

**WHO intervention at the plenary session of 63rd session of the  
Commission on Narcotic Drugs.**

**Vienna, Austria, 3 March 2020**

***Delivered by Dévora Kestel, Director, Department of Mental Health and  
Substance Use***

Madame/Monsieur Chair,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

To address the drug problem as a global public health issue we should prioritize public health strategies and interventions which respect human rights and put people and their health at the centre of responses ensuring that no one is left behind.

Under the leadership of Director-General Dr Tedros, the World Health Organization is transforming itself into a more effective and relevant organization for the world we live in. A new 5-year strategy was endorsed by the World Health Assembly (WHA) last year.

To ensure health and well-being for all, WHO has three strategic priorities: 1. advancing universal health coverage; 2. addressing health emergencies; and 3. promoting healthier populations. All relevant for addressing the world drug problem.

The impact of drugs on the health and well-being of populations cannot be overestimated. According to WHO's latest estimates for 2017, psychoactive drug use is responsible for about half a million deaths worldwide. Most of these deaths were preventable, caused by overdose, infectious diseases, road traffic accidents, and suicides. We need a comprehensive and agile global surveillance and monitoring system to see the trends, rightly interpret them and use them in developing public

health policies and responses. WHO has an important task to integrate this information in WHO health information systems.

Health is a human right. No one should get sick or die just because they are poor, or because they cannot access the services they need. This is the WHO concept of Universal Health Coverage (UHC). and it means that all people who use drugs, have drug use disorders, or are at risk of drug overdose and drug-related infectious diseases should have equal access to quality prevention, treatment and care they need, without experiencing financial hardship. WHO aims to advance UHC for people with drug use disorders worldwide.

WHO works in collaboration with UNODC and the International Narcotics Control Board to provide training and support to countries to maximize access to controlled medicines for the management of pain, palliative care and many other conditions.

WHO has significantly intensified the work of the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence. The Committee most recent review of cannabis and its preparations resulted in recommendations that consider the scientific advances and progress in our understanding of the composition of cannabis.

In addressing opioid overdose, WHO works on evidence-based recommendations on rational use of opioids for pain management, and, in collaboration with UNODC, on S.O.S. initiative focused on the availability of Naloxone for overdose management.

WHO continues to advocate for harm reductions as a critical element in a comprehensive public health response to drug use and related infectious diseases, such as hepatitis, HIV and tuberculosis. WHO promotes a package of evidence-based interventions including needle and syringe programmes, opioid substitution therapy, as well as testing for and treatment for viral hepatitis, HIV, and tuberculosis. WHO also recommends addressing structural barriers to accessing services, and work towards the decriminalisation of drug use and possession for personal use. These recommendations are reflected in the joint UN

Common Position on drug-related matters developed and endorsed by 32 UN entities last year.

The World Health Organization will continue, in collaboration with UNODC, INCB and other partners, to support countries in achieving the health targets set at the SDGs 2030 agenda and implementing the operational recommendations of UNGASS 2016.