

**Statement of the Deputy Director of Department on New Challenges and Threats, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation  
Mr. Dmitrii Subbotin at the 1<sup>st</sup> intersessional meeting  
of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs**

(Vienna, 22 September 2022)

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished colleagues,

The Russian delegation would like to thank the panelists for their assessments of the best practices and challenges in ensuring human rights within the framework of drug control conventions. We appreciate insightful contributions of the UNODC, INCB and representatives of regional and international organisations.

No one can argue that human rights and fundamental freedoms constitute the backbone of all our efforts in the area of drug control. The ultimate goal of our joint efforts to counter the world drug problem is to ensure that our people can live in health, dignity and peace with security and prosperity.

Prevention of drug abuse and drug-related crime is the essential element to build healthy, safe and productive communities free of drug abuse. The Russian Federation devotes particular attention to preventing young people from accessing and starting taking drugs.

Since 2015 legislative ban on propaganda and advertising of illicit drugs, in particular on the Internet, has been in force in our country. Medical research on drugs is specifically exempted from this provision of the Administrative Code.

Federal Agency for Youth Affairs coordinates local and federal social campaigns to warn teenagers about the risks of illicit drugs and engage them in social activities aimed at preventing drug use among their peers. We commend the UNODC Youth Initiative and are proud to provide donor funding.

Another important area is ensuring access and availability of controlled substances to patients in need. In 2020 the Russian Government adopted a five-year roadmap on improving quality and access to palliative medical treatment, which includes measures to remove regulatory barriers, development of health infrastructure in remote areas, improving distribution system of controlled substances to pharmacies, training of medical specialists, awareness-raising activities among the population and enhancing interagency coordination. The measures taken by the Ministry of Health resulted in a four-fold increase in the level of adequate pain treatment coverage since 2014.

Despite the achieved progress challenges still remain. Aggressive marketing strategies of pharmaceutical companies have led to overconsumption of analgesics and opioid epidemics in some regions. Reports on such drastic situation forces patients around the world to be cautious about taking strong opioid medications for fear of addiction. Russia welcomes the INCB efforts to address this phenomenon.

Human rights are of lasting value. This is why it is important that the issue of promoting and protecting these rights does not become the subject of political speculation or meddling in the internal policies of other Member States.

Russia firmly believes that universally recognized human rights and freedoms should be implemented taking into account civilizational and cultural characteristics, moral standards and traditional values of societies. There could be no one-size-fits-all model. There should be no place in the CND for imposing standards and methods developed by a group of countries, which might not be applicable and can sometimes even do harm in other national contexts.

We are surprised to hear time and again the proponents of the so-called harm reduction approaches, which is presented as a silver bullet even for countries with no substantial problems with opioid addiction. Article 38 of the 1961 convention leaves the choice of drug treatment and aftercare options at the discretion of State Parties.

Serious concerns from the human rights perspective arise regarding the initiatives of some countries that have legalized cannabis contrary to their obligations under the three international drug control conventions. The CND has discussed this serious matter at length yesterday, but we would like to underline again that the message that such liberal initiatives send to our youth and children about tolerability of occasional drug use cannot be reconciled with human rights commitments. We encourage the UNODC to look into this issue.

Decriminalization is often suggested as a simple solution to many problems caused by illegal drugs. We do not share those arguments. It would leave organized criminals in control while risking an increase in drug use. The 2020 National Counter Narcotics Strategy envisages tougher administrative and criminal sanctions against drug use and distribution in schools, sports facilities, cultural, entertainment and other

public places. At the same time drug use is not considered as a criminal offence in Russia. Drug-addicted persons who committed minor offences can choose treatment as an alternative to incarceration.

Special attention within drug control policies should be given to children, women and elderly people representing vulnerable members of society. However, we should be very cautious with promoting the rights of certain groups of population to the detriment of the others. Illicit drugs damage society as a whole and our primary goal is to ensure that we protect all population from their harms. This approach is at the core of the Russian healthcare and justice systems and represents our contribution to the common and shared responsibility for addressing the world drug problem and protecting human rights.