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

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Items 3 and 6 of the provisional agenda\*

**High-level segment**

**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.**

**Compilation of the Chairs' summaries on the thematic discussions on the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following-up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration: 2019–2023\*\***

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\* [E/CN.7/2024/1](#).

\*\* This document has not been edited.



## **I. Chair’s summary on the thematic discussions on the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following-up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration (16–18 October 2019)**

1. Provided below are salient points, a Chair’s summary, of the thematic discussion held during the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) thematic session from 16–18 October 2019. The thematic discussions were chaired by H.E. Ambassador Mirghani Abbaker Altayeb Bakhjet (Sudan), Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-second session. The summary by the Chair was not subject to negotiation.

### **A. 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.

3. On 24 June, following up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, the Commission adopted a multi-year workplan for thematic discussions on the implementation of all international drug policy commitments. This multi-year workplan foresees the organization of interactive thematic sessions, every autumn, in the period up to 2024, to address the challenges identified in the Ministerial Declaration, through the implementation of the provisions and recommendations contained in the three policy documents (2016, 2014, 2009).

4. The first autumn thematic session was held from 16–18 October 2019 at the United Nations in Vienna. In line with the multi-year workplan, the Commission focused its discussions on how to address the challenges, that:

- Both the range of drugs and drugs markets are expanding and diversifying;
- 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 are on the rise; and
- 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.

5. The CND Chair, H.E. Ambassador Mirghani Abbaker Altayeb BAKHET, moderated the discussions on 16 and 18 October. On 17 October 2019, the session was moderated by H.E. Ambassador Kazem GHARIB ABADI, first Vice-Chair of the Commission. Each of the three thematic discussions consisted of an introductory presentation and a panel discussion followed by presentations by international and regional organizations and United Nations entities as well as an interactive debate. The panels included experts nominated by the five Regional Groups, as well as civil society representatives. Following previous practice, civil society speakers were nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs. Participants who were not able to join the meeting in person could participate through a video-message or videoconferencing.

6. In addition to introductory remarks and presentations by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), the Universal Postal Union (UPU), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) made presentations in their respective field of expertise. Observers from non-governmental organizations, including from Austria, Argentina, Colombia, Ghana, Kenya, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Spain, Turkey and the United States of America, also made statements.

7. In preparation for the thematic discussion, a background note, based on the findings of the 2019 World Drug Report and contributions by the UNODC substantive sections, was prepared by the Secretariat and shared with Permanent Missions. In line with the approach taken in the preparatory and follow-up process to UNGASS 2016, the CND thematic discussions were webcast in all six United Nations official languages on the Commission's website, allowing all interested stakeholders to follow the deliberations. Pictures of and presentations made during the thematic session are available on the Commission's website dedicated to the follow-up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration <http://unodc.org/2019MDFollow-Up>.

## **B. Chair's summary of the deliberations**

### **(a) 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: "Both the range of drugs and drugs markets are expanding and diversifying"**

8. The thematic session started on 16 October 2019 with a discussion on how to address the challenge that "both the range of drugs and drugs markets are expanding and diversifying". The Chief of the UNODC Research and Trends Analysis Branch introduced the topic, including by presenting relevant findings from the 2019 World Drug Report. The expert panel discussion preceding the interactive debate included an expert from Italy, as well as a representative of the Instituto Latinoamericano de Seguridad y Democracia, representing civil society.

9. Presentations were made by UNODC including on waste water analysis, changing trafficking routes and modus operandi, the ATS market 10 years after the 2009 Plan of Action and new trends in drug use patterns. In addition, representatives from the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and the Organization of American States (OAS), shared regional perspectives on the development of the range of drugs and drug markets.

10. Discussing new developments in the range of drugs and drugs markets, several speakers highlighted that addressing the world drug problem was a common and shared responsibility. Many delegations reiterated the importance of a comprehensive and balanced approach, based on evidence, comprising both measures to reduce demand and supply, and in line with international law and policy commitments, in particular the international drug control conventions, human rights obligations and the policy commitments reaffirmed in the Ministerial Declaration 2019.

