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“General Debate”

Statement by
Kingdom of the Netherlands

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Distinguished Chair, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by congratulating you, dear Colleague, on your election as chair of the 64th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. I'm sure we will have a successful meeting under your able leadership.

A year into the COVID-19 crisis, countries around the world face alarming levels of pressure on their health and social services, and law enforcement agencies. The crisis has a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of people who use drugs and demands innovative approaches in providing drug prevention, treatment, and harm reduction services. Despite severe travel limitations and lockdowns, drug trafficking and related crime have not diminished.

As to health aspects, during lockdowns, we managed to keep our drug checking services open under restricted conditions, thereby providing important data on drug consumption market developments. We also intensified other monitoring activities to understand potential changes in drug use patterns.

The crisis has also proven once more that health workers are essential in providing harm reduction services and are key in ensuring access to care to those who would otherwise be hard to reach. Overall, the situation we are in today underscores the importance of decriminalizing drug use in order to break down barriers to access to care, and to have strong ties with civil society.

In relation to drug-related crime, the pandemic has again made us realize how much we need an integrated and international approach to counter such crime. We strongly believe this is a shared responsibility of national and local governments, enforcement agencies, banks and other financial institutions, schools, and parents. Moreover, the eminent transnational nature of drug crime shows that effective international cooperation is crucial to calling a halt to international drug cartels and their devastating impact on individuals, economies and the rule of law around the globe. This is true especially during the COVID-19 crisis, but may become even more acute in a post-COVID world, once borders have reopened.

Madame Chair, this year, we celebrate the 60th and 50th anniversaries of the 1961 and 1971 drug control conventions. The COVID-19 crisis shows they can still be relevant today, if in their effective implementation we support evidence-based policymaking and human rights protection. In doing this we should also take due account of the UNGASS outcome document and the 2019 Ministerial declaration, as well as support the UN system common position and a strong role of its task team.

Finally, I call upon all Member States to keep seeking mutual understanding and collaboration in order to move balanced and people-centered drug policies forward.