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**Commission on Narcotic Drugs****Sixty-seventh session**

Vienna, 14–22 March 2024

Items 3 and 6 of the provisional agenda\*

**Follow-up to the implementation at the national, regional and international levels of all commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the world drug problem****Chair's summary of the thematic discussions on the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following-up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration (23–25 October and 4–6 December 2023)\*\***

1. This document contains a Chair's summary of the thematic discussions held during the first and second intersessional meetings of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) at its sixty-sixth session, held from 23 to 25 October 2023 and from 4 to 6 December 2023. The thematic discussions were chaired by H.E. Ambassador Miguel Camilo Ruiz Blanco (Colombia), Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-sixth session. The summary by the Chair is not subject to negotiation.

**I. Background**

2. At its sixty-second session in March 2019, the Commission adopted by consensus the Ministerial Declaration entitled "Strengthening Our Actions at the National, Regional and International Levels to Accelerate the Implementation of our Joint Commitments to Address and Counter the World Drug Problem". In the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, Member States, while acknowledging that tangible progress had been achieved over the past decade, noted with concern the persistent and emerging challenges posed by the world drug problem and committed to accelerating, based on the principle of common and shared responsibility, the full implementation of the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action, the 2014 Joint Ministerial Statement and the 2016 UNGASS outcome document, aimed at achieving all commitments, operational recommendations and aspirational goals set out therein. In the stocktaking part of the declaration, Member States identified several challenges to the effective implementation of international commitments. In the Declaration, Member States resolved to review in the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in 2029

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\* E/CN.7/2024/1.

\*\* This document has not been edited.



progress in implementing all international drug policy commitments, with a midterm review in 2024.

3. Member States committed, in paragraph 7 of the “Way forward”, to support the Commission in continuing transparent and inclusive discussions involving all relevant stakeholders on effective strategies to address and counter the world drug problem, including through the sharing of information, best practices and lessons learned. A core part of the Commission-led follow-up process are the annual thematic discussions focused on the exchange of good practices, challenges and lessons learned in the implementation of all international drug policy commitments. Based on the challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, the Commission adopted in June 2019 a multi-year workplan to discuss how these challenges can be addressed through effectively implementing the provisions contained in the 2016, 2014 and 2009 documents.

4. The fifth and sixth rounds of CND Thematic Discussions, in line with the 2019 workplan<sup>1</sup>, were held from 23 to 25 October 2023 and from 4 to 6 December 2023 at the United Nations in Vienna and online. The **aim of the 2023 thematic discussions was to undertake a comprehensive stock-taking of all international drug policy commitments** as reaffirmed in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration. This stock-taking exercise would also serve as a substantive preparation to the 2024 midterm review. As such, the Commission addressed the 11 challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, as per the below programme, with data collection and analysis (12th challenge) considered a cross-cutting issue.

5. **Thematic Discussion I, 23–25 October 2023:**

i. **Day 1:** 23 October 2023

**Morning:** Challenge “both the range of drugs and drugs markets are expanding and diversifying”

**Afternoon:** Challenge “the abuse, illicit cultivation and production and manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as the illicit trafficking in those substances and in precursors, have reached record levels, and the illicit demand for and the domestic diversion of precursor chemicals are on the rise”

ii. **Day 2:** 24 October 2023

**Morning:** Challenge “increasing links between drug trafficking, corruption and other forms of organized crime, including trafficking in persons, trafficking in firearms, cybercrime and money-laundering and, in some cases, terrorism, including money-laundering in connection with the financing of terrorism, are observed”

**Afternoon:** Challenge “the value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money-laundering arising from drug trafficking at the global level remains low”

iii. **Day 3:** 25 October 2023

**Morning:** Challenge “the criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities is increasing”

**Afternoon:** Challenge “responses not in conformity with the three international drug control conventions and not in conformity with applicable international human rights obligations pose a challenge to the implementation of joint commitments based on the principle of common and shared responsibility”

6. **Thematic Discussion II, 4-6 December 2023:**

i. **Day 1:** 4 December 2023

<sup>1</sup> [www.unodc.org/hlr/en/Follow-upProcess.html](http://www.unodc.org/hlr/en/Follow-upProcess.html).

**Morning:** Challenge “drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs and deaths related to drug use have increased”

**Afternoon:** Challenge “the rate of transmission of HIV, the hepatitis C virus and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use, including injecting drug use in some countries, remains high”

ii. **Day 2:** 5 December 2023

**Morning:** Challenge “the adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new psychoactive substances have reached alarming levels”

**Afternoon:** Challenge “synthetic opioids and the non-medical use of prescription drugs pose increasing risks to public health and safety, as well as scientific, legal and regulatory challenges, including with regard to the scheduling of substances”

iii. **Day 3:** 6 December 2023

**Morning:** Challenge “the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and palliative care, remains low to non-existent in many parts of the world”

**Afternoon:** ½ day closing with a focus on the way forward

7. The 2023 CND Thematic Discussions were held in a hybrid format, with in-person and online participation, and were webcast on United Nations Web TV to ensure that all interested stakeholders could follow the deliberations. The October and December meetings combined had over 1,300 registrations and brought together experts and policymakers from over 160 Member States, United Nations entities, intergovernmental organizations, international partners, and civil society experts from around the world. Each of the 11 thematic sessions started with two introductory presentations by experts from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), followed by a question-and-answer session, and an open discussion with interventions from the floor.

8. In preparation for the 2023 CND Thematic Discussions, the Secretariat prepared a discussion guide<sup>2</sup> based on the background notes of previous CND thematic discussions and on findings from recent UNODC World Drug Reports. The discussion guide was shared with Permanent Missions and made available online ahead of the thematic discussions. Presentations and statements made during the thematic sessions (for which consent was given for publication) as well as short, procedural reports including photos of each session, are available on the Commission’s website: ([www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/66\\_Session\\_2023/thematic-sessions.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/66_Session_2023/thematic-sessions.html)[https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/65\\_Session\\_2022/TD\\_statements.html](https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/65_Session_2022/TD_statements.html)).

9. On the margins of the 2023 CND thematic discussions, several events were organized by the Secretariat to the Commission. On 25 October, the Chair provided a briefing to all interested stakeholders on the modalities of the 2024 midterm review, in hybrid format. The event included, on an experimental basis, the piloting of real-time artificial intelligence (AI) speech translation in the six official United Nations languages. From 4 to 6 December, and with a view to increasing stakeholder engagement ahead of the 2024 midterm review process, the Secretariat held a first series of Engaging Minds Fireside Chats consisting of informal discussions with civil society, the scientific community and youth.

10. In addition, on 23 October the Chair moderated an event to mark the 10th anniversary of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development, in implementation of CND resolution 66/3.

<sup>2</sup> [www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_thematic\\_discussions/2023/CND\\_TD\\_Discussion\\_guide\\_2023\\_30\\_August\\_final.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_thematic_discussions/2023/CND_TD_Discussion_guide_2023_30_August_final.pdf).

## II. Chair's summary of the deliberations

### (a) Opening session

11. The opening segment of the October intersessional meeting featured remarks by the UNODC Executive Director delivered by the Director of the Division for Treaty Affairs of UNODC, and by the President of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). Recalling the objective of the international drug control conventions to protect the health and welfare of humankind, they welcomed the holding of the CND Thematic Discussions, and stressed the importance of implementing all international drug policy commitments based on science and evidence, and in line with human rights obligations. The statements further called for global solidarity, cooperation and consensus-building to address the world drug problem.

12. During the December meeting, the opening segment featured welcoming remarks by the UNODC Executive Director delivered by the Director of the Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs of UNODC, by the Director General of the World Health Organization via video-message, and by the President of INCB delivered by an INCB member. They underlined the importance of prioritizing public health and evidence-based approaches to drug policy, and of accelerating joint efforts to ensure the health and well-being of societies.

### (b) Thematic Session 1 on the 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “Both the range of drugs and drugs markets are expanding and diversifying”

13. On 23 October in the morning, the Commission discussed the challenge that both the range of drugs and drugs markets are expanding and diversifying.

