

**Commission on Narcotic Drugs Sixty-fourth session**

**Vienna, 12–16 April 2021**

**General debate Monday 12. April**

**Norwegian statement**

**Minister of Health and Care Services Mr Bent Høie**

Madame Chair, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen

We are all genuinely engaged in minimizing the harms drugs may bring about and we strive to prevent harmful use. Especially our concern is related to the most vulnerable and affected groups, to identify who they are in order *to leave no one behind*. Thus, the sustainable development goals and the UN System Common Position on drug policy are normative and valuable documents to be guided by.

The world drug problem has multiple public health dimensions, demanding a massive response from many priority areas. We can come a long way with good intentions, but most of all our interventions must be based on best available practice.

I have been engaged in and responsible for drugs policy for more than twenty years. During these years I have learned some lessons and in the end I had to realize that my original and firm belief, namely to punish and incarcerate people for using drugs was likely to cause the opposite of the good intentions. These people need and deserve help.

During the last year we have faced a new challenge. The corona pandemic is affecting us all and we manoeuvre through this new landscape without a pre-printed map. People who use drugs was early identified as a group for which it

was important to maintain good services. An immediate action was therefore to strengthen the services with 5 million Euros as a one-time grant.

We have carried out regular surveys of the situation and it appears that there is relatively little corona infection among people who use drugs. The outbreaks seems to be under control, but it is also stated that the detection of infection can in some cases be demanding.

This tells us that these persons are just as responsible as you and me and rebut the stigmatized picture we often are presented as irresponsible persons who do not care for whatever consequences of their behaviour. And once again it tells us that low-threshold and non-stigmatizing services, based on the target group's premises, save lives. I express my greatest thankfulness to both the service providers and the receivers for their great job in these difficult times.

I thank you.