

Statement of the Czech Republic

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Republic**

**Thematic Discussions on the Implementation of All
International Drug Policy Commitments, Following-up to
the 2019 Ministerial Declaration**

of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

Vienna, 21-22 September 2022

Thank you, Mr. Chair,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished delegates,

Let me thank the secretariat for preparing these Thematic Discussions.

Firstly, let me emphasise that the Czech Republic fully aligns itself with all aspects of the statement delivered by the European Union, including the strong condemnation of Russia's unprecedented military aggression against Ukraine and its people. The Czech Republic expresses its full solidarity with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must not forget the current situation worldwide. Severe health, social, and economic crises that will most likely lead to a worsening of the situation and a rise in the number of people in need for help to address their addiction problem. In this regard we are also very concerned that the war might negatively influence the problem associated with the illicit drugs trade and the spread of transmittable diseases connected to problematic drug use. We must therefore reaffirm our strong commitment to the principles of the UNGASS outcome document 2016, the UN Common Position on Drug Policy, and the International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy. These important papers provide us with the paradigm towards a public health and human rights-oriented approach that emphasises that policies must primarily take into account human rights and dignity, equal accessibility and availability of health and social services. It is consequently essential to support the proportionate sentencing of drug-related offenses and to seek alternatives to coercive sanctions that improve the social and health situation of people who use drugs and support the well-being of society as a whole. By reaffirming our strong commitment to the protection of human rights, we fully support the suggestion made by Switzerland to include a dedicated chapter on human rights and drug policy in the next World Drug Report.

The Czech Republic also acknowledges its commitment to the EU Drug Strategy and Action Plan for the period 2021-2025 that puts emphasis on a public health approach. It is also necessary to strongly condemn the policies that expose people to the unnecessary risks of the spread of infectious diseases, that prevent individuals from accessing available treatment, and those that put people to death without trial for possession of drugs or obstruct their freedom for many years for minor drug offences.

We assert our commitment to effective and evidence-based drug policies that are based on human rights, decriminalisation and destigmatisation of people who use drugs. There are still many drug laws where disproportionate sentences, stigmatisation and discrimination prevail. Decades of evidence highlight the fact that punitive drug policies have repeatedly failed to eradicate drug use and addictions. The results of these policies lead to overcrowded prisons, inadequate and underfunded health and social support services, stigma, and an increase in overdose deaths and in HIV, viral hepatitis and tuberculosis prevalence. Countries, international organisations, NGO's and experts in the field of drugs should come together and acknowledge the need for drug policy reform and to decriminalise of drug use and the possession of drugs for personal use. The harm reduction approach must become a global concept via the provision of preventative services as well as by addressing relevant changes in legislation. The Czech Republic emphasises that care and public health go hand in hand with helping services and quality standards of care. In this regard civil society is a key player,

and we would therefore stress once again the importance of cooperating with civil society in all decision-making processes.

We are also aware of potential tensions that may rise between drug control and human rights obligations, but believe that all states that are bound by international drug control conventions must implement their obligations with full respect for international law, and human rights law. Our national approach to drug policies strongly supports and encourages Member States to research and open international debate to further develop drug policies, learn from the past and adopt good practices to replace policies that keep failing and put individuals, countries and regions at risk.

In order to develop a healthy lifestyle, prevent substance use and addictive behaviours, and support the reintegration to society of vulnerable groups, special attention must be paid to them and their needs. It is our responsibility to create adequate conditions that facilitate access to services and programmes for those who need them.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished colleagues.

It is my honour to speak in front of you today and would like to underline the important issues that we are facing this year from an international as well as a national perspective. I trust that international collaboration among us will continue and new partnerships will develop. We should work together to increase our collective efforts to effectively respond to the world drug phenomena of today.

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