14. Following the opening segment, the thematic session was introduced with presentations by a Research Officer at the Research and Trend Analysis Branch and by the Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch of UNODC.

15. The Research Officer provided an overview of **supply chains** for drugs of natural and synthetic origin, pointing out that synthetic drugs are cheaper to source, have shorter supply chains, reduced reliance on human labour and reduced risk of detection, which explained the **growth in synthetic drugs markets**. Highlighted were the increasing number of new synthetic drugs and mixtures, and innovations in drug supply to circumvent regulated substances, including through the dark web, which pose challenges for law enforcement and the health sector.

16. The Chief of the UNODC Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch explained that while **traditional plant-based drugs, methamphetamines and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS)** continued to impact public health, **innovative designs of precursors in the manufacture of fentanyl and its analogues** and other substances were leading to health crises and fatalities around the world. It was underlined that **CND decisions on the scheduling of substances** and measures taken by Member States, including **national early warning systems**, had played a role in effectively addressing the increase of new psychoactive substances (NPS). The Chief described UNODC's work to **enhance forensic capacities of national laboratories** around the world, and stressed the importance of **information-sharing and cooperation** through national and regional networks, as well as through CND.

17. During the discussion, **statements** were made by Switzerland on behalf of 47 Member States,<sup>3</sup> Italy, the European Union, the United States of America, Mexico, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Thailand, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Peru, France, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Lithuania, Ecuador, Jordan, the Russian Federation, Australia, Brazil, Japan, Egypt, Colombia,

<sup>3</sup> Albania, Argentina, Australia, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, European Union and its 27 Member States, Honduras, Iceland, Mexico, Republic of Moldova, Norway, New Zealand, San Marino, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Ukraine, Uruguay and United States of America.

Singapore, Chile, Morocco, Algeria, Canada, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates. Statements were also made by observers from intergovernmental organizations (INCB, EMCDDA) and from non-governmental organizations, nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs (VNGOC) in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in New Zealand, Canada, and Brazil. The following Member States exercised their right of reply under this thematic session: Israel, Russian Federation, United States, United Kingdom, and Ukraine.

18. Throughout the discussion, many speakers reiterated their **commitment to the implementation of the three international drug control conventions and the international drug policy commitments**, with some delegations referring to the 2024 Midterm Review as an opportunity to ensure that effective strategies would be set in place.

19. Key challenges experienced by many countries in relation to the challenge discussed included the **diversification of drugs and of the precursors** used in their illicit manufacture; the **expansion of drug markets** for both plant-based and synthetic drugs, including new psychoactive substances (NPS); and the increase in activities related to illicit drug markets, which had in many cases reached record levels, **threatening public security, public health and the environment**.

20. Several speakers noted with concern the increase in the **illicit production and non-medical use of synthetic drugs**, including synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, which had led to health-related harm and a high number of opioid overdose deaths in several parts of the world. In this context, some speakers recommended that Member States use the **UNODC Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs and the INCB PICS tool** for the control of precursors, which had led to successes in several countries, and commended the **UNODC Container Control Programme** for its work. Several speakers expressed support for the recently created Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drugs Threats led by the United States. Some countries shared measures taken at the national level, including the **scheduling of families of precursor chemicals** rather than of single precursors, which was also identified by INCB as a good model to address the rise in illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs.

21. Many speakers shared national trends with regards to the **cultivation, production, manufacture and consumption** of cocaine, heroin, cannabis, methamphetamines and amphetamine-type stimulants, alerting about the emergence of **new trafficking routes and methodologies**, as well as increased reliance on **online sales**. Several speakers noted the negative **impact that the expansion of the drugs market was having on the environment**, including in the Amazon basin, through water pollution and criminal activities such as illegal logging and illegal mining, which in turn affected the livelihoods of indigenous people and minorities.

22. In tackling illicit drug manufacturing, countries stressed the importance of strengthening the capacity of **law enforcement and forensic laboratories** for the detection and safe handling of chemicals, and of law enforcement for the dismantling of clandestine laboratories. Regulatory **frameworks and the proactive role of the chemical industry** in preventing the illicit sourcing of chemicals and equipment were emphasized as crucial aspects of precursor control to prevent the diversion of chemicals for illicit drug manufacturing.

23. Many speakers expressed concern about the **growing use of cannabis**, especially among youth, and the related misperception that cannabis was not harmful. Speakers called on Member States to comply with the provisions contained in the international drug control conventions.

24. Measures implemented at the national level to address the challenge of increasing drug use included programmes for the **prevention of early initiation** among youth, and the provision of **voluntary and evidence-based treatment and rehabilitation services**, which in many countries included harm reduction

programmes, drug checking services, and the strengthening of services at the community level.

25. The need for **data collection and sharing** was underlined by several speakers, for instance through regional networks and institutions, as well as for **cooperation at national and international levels** to exchange information and to address drug trafficking, guided by the principle of common and shared responsibility.

26. Many speakers highlighted the importance of promoting the implementation of **balanced and humane drug policies** that focus on ending stigma and discrimination of drug users, **addressing the root causes** and social dimensions of drug use, and that integrate a **gender and human rights perspective**.

(c) **Thematic Session 2 on the 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “The abuse, illicit cultivation, production and manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as the illicit trafficking in those substances and in precursors, have reached record levels, and the illicit demand for and the domestic diversion of precursor chemicals are on the rise”**

27. On 23 October in the afternoon, the Commission discussed the challenge that the abuse, illicit cultivation and production and manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as the illicit trafficking in those substances and in precursors, have reached record levels, and that the illicit demand for and the domestic diversion of precursor chemicals was on the rise.

28. Introductory presentations were delivered by the Chief of the Drugs Research Section of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch, and by the Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch of UNODC.

29. The Chief of the Drugs Research Section provided an overview of the diversification of routes and the **emergence of new trafficking hubs**, for instance in West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea for **cocaine**, and in Europe, Gulf countries and North and West Africa for **captagon**. The **increase in the production of methamphetamine** and the decrease in the number of laboratories dismantled was highlighted. **Cocaine was also increasing in both supply and demand**, including cocaine injecting. It was expected that the impact of **opium poppy** would change following the opium ban in Afghanistan. It was noted that both **drug use and drug-related harm have increased**, with drug services still not matching the needs in many subregions. The meeting was informed that **cannabis was still the most widely used drug globally** and, while it did not lead to significant drug-related deaths, it posed a burden to health-care systems. The Chief stressed **that youth were more vulnerable** to drug use in all regions and nearly all subregions, and that women progressed more rapidly to drug use disorders. It was further noted that the **gender gap in the use of some drugs was narrowing, while the gender gap in access to treatment remained wide**.

30. The Chief of the UNODC Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch highlighted the **innovative techniques used by traffickers** in camouflaging drugs, as well as the expanding nature of precursors, the increasing complexity of new psychoactive substances (NPS), and the increase in novel cannabis products based on cannabidiol (CBD). The **need for protecting law enforcement officers** during operations against clandestine manufacture was emphasized. Reference was made to the challenges faced by Member States in handling seized drugs and chemicals, emphasizing the **need for safe disposal practices to ensure the safety of officers and prevent environmental hazards**. He mentioned UNODC’s efforts in providing rapid tests and forensic training for laboratory personnel and highlighted the UNODC STAND programme as an initiative aimed at finding sustainable and environmentally responsible methods for the disposal of drugs and chemicals in various regions. The speaker underscored the importance of **sustainable reduction in illicit crop cultivation through alternative development programmes that put people at the centre** and ensure the need for market access, local ownership, inclusiveness and environmental sustainability.

31. During the discussion, **statements** were made by Iraq, Germany, Mexico, the European Union, Brazil, Australia, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Belgium, Thailand, Ecuador, the Russian Federation, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Peru, Japan, the United States, Colombia, Canada and France. Statements were also made by observers from intergovernmental organizations and United Nations entities, namely INTERPOL, the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission, the Universal Postal Union, EUROPOL, INCB, and from non-governmental organizations, nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs (VNGOC) in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in Colombia, India and Nigeria.

