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Follow-up to the implementation at the national, regional and international levels of all commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the world drug problem**Chair's summary on the thematic discussions on the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following-up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration (19–21 October 2020)****

1. Provided below are salient points, a Chair's summary of the thematic discussion held during the third intersessional meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-third session from 19–21 October 2020. The thematic discussions were chaired by H.E. Ambassador Wolfgang Amadeus Bruehlhart (Switzerland), Second Vice-Chair, on behalf of H.E. Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-third session. The summary by the Chair is not subject to negotiation.

I. Background

2. At its 62nd session in March 2019, the Commission adopted by consensus the Ministerial Declaration entitled "*Strengthening Our Actions at the National, Regional and International Levels to Accelerate the Implementation of our Joint Commitments to Address and Counter the World Drug Problem.*" In the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, Member States, while acknowledging that tangible progress had been achieved over the past decade, noted with concern the persistent and emerging challenges posed by the world drug problem and committed to accelerating, based on the principle of common and shared responsibility, the full implementation of the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action, the 2014 Joint Ministerial Statement and the 2016 UNGASS outcome document, aimed at achieving all commitments, operational recommendations and aspirational goals set out therein. In the stocktaking part of the declaration Member States identified a number of challenges to the effective implementation of international commitments.

* E/CN.7/2021/1.

** This document has not been edited.



3. Member States committed in para 7 of the “*Way forward*” to support the CND in continuing transparent and inclusive discussions involving all relevant stakeholders on effective strategies to address and counter the world drug problem, including through the sharing of information, best practices and lessons learned. A core part of the Commission-led follow-up process are annual thematic discussions that are focused on the exchange of good practices, challenges and lessons learned in the implementation of all international drug policy commitments. Based on the challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, the Commission, adopted in June 2019 a multi-year workplan to discuss how these challenges can be addressed through effectively implementing the provisions contained in the 2016, 2014 and 2009 documents.
4. The second round of CND Thematic Discussions, in line with the 2019 workplan,¹ was held from 19-21 October 2020 at the United Nations in Vienna. The Commission focused its discussions on how to address the challenges, that:
 - Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs and deaths related to drug use have increased;
 - The rate of transmission of HIV, the hepatitis C virus and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use, including injecting drug use in some countries, remains high;
 - The adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new psychoactive substances have reached alarming levels;
 - The availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and palliative care, remains low to non-existent in many parts of the world.
5. The 2020 CND Thematic Discussions were held in a hybrid format, with in-person and online participation, and livestreamed to ensure that all interested stakeholders could follow the deliberations. With over 500 registrations, the meeting brought together experts and policymakers from over 100 Member States, UN entities partners, intergovernmental and international organizations and civil society experts from around the world.
6. Each of the three thematic sessions consisted of introductory presentations by UNODC, followed by a panel discussion and an interactive debate. The panels included experts from Member States nominated through the Regional Groups, representatives from UN entities, international and regional organizations as well as civil society representatives. Following past practice, civil society panellists and speakers were nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs.
7. Expert panellists participated from Belgium, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uruguay. In addition to introductory remarks and presentations by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Organization of American States (OAS) and European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) made presentations in their respective field of expertise during the panel discussions. Observers from non-governmental organizations, including from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Greece, Lithuania, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uganda, also made statements.
8. In preparation for the 2020 CND Thematic Discussions, a background note, based on the findings of the 2020 World Drug Report and contributions by the UNODC substantive sections, was prepared by the Secretariat and shared with

¹ <https://www.unodc.org/hlr/en/Follow-upProcess.html>.

Permanent Missions. Presentations and statements made during the thematic session are available on the Commission's website dedicated to the follow-up of the 2019 Ministerial Declaration (<https://www.unodc.org/hlr/en/Follow-upProcess.html>).

II. Chair's summary of the deliberations

(a) 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: "Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs and deaths related to drug use have increased"

9. The thematic session started on 19 October 2020 with a discussion on two challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, a) "Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs and deaths related to drug use have increased" and b) "The rate of transmission of HIV, the hepatitis C virus and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use, including injecting drug use in some countries, remains high". The expert panel addressing both challenges included experts from Singapore, the United States, the Russian Federation, the World Health Organization, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Narcotics Control Board, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, as well as experts from the World Federation for Therapeutic Communities and Harm Reduction International representing civil society.