11. Several delegations encouraged countries to strengthen international cooperation, including in the law enforcement and judicial sector, in order to effectively combat the increasingly professionally operating and transnationally connected organized crime groups. It was highlighted that such international cooperation should include the exchange of information and evidence, as well as sharing of good practices. Member States were encouraged to make use of the existing legal instruments for international cooperation, namely the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the United Nations Convention against Corruption, the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 and relevant regional treaties. It was emphasized that also at the domestic level, cooperation between different agencies had to be ensured.

12. Many delegations highlighted the need for high quality, disaggregated data to ensure informed policy decisions at the national, regional and international level. Comprehensive data collection would also allow to draw lessons learned from past experiences, for example from the significant reduction of opium consumption in the last century. UNODC presented waste water analysis method as a relatively inexpensive way to collect valuable data on drug consumption and market size.

13. Several delegations expressed their support for strengthening and streamlining the existing annual report questionnaire, to reflect and assess progress made in the implementation of all international drug policy commitments. The lack of data relating to the consequences of cannabis legalization, depenalization and other policies adopted in some countries of the world was also mentioned. Recent changes in the range of drugs reported by many delegations included a significant increase in new psychoactive substances (NPS) and synthetic drugs in some parts of the world, including synthetic cannabinoids and cathinones, that were increasingly potent and thus posed a serious health risk. Many speakers highlighted the need and usefulness of early warning systems at the national and international level, in particular the UNODC Early Warning Advisory, to recognize and share information on NPS, as trends in the illicit drug market tended to spread to other countries and regions. Capacity-building for law enforcement and scientific experts and well-equipped laboratories were underlined to be crucial for the ability to detect NPS.

14. Several speakers emphasized the difficulty to control NPS, as due to their quickly changing nature it was challenging to put them under control. Some delegations reported on national control efforts that their respective countries had introduced. Examples presented included (1) the listing of substances by class to also include salts and isomers and (2) generic listing, meaning the listing of parent molecular structures and specific substitution patterns of structures. One delegation also elaborated on the introduction of provisional listing of new suspicious substances to allow for temporary seizures until there was scientific evidence for or against possible licit uses of the specific substances. Another delegation reported that their national experience showed that after scheduling an NPS, it usually disappeared from the market.

15. Several delegations reported on observed developments in the drug market due to changes in both supply and demand. On the supply-side, new marketing techniques from drug dealers included free or cheap trials of substances, thereby changing use patterns. On the demand-side, urbanization led to major shifts in consumption. The Internet, the darknet and the use of cryptocurrency also influenced the drug sales structures, mostly for personal consumption, as well as related intertwined crimes, such as money-laundering.

16. Among the new challenges in the abuse patterns mentioned were polydrug use and dependencies and dependency of children. The need for adequate treatment facilities for people with drug use disorders was emphasized. It was suggested to use the Internet to extend the reach and geographical coverage of treatment programmes. Some delegations also mentioned that new substitution therapies, following the same principles as for example methadone therapy for heroine, were being developed for other drugs. Studies were showing promising results, in particular with regard to cocaine.

17. Some speakers underlined that preventive measures, in particular addressing children not yet involved with drugs, were crucial, as statistics showed a correlation between vulnerabilities, such as mental suffering in the personal past, and the likelihood to abuse drugs. Effective measures to address those vulnerabilities included keeping students in school, strengthening families and parenting techniques and addressing socioeconomic challenges, including poverty. It was mentioned that the case study of tobacco showed the effectiveness of preventive measures.

**(b) 2019 Ministerial Declaration 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”**

18. On 17 October, Member States 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, had reached record levels, and that the illicit demand for and the domestic diversion of precursor chemicals were on the rise. An introductory presentation was delivered by the UNODC Research and Trend Analysis Branch. Experts from Nigeria, India, Colombia and Germany participated in the expert panel discussions, as well as a representative of the Corporación Viso Mutop-Observatorio de cultivos y cultivadores nominated by the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs.