32. A number of speakers stressed the **importance of a balanced approach** that takes into account demand reduction, including prevention and treatment of drug use, and the supply side focusing on law enforcement and alternative development programmes to prevent the illicit cultivation of crops.

33. Concern regarding the **increase in the number of drug users** was expressed by many speakers, with youth, minorities and other population groups disproportionately affected by it. **Polydrug use** was reported to be on the rise in many countries, leading to increases in overdoses. The need to **address the social dimensions and root causes of drug use** was emphasized by several speakers, and **prevention programmes** were referred to as a key and cost-effective strategy. Some delegations stressed the goal of working towards a society free of drug abuse.

34. Several speakers referred to national efforts in **reducing the illicit cultivation of crops and avoiding the vulnerability of families** forced to enter the drug production and trafficking chain. A key point raised by several speakers was the importance of effective alternative development strategies to reduce illicit crop cultivation in line with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development, which marked its tenth anniversary in 2023. Among key principles referred to for ensuring sustainable and effective alternative development programmes were promoting **voluntary participation, meeting the needs of communities, local ownership, exploring public-private partnerships to ensure market access** of products derived from such programmes, and integrating the **empowerment of women and youth** into their design. Several speakers also highlighted the importance of **fostering environmental protection and sustainability**, referring to the UNODC Practical Guide on Alternative Development and the Environment.

35. Many delegations described national and regional drug trafficking trends via different routes and over land, air and sea, acknowledging that criminal networks had **diversified trafficking routes and leveraged new technologies**. Some delegations noted that the increase in seizures of substances presented **new challenges in terms of storage and disposal, including their economic cost**. A key measure recommended to address drug trafficking was strengthening **multisectoral cooperation, in particular among law enforcement, postal services, shipping companies, and the chemical industry** to share information on, identify and disrupt suspicious transactions.

36. With regards to the trafficking in precursor chemicals, some speakers shared **challenges faced in the tracking of precursors and pre-precursors** due to the use of encrypted telecommunication tools. Another challenge mentioned was **the use of non-scheduled chemicals**, including designer precursors, **for the production of substances**, with virtually no limitations for substances used in illicit drug production. The **use of CBD as a precursor for semi-synthetic cannabinoids** was also noted. These cannabinoids, resembling internationally controlled THC, had been detected in various countries, prompting some countries to implement national controls. As in the previous thematic session, several speakers noted that the scheduling of substance by substance had not been successful, and alluded to the need for innovative scheduling, such as **scheduling of groups of precursors**, to facilitate seizures. Loopholes in Member States' shipment control systems were also noted.

37. **International programmes and tools** mentioned under this thematic session to address the corresponding challenge included the UNODC Synthetic Drugs Toolkit, the UNODC Container Control Programme, UNODC programmes on alternative development, the INCB PEN Online platform for voluntary reporting of non-scheduled substances, the INCB IONICS (Project Ion Incident Communication System), the INTERPOL RELIEF Database, the INTERPOL I-RAID Programme to combat synthetic drugs, and the INTERPOL Fentanyl Impact Group established to address trafficking in fentanyl, analogues and precursor chemicals.

(d) **Thematic Session 3 on the 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “Increasing links between drug trafficking, corruption and other forms of organized crime, including trafficking in persons, trafficking in firearms, cybercrime and money-laundering and, in some cases, terrorism, including money-laundering in connection with the financing of terrorism, are observed”**

38. On 24 October in the morning, the Commission discussed the challenge of increasing links between drug trafficking, corruption and other forms of organized crime, including trafficking in persons, trafficking in firearms, cybercrime and money-laundering and, in some cases, terrorism, including money-laundering in connection with the financing of terrorism.

39. Introductory presentations were delivered by a Statistician from the Data, Analytics and Statistics Section of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch of UNODC, and by the UNODC CRIMJUST Global Programme Deputy Coordinator.

40. In the introductory presentation, the UNODC Statistician provided data on bribery stemming from household and business surveys on corruption and noted the constellation of **common actors spanning the supply chains of drug-related crime and environmental crime** – alongside drug traffickers, these included organized criminal groups, militia actors, as well as political and economic backers who facilitate and finance illegal activities. Reference was made to reports about **local disputes between drug trafficking groups and traditional communities over land and property rights**, especially when coca and cannabis growing occurred on or near Indigenous land. Drawing on data from the 2023 UNODC World Drug Report, it was noted that many municipalities in the **Amazon Basin registered higher homicide rates** than the national average, due in part to **violent competition between rival criminal groups competing for control** over various facets of the production distribution, and retailing of drugs – and, increasingly, of other commodities.

41. The UNODC CRIMJUST Global Programme Deputy Coordinator underscored the symbiotic relationship between corruption and drug trafficking and stressed how **corruption facilitated drug trafficking operations and impacts on law enforcement and judicial systems**. It was noted that criminal organizations often **used the same routes for poly-criminal activities**, for instance to **traffic raw materials** or chemicals for the production of drugs, for **human trafficking**, often to exploit vulnerable persons as **couriers for drug trafficking, and for the smuggling of migrants**. Reference was made to the Global Report on Cocaine 2023 and the UNODC Cocaine Insights publication series, which shed light on the spectrum of products, chains of production, supply chain, the role of and methods used by different actors.

42. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by the United Kingdom, Mexico, the European Union, the United States, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ecuador, Türkiye, Pakistan, Australia, Tunisia, Colombia, the Russian Federation, the Sudan, Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, France and Paraguay.<sup>4</sup> Statements were also made by observers from intergovernmental organizations and United Nations entities, namely the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and INTERPOL, and from non-governmental organizations, nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs (VNGOC) in cooperation with the

<sup>4</sup> The statement of Paraguay was submitted only in writing and posted on the website as received.



UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in Indonesia, Peru and the Republic of Korea. The following delegations made use of the right of reply: Ukraine, Israel, the United States, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the European Union and the Sudan.

43. A number of speakers noted the need for more and different **data to better understand poly-crime**, in particular the linkages between drug trafficking and other types of crime. One speaker referred to the Global Organized Crime Index 2023 as a valuable tool to help understand how drug trafficking relates to corruption and organized crime. Some speakers noted that, faced with movement restrictions during the **COVID-19 pandemic**, organized criminal groups found alternative routes and methods to maintain their illicit activities.

44. The **profit-driven nature of organized crime**, including drug trafficking, was emphasized by many speakers, indicating the need to **focus on combating money-laundering and identifying and disrupting illicit financial flows (IFF)**. Some speakers provided examples of studies showing large increases in the profits of organized criminal groups in recent years.

45. Most speakers provided examples of linkages between drug trafficking and specific types of organized crime experienced in their countries and regions, as well as national measures to counter them. It was noted that drug trafficking groups often turned to **crimes that affect the environment** to generate additional revenue that fed back into organized crime groups. Some speakers stressed that drug trafficking amplified illegal land occupation, illegal logging, illegal mining, and wildlife trafficking. The need for strategies to prevent and mitigate the impact of drug trafficking on the environment and on indigenous populations was underlined, as well as the need to educate customers on the importance of not purchasing wildlife.

46. Several speakers underscored the close, two-way linkages between drugs and **firearms trafficking**, with firearms used to impose control over land and conduct illicit activities, and the profits of drug trafficking used for the purchase of more firearms. The importance of imposing effective controls on the production and sale of firearms was noted. Several speakers stressed the connection between drug trafficking and **corruption, cybercrime and human trafficking**, as well as noting that **terrorist activities** were often financed with the profits of drug trafficking. Some speakers noted that **conflict/instability** often exacerbated drug trafficking and vice-versa, as well as **homicides and kidnappings**.

47. The need for strengthened international and multisectoral cooperation was highlighted as key in effectively addressing the multiple linkages between drugs trafficking and other forms of organized crime. Some speakers noted that existing mechanisms around **UNTOC, UNCAC and the international drug control conventions** provided opportunities for increased cooperation. Additional measures recommended to address this challenge included **strengthening institutions and law enforcement** by providing resources and training, **enhancing intelligence-sharing** and cross-border evidence gathering, and conducting **awareness-raising campaigns** to inform the public about the risks associated with illicit activities.

