highlights with urgent concern that the HIV epidemic among people who use drugs is still increasing. Worldwide, 14% of the 12 million people who inject drugs are living with HIV. The risk of acquiring HIV for people who inject drugs is 22 times higher than for those who do not. In many countries, the quality, coverage and funding for HIV programmes among people who inject drugs are deteriorating. This is not just a worrying trend. This is a public health emergency.

As we said in UNAIDS report, ***Health, rights and drugs***, progress remains essential in three policy and programmatic areas: decriminalization, harm reduction, and zero discrimination.

First, end the criminalization of drug use and drug possession for personal use. Under the leadership of the UN Secretary General, the UN system is united on this. The UN System Common Position on drug policy commits all of us to step up our joint efforts, including to end the criminalization of drug possession for personal use and call for changes in laws, policies and practices that threaten the health and human rights of people.

Second, make harm reduction programmes accessible to all people who use drugs. Harm reduction is safe and cost-effective but in too many countries and communities, it remains underutilized and underfunded.

Third, end stigma and discrimination faced by people who use drugs and people living with HIV. This includes ending the stigma and discrimination that people who use drugs face if they're living with HIV, involved in sex work, migration, or because of their gender, race, or ethnicity.

In the past, precious time was lost debating what to implement and at what scale. All three components must be fully implemented or we will not end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

Usually at this point in our statement, we would say that UNAIDS stands ready to support member states. But if this CND is going to be different, standing by will not get the job done either. This year the UNAIDS Joint Programme, including our cosponsors, will be engaging governments, and donors and civil society and organizations of people who use drugs for a renewed push in this critical area.

Time is working against us, so we will engage with member states to provide evidence, expertise and policy support to support these changes now. For example, in dozens of countries with HIV epidemics among people who use drugs, UNAIDS will work with you to prioritize these components in your applications to the Global Fund over the next six months.

In closing, I have the honour remind the honourable delegates that 1st March was the International Day for Zero Discrimination. But as this was a Sunday, UNAIDS calls on all CND members to make today and indeed every day a day for Zero Discrimination for all people who use drugs.

Thank you.