

Statement of Australia to the intersessional meeting of the CND

Mr Chair, distinguished delegates,

It is a pleasure to address you today.

However, Australia regrets that this meeting is not taking place under normal circumstances.

Russia's invasion and ongoing occupation of parts of Ukraine is a timely reminder to us all of the dangers of failing to respect, protect and fulfil our human rights obligations, which inter alia include the right to life and the right to health.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has recorded that between 24 February 2022, when Russia's latest invasion of Ukraine started, to 18 September 2022, there have been over 14,500 civilian casualties in the country, with over 5,900 killed and 8,600 injured.

And according to the World Health Organization, in Ukraine so far this year, there have been 550 separate attacks on hospitals, ambulances and doctors, causing at least 100 deaths and 129 injuries, and with 144 of these attacks impacting medical supplies in particular.

Australia strongly supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and calls on Russia to immediately withdraw its forces from Ukrainian territory.

Any referendums held or supported by Russia in occupied areas of Ukraine would be illegitimate and invalid, and would not form a lawful basis for any purported acquisition of Ukraine's territory by Russia.

We will provide further comments on human rights in tomorrow's session but for now we would like to support the calls by Switzerland and others for the 2023 or 2024 World Drug Report to include a specific chapter on human rights.

Mr Chair

Australia would like to join others in acknowledging the importance of the CND's continued reiteration of its commitments to address barriers that prevent the adequate availability of and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

And we thank the Chair for his leadership in championing the 'Joint Call to Action', expanding the initiative's reach to ensure no patient is left behind.

As we have already heard from Justice Tettey, 'Access' is one of the fundamental principles of the drug control conventions, which collectively enshrine commitments by the international community to cooperate in their efforts to ensure controlled medicines are readily available and are not diverted from licit sources to illicit channels, or illicitly produced, manufactured, distributed and trafficked.

Increasing availability and preventing diversion are both concerned with the protection and promotion of health and public safety, however a balance must be found so the controls to prevent diversion do not reduce the availability of medication for licit access and use.

The global disparity in access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes persists, and we stress the importance of acknowledging how the COVID-19 pandemic, and other humanitarian emergencies have not only directly disrupted the availability of and access to medicines on a global scale, but also exacerbated pre-existing barriers and challenges.

Australia remains concerned that the impacts of global challenges are disproportionately experienced by low- and middle-income countries, who must work to uphold their commitments to the conventions despite the most difficult of circumstances.

The global community must come together and consider how individual Member State commitments to ensuring access to controlled substances could be scaled-up to provide farther-reaching support, or how we can facilitate bilateral, regional or global advancements in conforming with the conventions.

The UNODC, WHO and the Union for International Cancer Control's Joint Global Programme is an excellent example of what can be implemented when multilateral agencies, governments and civil society are engaged.

Australia is proud to be continuing its support for the Programme and is particularly encouraged by its expansion earlier this year to also include Indonesia and Fiji.

Australia also acknowledges the valuable contributions the INCB Learning Programme has made to support countries and territories in addressing barriers to the availability of and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including the recent launch of its e-module on Adequate Availability.

We encourage other States to utilise INCB Learning resources to enhance their estimates and assess their need for international controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, in compliance with the three international drug control conventions.

Australia encourages all Member States to work together and with the UNODC, INCB, the WHO and Civil Society to identify and address barriers perpetuating the global disparity in access to controlled substances for medical purposes, preventing their non-medical use, and avoiding their diversion into illicit channels.

Thank you.