(e) **Thematic Session 4 on the 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “The value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money-laundering arising from drug trafficking at the global level remains low”**

48. On 24 October in the afternoon, the Commission discussed the challenge that the value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money-laundering arising from drug trafficking at the global level remains low.

49. Introductory presentations were delivered by a Research Officer at the Data, Analytics and Statistics Section of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch and by the Chief of the Cybercrime and Anti-Money Laundering Section of the Organized Crime Branch of UNODC.

50. The Research Officer provided an overview of the **value chain** for opiates, with organized crime groups focusing on the middle of the supply chain, where profits were highest and involved a small group of players. The intervention focused on the **concept of illicit financial flows and on progress made in their measurement**, especially since the inclusion of IFF in the 2030 Agenda under SDG16. It was noted that UNODC and UNCTAD were working together with Member States' statistical authorities to estimate their own illicit financial flows, with an average of 12.8 million USD per country of assets seized or frozen as of 2020. Based on existing data, the **methods most frequently used to launder income from drug trafficking** in 2022 were cash, the banking system, construction/real estate, other business sectors and financial institutions, cryptocurrencies and informal remittances. The **need for better data was considered crucial**, such as data on the total value of seized and confiscated assets, the proportion of seized and confiscated assets by predicate offence, as well as data on assets according to the criminal organizations, and on the proportion of cross-border movements.

51. The Chief of the Cybercrime and Anti-Money Laundering Section stressed the need to **disrupt the business model of organized criminal groups**. Key problems mentioned were the lack of strong and effective money-laundering frameworks within Member States, the lack of prioritization of asset seizure early in the process, the lack of parallel financial investigations, as well as insufficient information-sharing at national, regional and international levels. The work of the UNODC Global Programme on Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT), which supports **Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Networks (ARINs)** of law enforcement officials and practitioners in different regions was presented. To address the challenge at hand, the importance of **enhancing financial investigation skills, strengthening ARINs, strengthening information exchange, having systems in place to address virtual assets, conducting parallel financial investigations, prioritizing the targeting of illicit assets, as well as having effective systems on anti-money laundering and on countering the financing of terrorism** was underscored.

52. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by the United Kingdom, the European Union, Australia, Mexico, the Russian Federation, Kenya, Thailand, the United States, Ecuador, Peru and France. Statements were also made by observers from intergovernmental organizations (EUROPOL and the Basel Institute of Governance), and from non-governmental organizations, nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs (VNGOC) in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in Switzerland and Tanzania.

53. Many speakers recognized that a greater emphasis needed to be placed on **“following the money” strategies with the aim of seizing a greater proportion** of the assets derived from transnational drug trafficking. It was generally understood that only between **1 and 2 per cent of the value of drug trafficking profits were seized globally as assets**. There was a recognition that professional money-laundering networks operated which provide their services to drug trafficking organizations.

54. Many speakers shared national strategies and obstacles faced on the topic, for instance that assets of drug trafficking organizations were **deliberately held offshore and/or concealed** using opaque arrangements. In addition, as many drugs were **paid for in cash**, they often did not leave financial footprints. The **growing misuse of cryptocurrencies**, the darkweb and other anonymity-enhancing technologies made **the tracking and recovery of assets more complex**. The insufficient capacity of analysts and investigators to trace such virtual assets posed an additional obstacle. Many speakers referred to the importance of inter-agency networks, such as the Camden Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network (CARIN).

55. On the policy side, several speakers noted that **beneficial ownership registries**, which contained data on the beneficial owners of companies, **continued to be**

**inadequate** in many jurisdictions. Many speakers also acknowledged that **anti-money laundering frameworks in some jurisdictions needed additional reforms** to ensure they met with the international standards on combating money-laundering and the financing of terrorism and proliferation (FATF). Several speakers noted the **lack of prioritization and resourcing of proceeds of crime and money-laundering investigations** within law enforcement and prosecution agencies, with emphasis primarily placed on the drug investigation and seizures. Also noted was the problem of **conducting parallel investigations in a timely manner**, since often the criminal investigation was opened first by the prosecution office while the financial investigation was launched afterwards.

56. Regarding the way forward, speakers highlighted the need to **enhance regional and internal cooperation and to continue supporting and strengthening regional Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Networks**, ensuring their sustainability. It was also noted that Member States needed to prioritize the resourcing and strategy of “following the money” to combat drug trafficking, ensuring that **financial investigations were undertaken in parallel to the drug investigations**. In this context, it was recommended as a best practice to **form specialized financial investigation and prosecution units focused on proceeds of crime, and to enhance the capacities of analysts, investigators** and prosecutors in many jurisdictions to ensure they have the skills, equipment and strategy to focus on transnational proceeds of crime actions aiming to detect, trace, seize and confiscate the proceeds of crime from international drug trafficking organizations. This was particularly a priority in relation to the tracing of virtual assets.

57. Strengthening the **capacities of law enforcement and prosecutors** to undertake actions against drug trafficking networks was also considered key, as well as **cooperation with the private and banking sectors** to implement laws aimed at preventing suspicious financial transactions. It was further recommended that **asset management legislation and processes** be put in place to ensure that the proper value of seized assets were realized and managed. Some speakers recommended that **the innovative use of Asset Confiscation Funds** be explored – with the seized funds being redirected into actions to address the world drug problem – such as emergency accommodation, drug treatment programmes, and capacity-building programmes. It was also suggested to **promote the use of non-conviction-based proceeds of crime actions**. In general, there was agreement on the need to explore the employment of **financial disruption techniques and strategies** to harden the environment/increase the cost for drug trafficking organizations.

(f) **Thematic Session 5 on the 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “The criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities is increasing”**

58. On 25 October in the morning, the Commission discussed the challenge that the criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities is increasing.

59. Introductory presentations were delivered by the Chief of the Drug Research Section of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch, and by the Chief of the Cybercrime and Anti-Money Laundering Section of the Organized Crime Branch of UNODC.

60. The Chief of the Drug Research Section provided an overview of the online drugs market on the clear web, dark web and deep web. It was noted that, while the size of the **online drug trafficking market remained relatively small** in terms of the global market (estimated to be **less than 2 per cent**), **it was increasing**. The meeting was informed of an **increase in the size of transactions on the dark web**, although with less sellers and vendors, **as well as in the use of the clear web**, including the use of social media platforms, encrypted apps and closed online chats, which were more user-friendly and stable than the dark web. The **volatility of dark**

**markets was noted and** examples were shared of markets successfully shut down by law enforcement, such as Hydramarket and Whitehouse.

61. The Chief of the Cybercrime and Anti-Money Laundering Section presented the **contributing factors to the cost-efficient criminal enterprise of ICT misuse** for the purpose of drug trafficking, namely the fact that **65 per cent of the population was connected** online, the **low cost of technology**, as well as **enhanced anonymity** afforded by peer-to-peer (p2p), darknet, security messaging and blockchain, which had led to the **expansion of decentralized and fast transnational payment methods**. In addition, it was noted that online markets provided **effective alternatives in the face of crisis situations and mobility restrictions**, such as those originating from conflicts and pandemics, and that **legal voids, cooperation difficulties and the lack of specialization and equipment** in criminal justice systems were key obstacles in addressing the challenge of ICT misuse for drug trafficking.

62. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by the United Kingdom, the European Union, the United States, Australia, Japan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation, Mexico, Lebanon, Algeria, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, France, the United Arab Emirates, Colombia and Argentina. Statements were also made by a member of the International Narcotics Control Board, and from non-governmental organizations, nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs (VNGOC) in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in India, Uganda and Australia. The following delegations made use of the right of reply: Australia, the United States and Israel.

