

UNODC Executive Director's remarks
66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
Monday, March 13, M Plenary, 10:00

Mr. Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished colleagues,

I am pleased to join you today to open the 66th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

I would like to start by congratulating Ambassador Ruiz Blanco of Colombia for assuming the position of Chair, and to wish him every success.

Today, the CND meets at a significant moment for international drug policy.

This is the last session before next year's mid-term review of the commitments set forth in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration.

An effective response to the world drug problem requires a broad global consensus. Today, that consensus needs to be renewed and reinvigorated.

This session comes at a time when the international community needs urgent progress against expanding drug challenges.

The global supply of illicit drugs is growing notably.

Cultivation and production of cocaine have reached unprecedented highs. Opium cultivation is on the rise in the major source countries.

Demand for illicit drugs is also growing. Opioids continue to kill, while the development of synthetic drugs is moving at an alarming pace.

It is time to reflect on what needs to be done, focusing on science and solutions.

Politicization leads to polarization, while evidence leads to results.

The international drug control system has helped keep people healthier and safer since its establishment.

Compared to alcohol and tobacco, for example, the use of drugs accounts for only nine per cent of healthy years of life lost.

But we must also acknowledge that the challenge of illicit drugs is not frozen in time.

The greatest value of the drug control framework does not lie in any of its specific provisions, but in the existence of a global platform to agree on control measures.

The CND is **the** policy-setting body of the United Nations on drugs, where all of us have the expertise and the mechanisms needed to find practical solutions.

This is where Member States, UN entities, civil society, and other stakeholders should come together in forward-looking discussions, considering every facet of drug issues, from health to development to human rights to security and beyond.

The upcoming mid-term review is a vital opportunity to have difficult but necessary debates about how we can face drug challenges more effectively.

When you engage in those debates, I ask you to bear in mind some important factors:

First, the need to recognize that sustainable responses to the world drug problem are built on compassion.

It is time to put compassion at the heart of our responses.

To take a more serious look at de-penalization and alternatives to incarceration for minor drug offenses, focusing instead on treating and rehabilitating.

To use a gender-sensitive lens when looking at women and girls who use drugs, and to ensure that they have equal access to treatment.

To reach out to young people, who are using drugs more than ever before, understand their vulnerabilities to substance abuse, and help them be part of the solution.

To stand with marginalized and vulnerable people, including people in prisons who are underserved by treatment programmes, and people who inject drugs, who are far more likely to be living with HIV, yet far less likely to access life-saving services.

And to adopt concrete measures to make controlled medicines equally available around the world for those who need them, standing in solidarity with the global south, and recognizing that more than 80 percent of the world's population has no access.

Second, the importance of investing sufficient resources in responses that prioritize health, preserve dignity, and uphold human rights.

Drug-related treatment should be available to all who need it.

This includes programmes that aim to reduce the harms caused by drugs, as part of comprehensive and evidence-based treatment to address demand.

Many countries are looking to make progress.

Last year, for example, UNODC supported the introduction of opioid agonist therapy programmes in Algeria, Egypt, Pakistan, and Uganda, as well as its expansion in Tajikistan.

But resources for health-focused interventions are sorely lacking, including the resources made available to us here at UNODC.

Several countries call for progressive approaches, but few have been willing to provide the necessary funding.

And third, the need to reaffirm that the illicit drug market remains a very real threat to peace, security and development, and to address the links between drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime, exploitation, and in some cases terrorism.

Illicit markets will not disappear overnight, regardless of any decisions made in relation to national or international controls.

Intelligence-sharing and cross-border law enforcement cooperation need to be prioritized, to address the harm and violence caused along trafficking routes.

Laws, policies, and capacities need to keep up with emerging threats, as traffickers take advantage of new tech such as the dark web and cryptocurrencies, the production of synthetic drugs proliferates, and new psychoactive substances continue to emerge.

At the same time, farmers who are stuck in illicit economies need viable alternatives to illicit crop cultivation, for sustainable livelihoods.

Excellencies,

With our expertise across the spectrum of drug-related issues, UNODC is ideally positioned to support the CND and Member States in stepping up drug responses.

In 2022, we supported 35 countries to improve treatment, care and rehabilitation services.

And we provided scientific and forensic services to 300 national drug testing laboratories in 90 countries.

Through our Synthetic Drug Strategy, UNODC continues to support over 40 countries in their response to the synthetic drugs problem.

We also continued to conduct prevention campaigns and outreach, and we are currently developing new tools for caregivers and policymakers on early prevention for children.

As Chair of the Committee of Cosponsoring Organizations of UNAIDS this year, we are promoting efforts to end the inequalities that drive the HIV/AIDS epidemic, especially among people who use drugs and people in prisons.

Recognizing that effective drug control must be balanced and comprehensive, our Office is also helping curb the supply of illicit drugs.

In 2022, UNODC's Border Management Branch trained over 10,000 officers and criminal justice professionals from more than 50 countries, to enhance interdiction of illicit drugs and goods.

We are also helping countries review their drug control legislation and training practitioners to counter online trafficking of drugs.

And we are providing countries with research to improve the evidence base.

This week UNODC will be launching its first global report on cocaine, with insights into cocaine markets, routes, dynamics and actors. In June, we will be launching our annual World Drug Report.

This is in addition to our regular illicit crop monitoring surveys in the main regions where cultivation occurs, and our dedicated briefs on specific thematic or regional priorities.

Our Office is coordinating with other UN entities, including WHO, UNDP, UNAIDS, OHCHR, and others, and we are looking to expand that partnership to maximize our support on specific thematic areas, while we continue to enjoy fruitful coordination with INCB here in Vienna.

Ladies and gentlemen,

UNODC is working with you to make an impact on the ground.

But the world drug problem has evolved, and we urgently need to adapt.

We need Member States to strive for a renewed global consensus on drug policy, one that addresses difficult questions and emerging concerns, while retaining the tools that have helped save lives and preserve security.

And we need you to devote the necessary attention and resources to the world drug problem, with all its dimensions, even - and especially - during these times of crisis.

The mid-term review is the right window of opportunity.

You have already made progress through the years, by adopting commitments that build upon the existing international framework.

The outcome document of the 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session is testament to that, as is the 2019 Ministerial Declaration.

This is our chance to look at those commitments with fresh eyes, and to put them into action in a way that meets the realities of today.

Let us leave divisive narratives behind, and instead work to adapt the wide range of tools and commitments that we have to the challenges that we face.

Let us take this debate forward, with compassion and understanding at the centre, to ensure that the system in place is well-equipped to help and protect people everywhere.

Thank you.