10. The Chief of the UNODC Research and Trends Analysis Branch and the Chief of the UNODC Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section introduced challenge a). UNODC in its presentations introduced the overarching challenges for prevention and treatment, the expansion and complexity of the drug market, and the increasing demand for treatment. In addition, amongst others, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic among others on people with substance use disorder was discussed. The importance of mobilizing partners at all levels to provide a comprehensive set of measures for people with drug use disorders to promote and protect their health, wellbeing, and recovery, was highlighted.

11. Many speakers emphasized the disparity between the increasing number of people who used drugs and the availability of drug treatment, recognizing that only one in eight persons globally had access to proper treatment and rehabilitation services. By referring to international, regional, and domestic statistics, several speakers identified challenges concerning the provision of treatment, the high mortality resulting from drug overdoses, the prevalence of substance use disorders among the youth, or an inadequate number of trained professionals.

12. Several speakers shared national strategies for evidence-based drug treatment, and the importance of addressing the drug problem from a multidimensional perspective including through prevention, criminal justice responses, and evidence-based drug treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare, was highlighted. Speakers also referred to the UNODC-WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders outlining common principles and good practices for drug use disorder treatment services. Some speakers stated that overly punitive approaches, and the criminalization of drug use, would fuel stigma and discrimination.

13. Some speakers mentioned that measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health consequences of drug abuse, by some referred to as harm reduction, such as needle exchange programs, or substitution therapy, had been effective. One speaker shared national experiences with the use of drug consumption rooms. Some speakers also underlined the value of therapeutic communities, which attracted a population with mainly poor prognostic indicators for the treatment of drug use disorders, including polydrug use, or psychiatric comorbidity.

14. Recalling the commitment to "leaving no one behind," a number of speakers encouraged the adoption of approaches that meet the needs of different groups of people with drug use disorder, particularly vulnerable members of, underscoring

limited availability and access to drug treatment for, among others, women or people in prison-settings. Concerns were expressed by several speakers that the COVID-19 pandemic had further exacerbated health conditions of people with drug use disorders. The need for enhancing coverage of gender and age-sensitive, evidence-based treatment, as well as rehabilitation and social re-integration policies, was underlined.

15. Many speakers elaborated on the impacts of the COVID-19 from different perspectives and supported the exchange of lessons learned in this regard. A number of speakers underlined that the COVID-19-related quarantine and travel restrictions had disrupted residential treatment programs and the supply and delivery of measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health consequences of drug abuse, by some referred to as harm reduction, including opioid agonist therapy medications and HIV-related services. Some speakers reported record levels of national opioid and stimulant use, and a high mortality rates from overdoses accelerated as a direct result of the global pandemic. It was reported by some speakers that due to the pandemic and the related interrupted supply, people with drug use disorders, potentially seek new, unknown sources that carry a higher risk of adulteration with lethal synthetic opioids. As part of COVID-19 related measures, it was reported that some countries have eased restrictions on the dispensing of methadone, making distribution more accessible with home delivery of opioid antagonist therapy medications or offering dosing at community pharmacies.

(b) 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “The rate of transmission of HIV, the hepatitis C virus and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use, including injecting drug use in some countries, remains high”

16. On 19 October 2020, the Commission also discussed the challenge that the transmission rate of HIV, the hepatitis C virus, and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use, including injecting drug use in some countries, remained high. Introductory presentations on the challenge were delivered by the Chief of the UNODC Research Section and the Chief of the HIV/AIDS Section & Global Coordinator for HIV/AIDS.

17. UNODC reported that according to the latest findings of the 2020 World Drug Report more than 11 million people injected drugs; 1.4 million were living with HIV; 5.5 million are living with hepatitis C and 1.2 million are living with both HIV and hepatitis C. It was further mentioned that in 2019, 10 percent of the new HIV infections worldwide were among people who inject drugs. UNODC further presented the support offered to Member States including COVID-19 related responses.