63. During the discussion, most speakers shared national strategies developed to tackle the challenges arising from the misuse of ICT for drug trafficking. Anonymity was a key concern among delegations, both in the sense that **ICT platforms created an anonymous marketplace to traffic drugs online**, and secondly, in that **ICTs allowed drug trafficking organizations to provide anonymity to their communications and movement of funds**. It was noted that drug trafficking organizations were particularly exploiting encrypted communications to carry out their operations anonymously, as well as were using cryptocurrencies to launder their illicit funds without attribution, thereby impeding efforts by law enforcement. Several delegations expressed concern that, as technology solutions evolved, they also created opportunities for persons to exploit technology to minimize the chance of detection.

64. **Key obstacles** mentioned during the discussion include insufficient cooperation between law enforcement at the national, regional and international level, with an acknowledgement that **formal cooperation mechanisms, such as mutual legal assistance requests, were often not fit for purpose** to proactively target online drug trafficking. It was noted that the **ICTs and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) were operated by private companies**, typically located in foreign jurisdictions, which **severely restricts the ability of law enforcement** to access information in a timely manner. The **capacity of analysts, digital forensic officers and investigators** along with the **availability of tools** were noted as lacking in many jurisdictions, severely limiting the ability of law enforcement to combat cyber-enabled crimes such as transnational drug trafficking. Another obstacle noted was the **low number of human resources available in many countries for cyber patrolling**. It was noted that traditional investigative strategies and tools would have limited impact on combating online drug trafficking and encrypted technologies, and that **innovative tools and strategies were required**. Many speakers also acknowledged **deficiencies in the international regulatory and legal framework** to prevent and combat cyber-enabled crimes such as transnational drug trafficking.

65. Several **key recommendations** emanated from the discussion, such as the need to develop **private partnerships with internet service providers (ISPs) and information and communication technologies (ICTs) companies**, and the need to continue to **employ proactive multi-jurisdictional investigation strategies** to target drug trafficking organizations and disrupt their business model. In addition, speakers

noted the need **to enhance the capacities of analysts, investigators and prosecutors** in many jurisdictions to ensure they have the skills, equipment and strategies to target online drug trafficking as well as defeat encrypted communications and to trace virtual assets, and the need to **establish dedicated cybercrime units** with specialized skills to carry out digital forensics, analysis and investigation of cyber-enabled drug trafficking, ideally integrated with drug investigation and financial investigation units. Speakers stressed the **need to innovate**. With new technologies evolving and emerging, countries needed to invest in innovative responses and strategies to more **effectively monitor postal and courier delivery services** used by online drug trafficking groups. Several speakers underlined the need to implement **prevention programmes** and to **raise awareness among youth and vulnerable populations** regarding the potential misuse of ICTs in relation to drug trafficking.

66. Some speakers underscored the importance of ensuring that **the outcomes of the current negotiations of the Ad Hoc Committee** to elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes will offer solutions in relation to challenges of international cooperation and provide a consistent legal framework. Additional recommendations provided during the discussion included the need to establish **platforms/networks to effectively share information** and coordinate regional and international responses, and the need to **undertake further research** on the scale and nature of online drug trafficking as well as the role of misusing ICTs, (such as encrypted communications) by drug trafficking organizations.

**(g) Thematic Session 6 on the 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “Responses not in conformity with the three international drug control conventions and not in conformity with applicable international human rights obligations pose a challenge to the implementation of joint commitments based on the principle of common and shared responsibility”**

67. On 25 October in the afternoon, the Commission discussed the challenge that responses not in conformity with the three international drug control conventions and not in conformity with applicable international human rights obligations pose a challenge to the implementation of joint commitments based on the principle of common and shared responsibility.

68. Introductory presentations were delivered by the Chief of the Drug Research Section at the Research and Trend Analysis Branch, and by the Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch of UNODC.

69. The Chief of the Drug Research Section provided examples of different provisions in the drug control conventions which focused on the protection of public health and welfare of humankind, namely **criminalization; prevention, treatment, care and rehabilitation; international cooperation; and data collection**. With regard to the legalization of the non-medical use of cannabis and psychedelics it was noted that it had lowered the public perception of risk. Reference was further made to key **human rights in the drug context**, such as the right to health, life, security, freedom from inhuman treatment or punishment, freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, right to a fair trial, as well as the “cross-cutting” rights of equality, non-discrimination and participation, noting that **those rights referred to all people affected by the world drug problem** – including people who use drugs, people who cultivate, produce and traffic drugs, and their environment. It was also noted that these human rights were connected to different thematic frameworks relevant in the drug context, including access and availability to medicines containing controlled substances, voluntary treatment and social assistance programmes for drug users, and security from drug-related violence.

70. The Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch focused on the following issues: the **right of children to be protected from drug use**, mentioning the new UNODC CHAMPS programme and the need to invest in evidence-based drug use prevention; the importance of **ensuring access and**

**availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes**, as enshrined in the drug control conventions; and **the rights of people using drugs and those in contact with the criminal justice system**. The importance of implementing voluntary, evidence-based treatment for drug users instead of punishment was stressed and it was underlined that the three drug control conventions provided the flexibility to apply alternatives to conviction or punishment.

71. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by Singapore on behalf of 43 countries,<sup>5</sup> Belgium, the European Union on behalf of the EU and its Member States, Slovenia, Pakistan, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Kuwait, Malta, Brazil, the Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Australia, the United States, Lithuania, Canada, Uruguay, Mexico, Egypt, Argentina, Israel, Singapore, Ecuador, Colombia and Algeria. Statements were also made by observers from intergovernmental organizations and international experts, namely a member of INCB, a Member of the Human Rights Committee, a Member of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Chair-Rapporteur of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, as well as a representative of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Statements were also made by representatives of non-governmental organizations, nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs (VNGOC) in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in the United States and Poland. The following delegations exercised their right of reply: State of Palestine, Israel, Sudan, Iran, Pakistan, and United States.

72. The thematic session underscored the **importance of respecting and promoting human rights in drug policy**, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the drug control conventions. Several speakers expressed their commitment to promoting human rights-based drug policies as a key element in addressing the world drug situation, also in the context of the 2024 Midterm Review.

73. Several speakers advocated for **increased access to evidence-based, voluntary drug treatment**, especially for those in vulnerable situations. In this regard, stigma, discrimination, and punitive laws were recognized by many speakers as key barriers to seeking and accessing treatment. Some speakers shared their experiences in implementing **specific measures**, which included prevention programmes, drug checking and harm-reduction services.

74. Noting with concern the global disparity on the topic, several speakers underscored the need to improve **access and availability, as well as affordability, of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes**, noting its centrality to the fulfilment of the right to health.

75. The **importance of the principle of proportionality** in the formulation of criminal justice responses for drug-related offences was stressed. Several speakers shared good practices relating to **alternatives to conviction or punishment** – moving to a more **health-centred approach focusing on treatment and rehabilitation of individuals**. It was noted that this approach could, among others, reduce stigmatization and discrimination of drug users, as well as reduce prison overcrowding. **Extrajudicial measures were condemned** by a number of speakers as being contrary to international human rights obligations.

76. Many delegations noted that effective drug policy required a **human rights-based approach, with gender-based interventions, with attention to children rights and other marginalized groups**, including people in the criminal

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<sup>5</sup> Algeria, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, China, Cuba, Central African Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Namibia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Russian Federation, State of Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe.

justice system, and with the active **involvement of civil society** and other stakeholders.

77. Divergent views were expressed regarding the **legalization of the non-medical use of controlled substances, in particular cannabis**. Some delegations shared national experiences stemming from the legalization of non-medical cannabis use. Other speakers expressed concern that legalization was leading to misperceptions about the risks posed to public health, especially among youth, as well as urged Member States to comply with the provisions of the drug control conventions, encouraged the INCB to monitor compliance, and called on UNODC and INCB to collect data on the harms posed.

78. A number of speakers expressed their opposition to the use of the **death penalty** under all circumstances, including for drug-related offences, calling for its immediate abolition and for the commutation of death sentences. Another speaker recalled that the death penalty was not forbidden by international law and that there was no international consensus as to its use.

79. The importance of **international cooperation in advancing human rights in drug policy** was underscored, with several speakers stressing the importance of increased cooperation among United Nations entities. Some speakers welcomed the report prepared by OHCHR on *human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem* as a contribution to the 2024 midterm review, while others expressed concern about some of the recommendations contained in the report, including on the regulation/legalization of drug use.