19. Speakers from UNODC made interventions on the following issues: community and women empowerment in the framework of alternative development; the Container Control Programme; drug trafficking via the darknet; illicit demand for and the domestic diversion of precursor chemicals; as well as the complexity of drug dependence as a health disorder. In addition, presentations were made by the Ambassador of Afghanistan and the Secretariat to the International Narcotics Control Board.

20. With a view to addressing illicit cultivation, many delegations expressed the view that alternative development was key as part of a holistic approach, addressing the vulnerabilities of the communities and security issues to ensure livelihoods. It was emphasized that alternative development programmes should take into account climate conditions and the environmental impact. The importance of building trust in the State by establishing a minimum level of services, in particular health, education and infrastructure, for the programme to be successful, was underscored. In addition to agricultural products, other alternative legal income sources should be explored, such as handicraft and tourism, in particular with regard to the establishment of programmes in urban areas.

21. A major challenge cited by several speakers was ensuring the sustainability of alternative development programmes due to short-term funding. It was suggested to for example address this issue by for example establishing a trust fund or a coalition of donors in cooperation with targeted communities. Additionally, it was mentioned that red tape barriers were hampering the sale of licit agricultural products. It was underlined that assessing the impact of alternative development was necessary, but difficult, as the programmes had diverse targets. The need for a unification of reporting standards to measure the impact of the programmes was highlighted. In addition, a number of speakers underscored the importance of the review of the annual report questionnaire.

22. Regarding the production of drugs, the importance of precursor control to be undertaken in cooperation with the International Narcotics Control Board was highlighted by several delegations. It was observed that the number of designer precursors, solely used for the production of illicit drugs, was increasing, and that at the same time the diversion of precursors with licit uses remained problematic. The importance of closely observing new techniques used by clandestine laboratories in order to identify precursors used for the production of illicit drugs was highlighted by a number of speakers. Some delegations underlined that to avoid diversion of precursors with licit use, cooperation between the production and destination countries was key, taking thereby into account the quantity of precursors required by the legal market, was key.

23. Several delegations highlighted that since most substances under international control were smuggled via maritime routes, it was crucial to implement relevant provisions contained in the international drug control conventions. This includes responding to requests regarding the registration of a ship under article 7 of the United

Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 and expeditious manner. The strengthening of port and maritime control capacities, as well as the need to increase information-sharing between countries on the trafficking route were highlighted as prerequisites for the interception of maritime trafficking. Regarding the strengthening of capacity, the Container Control Programme, developed by UNODC in cooperation with the World Customs Organization, was commended by a number of delegations. Speakers highlighted that information exchange was in particular crucial with regards to developments, such as the physical appearance of new drugs. An increase in the illicit trafficking of raw material instead of refined drugs and the associated relocation of drug laboratories closer to the destination countries with the goal to minimize the loss in case of an interception of the shipment, were noted.

24. Several delegations mentioned that investigations in the darknet and the gathering of evidence that was valid in court, remained a challenge. It was further underlined by several speakers that investigations should always be in line with domestic and international regulations, in particular human rights. The importance of capacity-building in the law enforcement sector, inter alia, through trainings on darknet investigation and the use of cryptocurrency offered by UNODC, was highlighted. Additionally, speakers stressed that more data were needed on the use of the darknet for trafficking of illicit drugs, in particular on websites in other languages than English. As controlled substances purchased on the darknet were mostly delivered by postal service providers, the establishment of cooperation mechanisms with such providers could prove to be useful. Several delegations underlined that it was also important to establish and strengthen Financial Intelligence Units to disrupt money-laundering channels, in order to intercept illicit trafficking.