18. Several speakers reported on progress made and challenges Member States had been facing. Some speakers reported a steady decline in drug injection and new diagnoses among people who inject drugs, even though stimulant injection remained widespread and HCV among people who inject drugs continued to be a concern. Some speakers shared good practices, including on the prevention and control of infectious diseases among people who inject drugs. The importance of data on the prevalence of HIV and in that regard the implementation of CND Resolution 60/8 concerning preventing HIV amongst people who use drugs and increasing financing for the global HIV/AIDS response, was highlighted.

19. Some speakers also shared experiences on preventing and controlling infectious diseases among people who use drugs, including through the distribution of injection equipment and materials; drug dependence treatment; vaccination; testing and treatment of infectious diseases; health promotion; as well as targeted delivery of services. The importance of implementing a comprehensive package of services for persons who use drugs, including targeted HIV and hepatitis prevention, low-threshold access to diagnosis, and anti-retroviral treatment as well as accompanying care and support programmes, was highlighted by a number of speakers. The need to ensure that services focus on treatment and long-term recovery, was underscored by some speakers.

20. Addressing the gender gap, a speaker from UNODC reported that women who use drugs were often more vulnerable to blood-borne diseases than men who use drugs. Some speakers suggested increasing gender-sensitive services to address women's needs appropriately and to jointly progress the implementation of related under CND resolutions, including resolution 61/4² on promoting measures for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, hepatitis B and C and syphilis among women who use drugs; resolution 59/5³ on mainstreaming a gender perspective in drug-related policies and programmes; and resolution 55/5⁴ on promoting strategies and measures addressing specific needs of women in the context of comprehensive and integrated drug demand reduction programmes and strategies.

21. A number of speakers addressed challenges related to COVID-19 and highlighted that the global pandemic had further revealed vulnerabilities in the health care systems and challenges for communities and affected populations, including people who use drugs. The importance of ensuring a holistic approach, aimed at long-term recovery, was highlighted by some speakers and the need for health and human rights-based service delivery systems for prevention and treatment for people who use drugs, was stressed.

(c) 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “The adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new psychoactive substances have reached alarming levels”

22. On 20 October, the Commission discussed the challenge that “the adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new psychoactive substances have reached alarming levels.” The Chief of the UNODC Research and Trends Analysis Branch and the Chief of the Laboratory and Scientific Section introduced the topic, including presenting relevant findings from the 2020 World Drug Report. The expert panel discussion preceding the interactive debate included experts from the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Mexico, China, Uruguay, the International Narcotics Control Board, the World Health Organization, the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission from the Organization of American States, as well as an expert from the Dalgarno Institute, representing civil society.

23. A major challenge cited by several speakers was the mimicking abilities of the emerging substances and the lack of practitioners' training on treatment for the adverse effects of new psychoactive substances (NPS). A number of speakers suggested that an increased focus on evidence-based research and strengthening of cooperation and partnership were critical to fully understand the adverse effects of the different NPS. The importance of research on the toxic effects, the use of NPS in combination with other controlled substances, and the long-term effects of NPS, was stressed. Many speakers highlighted the need for training of service providers for the provision of quality assistance and counselling as well as tailored support for people using NPS.

24. Regarding the identification and reporting of NPS, several speakers noted the importance of exchanging information. In that regard INCB platforms were mentioned as a tool to promote partnerships and to prevent the misuse of substances. With an increase in small amount NPS shipments, the cooperation with the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the World Customs Organization (WCO) to heighten alerts on shipments as well as training officers on intelligence sharing and safe handling, was welcomed by some speakers.

25. Several speakers underlined the role of online retailers and sales over the internet, highlighting that criminals were adapting their modus operandi to the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of speakers highlighted the importance of the UNODC Early Warning Advisory (EWA) system, keeping the international community informed about developments and helping to identify the

² Resolution 61/4.

³ Resolution 59/5.

⁴ Resolution 55/5.

most harmful, prevalent and persistent substances for international action. Further, the UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs was presented, which offered interventions to support Member States in identifying and addressing national synthetic drug threats, including through legislative approaches, forensic capacity building, and enhancing controls on precursor chemicals.