**(h) Thematic Session 7 on the 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs and deaths related to drug use have increased”**

80. On 4 December in the morning, the Commission discussed the challenge that drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs and that deaths related to drug use have increased.

81. Introductory presentations were delivered by an Epidemiologist of the Drug Research Section of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch, and the Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch of UNODC.

82. In the introductory presentation, the Epidemiologist confirmed the global trend of **increasing drug-related deaths**, stressing that **inequalities exacerbated health problems associated with drug use** and that **women experienced additional barriers** to access treatment. The presentation provided an overview of the **global burden of disease** due to drug use, with 30.9 million healthy years of life lost due to disability and premature death attributed to drug use, and with opioid use disorders and hepatitis C as the leading causes. It was further noted that, while prevention policies were commonplace in countries, **evidence-based prevention interventions and accreditation standards were often missing**. Similarly, drug use **treatment** was noted as a key pillar in national drug policies, but **quality standards, availability, accessibility and coverage of evidence-based interventions remained low**. The speaker further mentioned that **cannabis** was reported by a large share of countries as the **drug of most concern** for drug use disorders, and he further noted that the **availability of naloxone to reverse opioid overdose still remained limited even in medical settings** in many countries.

83. The Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch noted that **young people** were most vulnerable to starting drug use and he stressed the importance of **enhancing drug use prevention systems as a cost-effective strategy**, presenting UNODC’s new early prevention initiative, **CHAMPS (Children Amplified Prevention Services)**. Based on data from the 2023 World Drug Report, it was noted that 39.5 million people suffered from drug use disorders, representing a 45 per cent increase over the past 10 years, with only 1 in 5 persons in treatment, evidencing a **high treatment gap** which was even higher for specific populations,

such as women, adolescents, and people in criminal justice systems. An overview was provided of the work conducted by UNODC in this regard, including the joint **programme of UNODC and WHO on drug dependence, treatment and care**, and the **UNODC global mapping on alternatives to incarceration for drug users** which had been published recently.

84. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by Mexico, the European Union, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, China, South Africa, Czechia, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Kingdom, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, the United States, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lithuania, Brazil, Japan, Canada, Pakistan, Australia, France, Chile, Colombia, Algeria, Ecuador, Oman and Morocco. Statements were also made by observers from intergovernmental organizations and United Nations entities, namely WHO and the International Federation of the Red Cross, and by representatives of non-governmental organizations, nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs (VNGOC) in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in Iraq, Sweden and the United States.

85. During the discussion, many speakers highlighted the importance of adopting a **comprehensive approach that included evidence-based prevention and treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare within a continuum of care, and that also addressed supply reduction**.

86. In terms of prevention services, speakers recalled the importance of adopting **effective prevention strategies, taking into account various specificities** of the population and drug market developments. It was observed that specific groups such as women, adolescents or people in the criminal justice system continued to be particularly underrepresented among people having access to and using the services available in many parts of the world.

87. Many speakers shared **national drug strategies and initiatives** to address drug use and drug-related mortality, including the set-up of community health clinics, treatment centres, counselling services, suicide prevention hotlines, training programmes for health-care professionals on substance use, opioid substitution therapy programmes (OST) through methadone and naloxone, drugs checking, needle-exchange programmes, school-based prevention strategies and online awareness-raising campaigns, as well as the creation and strengthening of professional networks.

88. Several speakers referred to the **UNODC-WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders** as providing good guidance and practices for drug use disorder treatment services. It was highlighted that treatment for drug use disorders needed to be **evidence-based and accessible to all**, without discrimination. In this regard, the importance of **reducing stigma associated with drug use** was emphasized by many speakers also as a means of facilitating health-seeking behaviour and promoting respectful treatment by health providers. Building **partnerships at local level** was also mentioned as a key element of successful interventions and strategies, as well as **coordination** among health-care facilities and between the health, social, criminal justice, and education sectors.

89. A number of speakers emphasized the importance of addressing drug use through a **public health approach** and stressed the need of incorporating **harm reduction measures** to reduce deaths and the negative consequences of drug use.

90. Some speakers underscored the importance of **addressing mental health disorders**, noting also that dual disorders (the co-occurrence in the same individual of a substance use disorder and another psychiatric disorder) remained a problem. **Addressing the different vulnerabilities associated with drug use**, including from a socioeconomic perspective, was also highlighted as an important element of drug policies.



(i) **Thematic Session 8 on the 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “The rate of transmission of HIV, the hepatitis C virus and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use, including injecting drug use in some countries, remains high”**

91. On 4 December in the afternoon, the Commission discussed the challenge that the rate of transmission of HIV, the hepatitis C virus and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use, including injecting drug use in some countries, remains high.

92. Introductory presentations were delivered by an Epidemiologist of the Drug Research Section of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch, and by the Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch of UNODC.

93. The Epidemiologist provided global and regional trends on the challenge, highlighting that **people who inject drugs were 35 times more at risk of living with HIV and that hepatitis C** was a major contributing factor to the global burden of disease, with **the prevalence of hepatitis C among people who inject drugs being 37.2 times higher than the prevalence of hepatitis C among the general population**. It was noted that, while **women** were less likely to inject drugs, those who did so were more likely to be living with HIV, and that the **use of stimulant drugs** (to enhance the overall drug-taking and sexual experience) **increased the risk of contracting HIV** and other sexually transmitted diseases. Further, it was stressed that **crowded prisons were a high-risk environment for infections** (HIV/hepatitis C/tuberculosis), with people in prison six times more likely to live with HIV than adults in the general population. It was noted that the **availability and coverage of key interventions to address HIV in community and prison settings remained inadequate** to prevent transmission.

94. The Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch emphasized that despite the global challenge of HIV, **progress had been made in countries with high coverage of needle and syringe programmes**, where the incidence of HIV was almost zero. It was noted that **coverage of such programmes remained low**, often only available on one site or in urban areas, and that the spread of HIV was **not only related to the use of opioids but also of stimulants** such as methamphetamines. The work undertaken by UNODC to assist countries in strengthening community-led organizations, supporting programmes on opioid agonist therapies and the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and developing guidance and capacity-building programmes was presented.

95. During the open discussion that followed, **statements** were made by Belgium, the European Union, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Thailand, Czechia, South Africa, the Russian Federation, China, Mexico, Austria, France, Algeria, Iraq, Canada, the United States and Colombia. Statements were also made by observers from United Nations entities, namely UNAIDS, UNDP, UN-Women, and by representatives of non-governmental organizations, nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs (VNGOC) in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in Portugal, the United Kingdom and Australia.

96. During the discussions, several speakers noted that the progress made in reducing HIV prevalence to 2 per cent globally was focused on the general population, with **higher or increasing levels of transmission among drug users** and up to a 50 per cent prevalence among some key populations. The low coverage of needle and syringe programmes and opioid agonist therapies, with 100 countries having neither of those, was highlighted as a key barrier to achieving the targets contained in the 2021 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.

97. A number of speakers shared strategies for the prevention and treatment of HIV along the drug dependence continuum. Speakers emphasized that **evidence-based prevention strategies were effective and cost effective**, and that it was important to adopt a **comprehensive package of services** for people who use drugs to treat and

prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Enabling legal environments and community partnerships were also considered key in tackling the challenge.

98. Measures that were shared as **good practices** included needle and syringe programmes; opioid agonist therapies; increasing the coverage of the hepatitis B vaccine; screening, prevention and treatment strategies for sexually transmitted infections (STIs); unrestricted access to condoms; ensuring access to pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis; setting up temporary laboratories at events; providing drug test kits in private settings; and mobile clinics.

99. Many speakers emphasized the **need to tailor national initiatives to women and key populations**, such as persons displaced by emergencies, sex workers, persons living in homelessness, people with mental health disorders, persons in humanitarian and prison settings, and for those transitioning from custody to community settings.

