

**Opening Remarks for the General Debate of the  
High Level Segment of the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the  
United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs**

**Presented by Jennifer Saxe**

**March 13, 2023**

**Vienna, Austria**

**Available Time: 3-4 minutes**

**Estimated Read: 3 minutes 45 seconds**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Monsieur le Président, Messieurs et Mesdames les Ministres, Chefs de délégation, délégués, représentants de la société civile :

Je m'adresse aujourd'hui à la Commission des stupéfiants alors qu'un peu plus d'un an s'est écoulé depuis l'agression insensée, non provoquée, illégale et violente de Vladimir Poutine contre l'Ukraine.

Cette invasion est une violation flagrante de la Charte des Nations unies. C'est une attaque contre la démocratie et les principes de l'État de droit et du multilatéralisme. Le comportement criminel de Vladimir Poutine a des conséquences humanitaires considérables, entraînant la mort insensée d'innocents et créant le chaos et l'anarchie - un environnement dans lequel les acteurs criminels et le trafic de drogue peuvent prospérer.

Le Canada soutient le gouvernement de l'Ukraine et son peuple courageux et résistant et se joint à la communauté internationale pour

demander au président de la Fédération de Russie de mettre fin à sa guerre d'agression illégale.

\*\*

Monsieur le président, la crise des surdoses de drogues toxiques continue d'avoir un impact sur la vie des personnes qui vivent au Canada. Cette crise est alimentée par un marché des drogues illégales non réglementé et volatile. En deux mille vingt-deux, le Canada a connu environ vingt décès par jour. Malheureusement, cette tendance se poursuit. **Il s'agit de l'une des crises de santé publique les plus importantes de l'histoire récente du Canada**, qui a été aggravée par la pandémie de COVID-19. Elle a un impact tragique sur les personnes et les communautés à travers le Canada.

\*\*

*[Esteemed Chair, Ministers, Heads of Delegation, Distinguished Delegates, and Civil Society Representatives:*

*I am addressing the Commission on Narcotic Drugs today as we are just over a year into Vladimir Putin's senseless, unprovoked, illegal and*

*violent aggression against Ukraine.*

*This invasion is a clear violation of the UN Charter. It is an attack on democracy and the tenants of the rule of law and multilateralism.*

*Vladimir Putin's criminal behavior is causing widespread humanitarian consequences, resulting in the senseless deaths of innocent people, and creating chaos and lawlessness -- an environment in which criminal actors and drug trafficking can thrive.*

*Canada stands with the government of Ukraine and its brave and resilient people and joins the international community in calling on the President of the Russian Federation to end his illegal war of aggression.*

*Mr. Chair, the drug toxicity overdose crisis continues to impact the lives of people living in Canada. This crisis is fuelled by an unregulated, volatile illegal drug market. In two thousand twenty two, Canada experienced approximately 20 deaths per day. Sadly, this trend is expected to continue. **It is one of Canada's most significant public***

*health crisis in recent history; and was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is having a tragic impact on people and communities across Canada.]*

**\*\*Switch to English**

Mr. President, in response to the overdose crisis, Canada supports efforts to improve access to treatment and harm reduction services; strengthen enforcement; increase awareness and prevention efforts; support a range of recovery models and build the evidence base through research and surveillance.

Canada continues to advance drug policy that respects human rights, and recognizes the disproportionate impact that drug policies can have on populations marginalized on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

We also recognize that reducing stigma and discrimination faced by people who use drugs is a starting point for addressing substance use

issues. Stigma is a key barrier to people obtaining supports, should they choose to seek them, and it influences our drug policies, programs, and services. We have seen progress on this issue domestically but know more needs to be done. An important and meaningful way to do this is through inclusion of diverse voices of people with lived and living experience, people who use drugs and civil society organizations in the development of our drug policies, domestically and internationally.

We look forward to continuing the important discussion on stigma with Member States. I invite all participants to attend our side event this Wednesday and to visit our booth in the rotunda with a special focus on reducing stigma.

Canada believes we must reduce barriers to the participation of civil society in the international dialogue on drug policy, including through the webcasting and archiving of UN meetings such as the CND, and emphasizes the importance of civil society voices.

Canada's efforts to protect the health and safety of people living in Canada include a strict legal framework to regulate and restrict access to cannabis, which came into force in 2018. The framework's objectives are to keep cannabis out of the hands of youth and to take profits out of the hands of criminals and organized crime. These goals are fully aligned and supportive of the goals of the international drug control conventions, which aim to safeguard the health and welfare humankind. The movement of cannabis across our international borders remains a serious criminal offence, and our framework has allowed for border management investments to better improve the interception of illegal cannabis shipments and the education of travellers. We have been fully transparent in our approach. Our Government is committed to measuring the health and social impacts of our cannabis policies and to sharing our data with concerned interested parties.

An important part of Canada's public health approach to cannabis is ongoing and comprehensive surveillance, data collection, and evidence gathering.

Early results are encouraging, including that:

- Among adults that chose to consume cannabis, the significant majority obtain it from the strictly regulated and quality-controlled legal market.
- Both risk perception, and knowledge of the risks associated with cannabis use, have increased since legalization among youth and the general population.

We continue to monitor trends and assess the progress towards achieving the public health and safety objectives of the Cannabis Act.

Finally, Canada remains a strong supporter of the international drug control system, anchored by the three Conventions. We are proud partners with the UNODC in key initiatives such as the Container Control Program, the Synthetic Drugs Toolkit, and the Global SMART



Program. These are some of the twelve ongoing projects worth a total of twenty-seven million Canadian dollars that support counter-narcotics efforts around the world.

As the challenges around substance use continue to evolve, Canada remains committed to finding effective solutions that promote the health and safety and the human rights of the people living in Canada, while maintaining the international drug control framework as the foundation for international collaboration on drug policy.

Thank you et Merci Monsieur le Président.