

**Statement of the Czech Republic**

**Delivered by Mr. Jindrich Voboril,  
National Drug Coordinator, Government Office of the Czech  
Republic**

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**Check against delivery**

**Thank you, Mr. Chairperson,**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished delegates,

1. Let me first thank the secretariat of the UNODC for their hard work in preparing this 65th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in a hybrid format. I would also like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the floor and the opportunity to share ideas and state of play of drug policies in countries, regions, and also in the world.

1.1. At the outset, the Czech Republic fully aligns itself with the statement by the EU and joins others in strongly condemning Russia's unprecedented military aggression against Ukraine. By its unprovoked and unjustified military actions, Russia is grossly violating international law and undermining European and global security and stability. The Czech Republic expresses its full solidarity with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people.

Dear excellences, Dear colleagues, it is alarmingly necessary to point out the enormous risk in the worsening of the drugs situation and attached problems which we are facing because of the war on Ukraine. We are expecting a new escalation of drug related criminal activities but even more the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C to our region - Central and Eastern Europe. The current epidemic situation in the Russian Federation and Ukraine has been criticized for almost two decades. Russia has been not only ignoring new and modern evidence-based recommendations on HIV/AIDS prevention but also imposing its approach to other countries and occupied territories. The region has unnecessarily become one of the biggest epicenters of HIV and Hepatitis C in the world. Ukraine used to be one of those countries under such influence however in the last few years the situation dramatically improved and the demand on drugs reduced and the country took on some very important preventative and successful measures. We are now concerned that their progress is going to be reversed because of the war and the problem will again start raising and spreading to the rest of Europe. Another issue that needs to be addressed is the problem of the Russian speaking criminal gangs. There has been a large investigation that pointed out how close some of the main figures of the drugs criminal scene are to high-level government representations. Therefore, we would like to call onto intelligence and analytical agencies of individual countries and on Interpol to provide an information that will allow our governments to understand the situation and secure better and in time intelligence based policies. Connected to the political situation in Afghanistan, we are expecting and we must be prepared to face alarming situation.

2. We also need to touch on the COVID-19 pandemic which is still affecting our everyday lives. Everyone in the world already felt the impact of this worldwide pandemic, at both levels, work and private life. Some of us might have had incredible losses. We continue to face various new challenges and threats that we are having to overcome. Regarding these consequences, we are in closer touch with technologies that play an important role in our daily lives.

2.1 Not surprisingly this digital phenomenon highly changes the way we understand drug policies. Each area of drug policies, such as demand, supply and harm reduction, are highly affected by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the area of supply, we can see a rapid increase in the use of new technology. Social media and the darknet have become

tools for various types of organized crime activities, such as money laundering, online drug market, or any other forms of cybercrime. On the other hand, in the public health area, we can see challenges and benefits. The high spread of telemedicine consists of early prevention, treatment, harm reduction and other health- and preventative-related measures, but also mental health programs in general or early warning systems all have very beneficial potential.

3. The pandemic has resulted in negative consequences for different public health aspects. That is why we need to continue to protect the population worldwide and guard vulnerable groups of any race, gender, and age. We need to continue to protect all layers of society to be able to face more difficult challenges that might come along the way. In this regard, we reaffirm our strong commitment to the outcome document of the UNGASS 2016 and shared EU values such as human rights, dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, accessibility to health and social services, decriminalization as well as a state of law. These outcomes and approaches are fundamentally rooted in our national strategies and action plans.

3.1. We also reaffirm our commitment to the principal of the Ministerial Declaration 2019 and Agenda 2030. Policies, programs, and interventions that take into account human rights and human dignity to support the proportionate sentencing of drug-related offenses and alternatives to coercive sanctions to improve the social and health situation of people who use drugs. It is also necessary to take into consideration the new findings and open a real debate on possible policies for a control market rather than a blind prohibition especially with substances that pose less risks such as cannabis. Such policies have been implemented in the many countries and show no dramatic problems but have brought more safety and decriminalised people who did not pose any threat to the general public.

On the other hand, it is also necessary to strongly condemn any policies that expose people to unnecessary risks of the spread of transmittable diseases, block people from available treatment when ill and put people to death for possession of drugs without a trial or being obstructed from freedom for many years for minor drug offences.

4. We therefore want to reaffirm our commitment to rational and evidence based drug policies that are based on human rights advocacy, decriminalization, destigmatization. The harm reduction approach should become an overall concept via the provision of helping and preventative services as well as a legislation. The Czech Republic emphasizes the care and public health aspects which go hand in hand with helping services and quality standards of care. In this regard civil society is one of the key players obstructed from its voice and we would like to stress once again that cooperation with civil society in all decision making processes is a must.

Our national approach to drug policies strongly supports integrated drug policies that encourage Member States to research and open international debate to further develop drug policies that integrate both licit and illicit substances as a single problem of addictive behaviour. Since more and new evidence continues to suggest that legal and illegal drugs problem correlate, we propose to learn from the control market based policies and adopt good practices

to replace policies that keep failing as well as creating more risks to individuals, countries and regions

5. As I already mentioned, every national environment has its origin and specific needs and issues. There are some threats that we share all together globally in various strengths. In the context of the Czech Republic, and in recent years more and more other regions, the methamphetamine crisis has been growing in force and the increased production of new psychoactive substances and fentanyl precursors cost serious harm and have a negative impact on public health and quality of life. We therefore reaffirm our commitment to international cooperation and multilateralism more than ever to achieve progress and accelerate the implementation of international drug policy commitments.

7. Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished colleagues.

It is my honour to speak in front of you and would like to underline the important issues that we are facing this year from both an international as well as national perspectives. I hope the beneficial international collaboration with many of us will continue and new partnerships may arise. We should work together to increase our collective efforts to effectively respond to the world drug situation.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for your attention,