100. **Reducing stigma and discrimination against drug users and persons living with HIV, as well as promoting human rights** in policies to address the challenge were underlined by a number of speakers as ways of promoting health-seeking behaviour and effective and humane treatment. **Multisectoral partnerships and the need for better data**, including on the attitudes of health practitioners and law enforcement officials, were also underscored.

(j) **Thematic Session 9 on the 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “The adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new psychoactive substances have reached alarming levels”**

101. On 5 December in the morning, the Commission discussed the challenge that the adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new psychoactive substances have reached alarming levels.

102. Introductory presentations were delivered by the Chief of the Drugs Research Section of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch and by the Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch of UNODC.

103. The Chief of the Drugs Research Section provided an overview of trends on new psychoactive substances (NPS), noting an **increase in the number of NPS**, with a total of 618 NPS reported in 2021 out of which 87 were newly identified. The number of opioid NPS had stabilized. While trafficking in NPS seemed to have slowed down in recent years, and **NPS use is lower than that of controlled drugs**, it was underlined that the **NPS market had rapidly expanded**, especially in Central Asia and Eastern Europe. It was noted that **young people were the main users** of NPS, although their overall use was declining among youth except for ketamine. Regarding the harm to global health caused by NPS, it was underlined that it was difficult to quantify but estimates based on data from 18 countries indicated that the **harm at population level was less than the one posed by controlled drugs**. Yet harm to individuals caused by NPS could be significant, including **dependence, contamination by infectious diseases through injecting use, poisoning, and fatal overdoses**.

104. The Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch informed participants that **NPS with sedative effects had often been detected in drug driving cases** and in many post-mortem cases. **Polydrug use** was highlighted as a key trend, with 87 per cent of post-mortem NPS cases involving multiple substances. Additional obstacles stressed were the **lack of knowledge by individuals** of what they were taking, and **lack of knowledge by emergency health services of the composition of the drugs**, compounded by the fact that **naloxone does not work** in managing NPS overdoses as it does for opioids. The Chief stressed the complex nature of monitoring NPS markets, despite **significant progress globally made in early warning systems**. Key recommendations for the way forward included **evidence-based drug use prevention, the provision of treatment and health services** along a continuum of

care including psychosocial and pharmacological services and conducting more **research on the long-term health effects of NPS**.

105. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by the European Union, the United Kingdom, Mexico, the United States, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, China, Türkiye, Brazil, Colombia, Australia, South Africa, Algeria and Canada. Statements were also made by observers from intergovernmental organizations and United Nations entities, namely the African Union Commission, WHO and EMCDDA, and by representatives of non-governmental organizations, nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs (VNGOC) in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in the United States, Kazakhstan and Türkiye.

106. A number of speakers shared experiences in monitoring and addressing the use of NPS within their territories. In this regard, some speakers highlighted that the presence of **NPS on the illicit market had increased**, including **synthetic opioids, benzodiazepines, synthetic cathinones and synthetic cannabinoids**.

107. The adverse health consequences and risks associated with the use of NPS, including **fatal overdoses, high potency and lack of knowledge of what substances had been consumed**, were highlighted as major threats. Early initiation to drug use in some settings, as well as an increase in treatment admissions due to use of NPS and poly-substance use were mentioned in this regard. **Effective prevention and education, especially among youth, training of professionals and access to treatment** were highlighted as key elements of a comprehensive public health response to address the threat of NPS.

108. A number of speakers referred to the UNODC Early Warning Advisory and emphasized **early warning systems as being of utmost importance** in understanding the developments in NPS markets, to identifying and detecting new substances and understanding their toxicology. Identifying the most harmful, prevalent and persistent substances was noted as crucial to adapt national responses accordingly. Some speakers further emphasized the importance of **developing and strengthening national early warning systems and to ensure their connectivity to existing regional and global systems**. Monitoring, reporting and **data- and information-sharing** to increase scientific evidence and knowledge were emphasized as crucial in implementing a coordinated and effective response.

109. **Strengthening the capacities of forensic laboratories, toxicology departments and public health authorities** who could issue alerts through a public health lens was also highlighted as an important measure. **Legal reforms and trade supervision to reduce the availability of NPS** were also mentioned in this regard, as well as **law enforcement and international cooperation**, and **data collection and timely data-sharing** to better understand the health risks associated with NPS, including mental health. Further **research to find a medication that is effective and approved** for the treatment of consequences associated with NPS use was also mentioned.

110. A number of speakers recalled CND resolutions 66/2 and 66/3 of 2023 related to the importance of information-sharing to inform evidence-based support for international scheduling and for the safe handling and disposal of synthetic drugs and their precursors. Many speakers referred to various **initiatives and programmes** developed by UNODC and INCB which contributed to effective responses, including the UNODC Synthetic Drugs Strategy, the UNODC SMART programme, the UNODC Early Warning Advisory, the GRIDS programme of INCB and other UNODC activities related to the prevention and treatment of NPS. A number of speakers also welcomed the Global Coalition to address synthetic drugs threats launched by the United States, and the concrete measures under development by the Coalition.

(k) **Thematic Session 10 on the 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “Synthetic opioids and the non-medical use of prescription drugs pose increasing risks to public health and safety, as well as scientific, legal and regulatory challenges, including with regard to the scheduling of substances”**

111. On 5 December in the afternoon, the Commission discussed the challenge that synthetic opioids and the non-medical use of prescription drugs pose increasing risks to public health and safety, as well as scientific, legal and regulatory challenges, including with regard to the scheduling of substances.

112. Introductory presentations were delivered by the Chief of the Drugs Research Section of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch and by the Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch of UNODC.

113. In the introductory presentation, the Chief of the Drugs Research Section noted the **high abuse of opioids** and explained that a key role in the dynamics of non-medical opioid use epidemics was played by the **substitution with other opioids** or experimentation with new opioids, **consecutive or sequential use to self-medicate or manage withdrawal**, and **inadvertent exposure to opioids as adulterants** of substances on the market. During the presentation data were provided on **global seizures**, with pharmaceutical opioids having reached a record high and led by seizures of codeine, tramadol and fentanyl. The Chief noted that the **non-medical use of opioids was reported in every region, with two key epidemics found in North America** (illicitly produced fentanyls) and in **parts of Africa and Asia** (non-medical supply of tramadol), **driven by the high availability of opioids produced at a low cost**. An **increase in the number of overdose deaths in North America was reported**, which had worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the **high proportion of people seeking treatment in some countries for tramadol use disorders**. While women made up for half of the non-medical users of pharmaceutical opioids and sedatives and tranquilizers, it was noted with concern that **women progressed more rapidly to drug use disorders** than men and that barriers to treatment persisted. Lastly, the **use of fentanyl in conjunction with other drugs**, such as depressant xylazine, was noted, as was the emergence of **potent opioid NPS such as nytazenes**.

114. The Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch referred to the two opioid epidemics and **advocated for integrated drug use prevention and treatment services** to prevent and manage opioid overdoses, combined with psychosocial interventions. It was noted that opioid users responded well to Naloxone preventive treatment and reference was made to the **UNODC SOS multi-country project** implemented in Central Asia. In the presentation the **differentiated use** by drug type was noted, with a higher level of prescription drug use reported for women, and captagon being reported as a drug distributed among irregular combatants and terrorist groups.

115. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by the United States, Brazil, China, the European Union, Thailand, Czechia, the United Kingdom, Mexico, the Russian Federation, Australia, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Statements were also made by the African Union Commission and INCB, and by representatives of non-governmental organizations, nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs (VNGOC) in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in the United Kingdom, Nigeria as well as Macau, China.

116. Many speakers shared the **growing concern related to synthetic opioids and non-medical use of prescription drugs**, noting **significant increases in overdose deaths in some regions**. In addition, speakers noted that the **relatively simple manufacture of synthetic opioids, their online availability**, as well as **differences in control measures** between countries, contributed to the availability of synthetic opioids for non-medical purposes.

117. During the discussion, many speakers **recalled that medicines containing opioids were used for medical purposes and their access needed to be ensured.** However, they noted it was important to raise awareness about the potency and risks of non-medical use or over-prescription, and to take effective measures to prevent such risks.