26. It was highlighted by some speakers, that a number of risk factors played a role in the widespread consumption of NPS, and that a variety of vulnerable members of society were affected, many living in impoverished or insecure socio-political environments. A number of speakers expressed concerns regarding the increasing consumption of NPS among young people, the effects on their mental health, and the role of peer pressure. In that regard, the importance of awareness-raising campaigns on the harms associated with consumption was highlighted.

(d) 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “The availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and palliative care, remains low to non-existent in many parts of the world”

27. The thematic discussion continued on 21 October, focusing on the implementation of the international drug policy commitments to address the challenge that “the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and palliative care, remains low to non-existent in many parts of the world”. Day three of the thematic discussions started with an introduction by the Chief of the UNODC Drug Research Section and an expert presentation from the UNODC Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Unit, Drug Prevention and Health Branch. Experts from Nigeria, India, Switzerland, Mexico, Belgium the International Narcotics Control Board, the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency as well as a civil society expert from the Universidad de La Sabana, formed the expert panel preceding the thematic debate.

28. In the introductory presentation made by UNODC, the main facts and figures illustrating the challenges to the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and suffering, were shared with participants. It was mentioned that the availability of pharmaceutical opioids had increased dramatically in the last decades, especially between 1998 and 2009, and then experienced a slight decline in the last five years. The availability was also analysed from a geographical perspective.

29. Speakers reported on their national statistics, such as the total amounts of prescription of opioids analgesics and cannabinoids, to introduce their domestic situations, and shared national experiences including with regard to efforts made in policy development and coordination, process supply chain, distribution process improvements as well as stakeholder engagement. Some speakers underscored that palliative care and pain relief were essential elements of Universal Health Coverage and expressed concern that many people all over the world received little or no palliative care or pain relief.

30. With a view to addressing the challenge, many speakers underscored that there were barriers that contributed to the challenges related to the availability of, and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. Some speakers mentioned that in addition to the systemic and legislative barriers, there were challenges related to appropriate infrastructure and equipment, specifically in palliative care services, as well as misconceptions relating to the misuse of opioids.

31. Many speakers highlighted the importance of striking a balance between ensuring the availability of controlled substances drugs for medical and scientific purposes, including for pain relief and management, while avoiding their misuse and diversion into illicit channels. Some speakers highlighted the role that the International Narcotics Control Board played in supporting Member States to ensure the availability and accessibility of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their diversion and abuse.

32. A number of speakers highlighted the importance of taking into account vulnerable members of society including, children and adults living with life-limiting illnesses, those suffering from traumatic injuries and violence, post-surgical pain and obstetrical complications. Speakers called for policy development and coordination, process improvements, and stakeholder engagements to address the barriers.

33. Many speakers highlighted the need to develop and implement an integrated and balanced approach to addressing the non-medical use of pharmaceuticals that would strike the right balance between prevention, treatment and measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health consequences, including with a view to reducing risks of opioid overdose. The importance of the introduction of prescription guidelines, increased public awareness to reduce the stigma associated with the use of synthetic opioids, education of health care providers, and training for first-line responders was highlighted by a number of speakers.

III. Way forward

34. As part of the Commission's efforts to enhance the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, the next thematic session is scheduled to be held during the 64th session of the CND in 2021. In line with the multi-year workplan, the Commission will focus on how to address the following challenges, that:

- Increasing links between drug trafficking, corruption and other forms of organized crime, including trafficking in persons, trafficking in firearms, cybercrime and money-laundering and, in some cases, terrorism, including money-laundering in connection with the financing of terrorism, are observed;
- The value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money laundering arising from drug trafficking at the global level remains low;
- The criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities are increasing.

35. Member States, and interested stakeholders are encouraged to initiate timely preparations for the 2021 thematic sessions to facilitate the participation of relevant experts, with a view to sharing good practices and challenges and to discussing how to address the highlighted challenges through the implementation of the international drug policy commitments of the 2016 UNGASS outcome document, the 2014 Joint Ministerial Statement and the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action.

36. In line with the commitments made in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, Member States are further encouraged to submit good practices for publishing on the CND Good Practice Portal www.postungass2016.org, an initiative that was started with the implementation of the 2016 UNGASS outcome document, requesting the Secretariat to develop a good practice portal that would function as a platform for Member States on which good practices in the practical implementation of international drug policy commitments could be exchanged.