

Chair and distinguished guests.

Let me start by expressing the United Kingdom's support for your excellent leadership, chair.

I would also like to thank the Commission Secretariat for their support in preparing for this Commission, which understandably looks rather different this year given the pandemic.

Global Issue

We still face unprecedented challenges in addressing drug misuse, despite our global efforts.

Organised Crime Groups continue to profit from the global illicit drug market, which is worth an estimated £9.4 billion a year in the UK alone. The cost to society is even higher and estimated at over £19 billion. Lives lost from these drugs reveal the true cost, and the urgent need to tackle drug misuse.

We must step up international efforts to choke off the supply of harmful drugs and relentlessly pursue the organised criminals behind this trade. We also need to do more to ensure greater global access to treatment. And the UK continues to urge all member states who use the death penalty for drug offences to abolish this practice which violates human rights.

UK Action

The UK Government is committed to protecting individuals from the harm of drugs and is working to understand the complex factors involved.

We commissioned a major independent review, led by Dame Carol Black, to examine these issues. Part one of the Review was published in February 2020 and part two is expected soon and will make recommendations on prevention, treatment and recovery.

A Recovery Champion has been appointed to provide national leadership around key aspects of the recovery agenda and advise the Government on where improvements can be made.

In January 2021 the UK Government announced £148 million new investment to cut crime and protect people from illegal drugs. This includes funding for project ADDER, which stands for Addiction, Diversion, Disruption, Enforcement and Recovery, which will test an intensive whole system approach to tackling drug misuse in five of the hardest hit areas in England

and Wales and provides additional funding to enable local police to work together with drug treatment and recovery services.

COVID-19

Covid-19 has brought further challenges and it is vital now more than ever that we take concerted and sustained action to tackle the harms caused by illicit drugs. We must also learn from the initiatives taken during this time and continue to build on them.

We introduced guidance that supported services to move most patients from daily supervised consumption of medications for Opioid Substitution Therapy to weekly or fortnightly collection to ensure continued access to treatments while also reducing contact and easing pressure on pharmacies. Highly skilled drug teams work with their community pharmacists to continue to take a risk-based approach to individual patients.

Professional services and mutual aid groups rapidly moved to make telephone and web-based support, and postal delivery of injecting equipment, available.

Many service users benefited enormously from these new or expanded forms of access, especially if they needed to shield. Some found 'virtual' support easier to access and use than face-to-face and it is being continued where it best meets people's needs.

CONCLUSION

The UK will continue to take an evidence-based approach to protect our communities from the wide-ranging harms caused by drugs, balancing tough enforcement with the need to divert more people into treatment and recovery.

Chair,

I will conclude by reiterating the United Kingdom's commitment to international cooperation to address the world drug problem and we continue to support the work of the UNODC, INCB and WHO in this regard.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Commission.