118. Speakers stressed that robust, **multisectoral and balanced public health responses** were crucial, together with intensified prevention, awareness-raising, education and the strengthening of treatment facilities. Some speakers mentioned the need to **commit adequate resources to programmes supporting health services,** and to strengthen measures to reduce the risks and harms associated with synthetic opioids.

119. A number of speakers shared **experiences and measures taken** at the domestic level to address the associated negative consequences of these substances on public health. These included **purchasing and expanding access to over-the-counter overdose reversal medication kits; promoting responsible prescription among health practitioners; suppressing illegal activities in pharmacies; investing in community resources; conducting awareness-raising measures about the danger of medication misuse, including through the use of social media; ensuring high-quality pain medication; and strengthening regulatory frameworks, international cooperation and real-time intelligence-sharing.** The importance of **quick scheduling action** at the national and international levels was also mentioned.

120. Some speakers welcomed existing international tools developed over the years by UNODC and INCB, as well as the establishment of the Global Coalition initiated by the United States to address synthetic drug threats. The role of WHO and INCB in assessing substances for possible international control was welcomed by a number of speakers.

**(I) Thematic Session 11 on the 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “The availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and palliative care, remains low to non-existent in many parts of the world”**

121. On 6 December in the morning, the Commission discussed the challenge that the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and palliative care, remains low to non-existent in many parts of the world.

122. Introductory presentations were delivered by an Epidemiologist of the Drugs Research Section of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch and by the Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch of UNODC.

123. In the introduction, the Epidemiologist stressed the **disparity in the availability of controlled opioids for medical consumption between high-income countries and low- and middle-income countries.** Low- and middle-income countries, which are home to some 84 per cent of the global population, accounted for only 7.5 per cent of global consumption in 2019. The high **diversity in the type of controlled substances** available by country/region (for instance methadone, fentanyl, hydrocodone, buprenorphine, oxycodone, morphine) was also noted, with overall progress reported on the availability of morphine. As key reported **barriers to availability** the Epidemiologist underlined the **lack of training and awareness of professionals; the fear of addiction; problems in the sourcing of opioids; fear of diversion; trade control measures; limited financial resources; cultural attitudes; and fear of sanctions.** It was mentioned that there had been an increase in the type of health providers with a licence to prescribe medicines containing controlled substances. Obstacles in managing the supply-chain were also noted as factors affecting availability of medicines containing controlled substances.

124. The Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch referred to the decision made through the drug control conventions to ensuring access to narcotic

drugs and psychoactive substances for medical use through the use of a **scaling system**, given that some of these substances can be beneficial to health but need to be controlled. The Chief mentioned the **challenges related to the stigma associated with opioids and in accessing medicines during conflict situations**. The “**change in narrative**” increasingly highlighting the importance of access and availability **was mentioned to be the biggest success** of the last decades, which included explicit references to the topic made in the 2016 UNGASS outcome document, the 2019 Ministerial Declaration and the 2020 World Drug Report. In this regard the **need to focus on changing the statistics and reality on the ground** was stressed.

125. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by Mexico, Belgium, South Africa, Thailand, Pakistan, Brazil, Spain on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, China, Morocco, the United States, Peru, Japan, Australia, Colombia and Algeria. Statements were also made by INCB, WHO, and by representatives of non-governmental organizations, nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs (VNGOC) in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in Ukraine, Ethiopia and Nigeria. The Russian Federation made use of the right of reply.

126. Many speakers recalled the **importance of ensuring availability of and access to** controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including as a key **purpose of the international drug conventions**, and shared national experiences and measures put in place in this regard.

127. It was observed that medicines containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances play a **vital role in the management of pain** associated with medical procedures, as well as severe cancer-related pain, including palliative care, but also in the treatment of drug-use disorders. It was observed that, in the face of insufficient availability, affected individuals would often resort to **black markets** for pain relief. The need for **pain medication in humanitarian settings** was also highlighted.

128. While **some progress** had been made, speakers recalled that **efforts needed to be scaled up to meet international commitments** and to ensure a balance between availability and preventing diversion. A number of speakers highlighted that availability, accessibility, and affordability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes can be **improved by addressing all existing barriers and by ensuring political will**. In this regard, the importance of **enhancing international cooperation, strengthening national regulatory and assessment mechanisms and providing adequate resources for capacity-building** was mentioned.

129. In addition, a number of speakers highlighted the importance of continuous efforts to **educate, raise awareness and promote rational use of medicines containing controlled substances**. Investing in **research to understand the effect of controlled substances** was mentioned as crucial, as was developing more **clinical guidelines for practitioners and on the various kinds of pain**, while making a clear **distinction between the needs in adults and in children**. The need for an **effective import/export authorization system in place to prevent diversion** and for regulation of production and functioning of **national distribution channels** was also emphasized.

130. Some speakers referred to existing projects and activities, namely the **UNODC/WHO/UICC joint global programme on access to controlled medicines and the INCB Learning project**, and to the importance of **inter-agency collaboration** on this topic. Appreciation was expressed for the “**No Patient Left Behind**” **initiative of CND** aiming to promote and improve availability. Some speakers called for enhanced cooperation between Member States and international organizations, namely INCB, UNODC and WHO, as well as civil society, through the use of scientific evidence-based approaches.

### III. Way forward

131. On 6 December in the afternoon, the Commission discussed the way forward regarding the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, including the 2024 midterm review planned for March 2024.

132. A **joint presentation was delivered by the Chair, the first Vice-Chair and the Secretary of the Commission** at its 66th session on the modalities and expected outcome of the 2024 midterm. The then Vice-Chair and incoming Chair of the 67th CND presented his **Pledge4Action initiative**, through which Member States would be able to make pledges on concrete actions during the general debate of the high-level segment.

133. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by Mexico, the European Union, the United States, Peru, Canada, Thailand, the Russian Federation, Japan, Brazil, Singapore, Ecuador, Egypt, South Africa, Colombia and Australia. Statements were also made by the Vienna NGO Committee and by nominated representatives of civil society organizations based in the United Kingdom, Tanzania and Mexico.

134. Many speakers noted their preference for a **concise outcome document** that would focus on **efforts undertaken between 2019 and 2023 along the challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration**, and a **road map to enhance implementation of all international drug policy commitments during the intersessional period between 2024 and the 2029 final review**. Some speakers suggested the inclusion of references to **emerging threats and threats that pose the greatest danger** to the health and wealth of humankind.

135. The preference for an outcome document that would reflect an **evidence-based, integrated and balanced multidisciplinary approach** covering both supply and demand reduction aspects, based on the principle of common and shared responsibility, was emphasized by a number of speakers. In this regard, the need for **more and better data, and for capacity-building on data collection and analysis** was mentioned as key in supporting evidence-based interventions.

136. A number of speakers highlighted the need to emphasize in the outcome document a **human rights approach to drug policy**, paying attention to **populations particularly affected by the world drug problem** and ensuring that no one would be left behind. Some speakers called for the outcome document to include a reference to harm reduction measures as a way of enhancing implementation of the drug policy commitments.

137. The importance of **multilateralism and strong cooperation at all levels** was stressed by many speakers, as well as the need for the outcome document to **align with the 2030 Agenda**. Some speakers underscored the need to work closely with academia, civil society, and the private sector when appropriate, as well as with other United Nations entities. Multisectoral cooperation among different national actors was also emphasized as a key element of effective drug policies.

138. **Leveraging innovation**, was stressed by several speakers as a key element for inclusion in the outcome document. This included improvements stemming from innovations in drug policy and practices introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and innovative measures and partnerships to counter the constantly changing techniques applied by criminal organized groups, including with regard to online trafficking.

139. The importance of **investing sufficient resources** for, and of enhancing **capacity-building to jointly address** the various aspects of the world drug problem was also considered a core element of the road map to 2029.

140. All information related to the **2024 midterm review** can be found through the link below:

[https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/67\\_Session\\_2024/review.html](https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/67_Session_2024/review.html).