

Statement of the Czech Republic

**Delivered by Mr. Jindřich VOBOŘIL,
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Thank you, Mr. Chair,

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. First of all, I would like to thank the Secretariat of the UNODC for their work in preparing the 66th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. We greatly appreciate the decision to continue to hold these meetings in a hybrid format, which not only allows for effective and fast communication among experts, but also thanks to it being streamed, civil society organisations can access discussions and essential information sharing.

I would first of all like to emphasise that the Czech Republic fully aligns itself with the statement by the EU in strongly condemning Russia's unprecedented military aggression against Ukraine. The Czech Republic expresses its full solidarity with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. We must also stress in this regard our concern on the risk of a drug situation escalation in the European region. The UNODC Research published in April 2022 warns that the exposure to trauma and lack of access to economic opportunities are one of the main risk factors of increased drug use among internally displaced persons and refugees. We must not forget that the Ukrainian displacement that started just over a year ago is by far the largest and fastest displacement in Europe since WWII. We are also witnessing an increase in human trafficking as a consequence of this situation, as well as, according to several reports, the diversion of heroin trafficking routes coming from Afghanistan, and the potential increase in the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C across Europe.

2. Today, more than ever before, a strong emphasis on human rights, dignity and freedom must be the core of drug policies. We should continue in our endeavour to guard vulnerable groups, regardless of their age, colour, gender or nationality. Everyone has the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. In this regard, we underscore our strong commitment to the comprehensive outcome document of the 2016 UNGASS and all commitments set in international human rights law. We must promote a truly evidence-based approach on harm reduction philosophy. Evidence today leads us towards abandoning extreme punitive policies based on the non-attainable ideology of an abstinent world. This ideology actually seems to create more serious unwanted consequences than provide solutions, such as destabilising countries and whole regions, creating narco states and contributing to globally organized crime, corrupting

governments, or stigmatizing people with mental health problems, and even creating epidemics. The victims of such harsh policies still based on the idea of the War on Drugs are usually those most vulnerable people. In this regard, we must strongly oppose the imposition of disproportionate and inhumane penalties, especially the death penalty, for drug-related offences. We must support policies, such as decriminalization of drugs for personal use, that are, as evidence proven, the right way forward.

3. The Czech Republic submitted the Conference Room Paper at this 66th session of the CND. The Paper supports, inter alia, the active participation and involvement of civil society in drug policies, the decriminalisation of personal drug use, and also provides an overview of the human rights approach in drug policies in the Czech context.
4. We recognise that the three UN drug control conventions aim to protect the health and safety of individuals and of societies as a whole. In order to respond to the dynamic drug situation, we should consider how these three conventions can help to develop a more humane approach in drug policies. We would therefore like to call on greater flexibility in the application of the UN drug control conventions. Evidence repeatedly points to the fact that a drug-free society is unachievable and an unrealistic intention, and that alternative measures can be effective in addressing the world's drug situation. In this regard, the Czech government in its parliament-approved programme states that we must regulate addictive substances according to their risks. This is the reason why we are calling for international debate on how to create a safer drug situation that incorporates the possibility to abandon full prohibition and create a strictly controlled market with some substances, such as, for example, cannabis. To continue with a purely punitive and harsh prohibitionist rhetoric, not allowing countries a flexible approach, will eventually lead to the degradation and disintegration of any international agreement. In this regard we would like to stress the urgency to initiate talks that will lead to formulating viable guidelines to the 1961 Convention.
5. Ladies and gentleman, to conclude, all policies, programmes and interventions must take into account human rights and fully support the proportionate sentencing for drug related offences. This kind of policy will lead to the improvement of the quality of life and promote the social reintegration of people who use drugs.

Thank you ladies and gentleman for your attention.