

Joint Statement at the reconvened 63rd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs on the WHO/ECDD recommendations on cannabis and related substances

Vienna, 2 December 2020

On behalf of Algeria, Angola, Bahrain, Belarus, Burkina Faso, China, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Libya, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Russian Federation, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

We are extremely disappointed at the outcome of the voting on the recommendation 5.1 to reschedule cannabis plant and cannabis resin from the strictest Schedule IV of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. Cannabis remains the most abused drug globally. For the past 60 years, the international drug control system has been effective in addressing and countering the illicit production of and trafficking in cannabis and cannabis-related substances whilst ensuring their availability for medical and scientific purposes. There is limited evidence that justifies any changes to the scheduling system for cannabis and its related substances, which remains relevant today in curbing the worsening global drug situation.

The outcome of the voting clearly shows that there is no consensus on such an important decision and nearly half of the Commission does not see sufficient reasoning for the proposed change. We express deep concern that the decision to change the existing scheduling status for cannabis and its related substances may be interpreted as the Commission finding that these substances are no longer regarded as harmful to health, in sharp contrast to the recent scientific findings.

Notwithstanding the outcome of the voting, there should be no ambiguity about the implications of this decision. The Commission does not condone the legalization of cannabis, which is contrary to the conventions.

We are concerned that the change in the control system will result in an

increase in the illicit use and production of cannabis and cannabis-related substances, as we have seen in some State Parties that eased the control measures long before the official decision of the CND and contrary to the conventions. In addition, this change will not improve access to cannabis for medical and scientific purposes considering that access for such purposes is not restricted within the current legal framework. This change will cause planting more cannabis for its economic benefits and will result with an increase in drug trafficking. Also, replacing the cultivation of agricultural products with cannabis will have adverse effects on food security.

Deliberations on the recommendations over the past two years clearly illustrate that there is no agreement as to their need and that there is no clear understanding of their possible implications. We rejected these recommendations because they will cause uncertainties and gaps in the implementation of control measures, which will weaken the integrity of the international drug control regime.

Cannabis plant and cannabis resin will remain included in Schedule I of the 1961 convention with strict level of international and national control. We call upon the Parties of the conventions to fulfil their obligations to prevent and combat drug addiction in order to protect the health and welfare of mankind and encourage the international community to support these efforts.

Member States maintain the right to impose the strictest domestic control measures for cannabis and cannabis-related substances, which in their opinion are necessary having regard to their particularly dangerous properties, in accordance with Article 39 of the 1961 convention.

The focus should now be on helping Member States effectively implement the control measures for cannabis and cannabis-related substances. Technical assistance will need to be provided, including through the UNODC, to Member States who lack the necessary detection, testing, monitoring and enforcement capabilities to implement them.

We call upon the Commission to elaborate in close cooperation with the INCB, UNODC and WHO clear guidelines to ensure coherent application of the

provisions of the conventions related to licit production, trade, medical and scientific use of cannabis as well as control of emerging high-potency cannabis products. We are concerned that cannabis cultivation might expand further without proper control measures, which could lead to diversions to illicit market and result in weakening of the international drug control system.

The Commission spent two years discussing this complex and interconnected set of recommendations and their possible implications. We believe there is a need for a closer and more coherent coordination between the WHO/ECDD and Vienna-based entities – the INCB and the UNODC - prior to the submission of scheduling recommendations in order to avoid such unfortunate situations in the future, as these recommendations might have very serious implications for the present and future generations.

Finally, we commend the CND chair Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan for his prudent and strong leadership throughout the process of consideration of these recommendations, despite the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate the valuable input provided by the UNODC and the INCB during the expert deliberations on the WHO/ECDD recommendations and underline the leading role of the CND as the policy-making body of the UN system with prime responsibility for drug control matters and mandated by the three drug control conventions, which constitute the cornerstone of the international drug control system, to amend the schedules of those conventions.