25. Addressing the rise in the abuse of controlled substances, it was recalled that drug dependence was a multifaceted health disorder with social causes and consequences. It was highlighted that drug demand and supply reduction had to be combined in an evidence-based, inter-agency driven, holistic approach. The importance of a gender sensitive approach to prevention and treatment was underlined by a number of speakers, including with regard to alternatives to incarceration, as women often had to take care of the family. The need to address drug consumption during pregnancy was also highlighted.

26. Some speakers expressed concerns regarding the increasing consumption of illicit drugs among young people and highlighted the importance of awareness-raising campaigns on the harm associated with drug consumption. It was observed that peer pressure was a factor for drug consumption, but that vulnerabilities, including poverty, were considered root causes. It was noted that the ageing population also led to an increasing number of elderly drug users, and that this was creating new challenges for prevention and treatment.

**(c) 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”**

27. The thematic discussions continued on 18 October 2019, focusing on the implementation of all commitments to address 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. Day 3 of the thematic discussions started with an introduction by the Chief of the UNODC Research and Trends Analysis Branch. Experts from Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Estonia, Australia as well as a representative of the International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care, for the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs, formed the expert panel preceding the thematic debate.

28. Additional interventions were made by experts from the Russian Federation and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, followed by UNODC,

INCB, WHO and Universal Postal Union presentations focusing on the UNODC Opioid Strategy, United Nations Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs, the S.O.S initiative, and the availability and accessibility of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

29. With a view to addressing the challenge, many speakers underscored that the collection of relevant and reliable data was key for a comprehensive overview of the drug situation worldwide enabling governments to make timely and evidence-based decisions at the national and international levels. One delegation stressed the importance of collecting data beyond dependency rates and to also focus on the number of deaths and other harmful effects related to the misuse of opioids.

30. Many delegations highlighted the need to develop and implement an integrated and balanced approach to addressing the non-medical use of pharmaceuticals that would strike the right balance between prevention, treatment and measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health and social consequences, by some referred to as harm reduction programmes, on the one hand, and supply reduction measures, on the other hand. A number of speakers pointed out that measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health and social consequences of drug abuse played an important role in reducing risks of opioid overdose. Introduction of prescription guidelines, reducing stigma associated with the use of synthetic opioids, training for first line responders on overdose management, administration of naloxone, an opioid antagonist medication, to address the overdose and mortality, and provision of rehabilitation and reintegration services were reported by several delegations as components of a holistic response to the challenges posed by the non-medical use of opioids.

31. Some delegations underlined the importance of enhancing controls for the trade and distribution of pharmaceuticals through all channels, including through enhanced cross-border information-sharing. One delegation highlighted the need to take into consideration and address the growing role of the Internet and information and communications technologies in facilitating the non-medical use and misuse of pharmaceuticals.

32. Speaking on national control measures, many delegations highlighted the importance of striking a balance between ensuring the availability of controlled substances and drugs for medical and scientific purposes, including for pain relief and management, while avoiding their misuse and diversion into illicit channels. In particular, with regard to the “tramadol crisis”, some delegations stressed the importance of introducing national control measures, such as scheduling at the national level, to prevent misuse, while recognizing the medical value of tramadol. Some delegations reported on the introduction of centralized electronic registers for the prescription of pharmaceuticals to prevent their misuse and diversion. Some speakers highlighted the role that the International Narcotics Control Board plays in supporting Member States to ensure the availability and accessibility of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their diversion and abuse.

33. Many delegations highlighted the importance of strengthening cross-border cooperation to prevent the diversion of pharmaceuticals from licit sources to illicit markets, including through sharing of information and good practices. The importance of involving academia and civil society was also underscored. Strong and consistent inter-agency cooperation and coordination at the national level was emphasized by a number of speakers as an essential component of effective national policies to address the challenges posed by synthetic opioids and the misuse of pharmaceuticals to public health and well-being. Public awareness-raising, including among health-care professionals and law enforcement authorities, was mentioned as an important tool to keep all relevant stakeholders informed about the legal uses of pharmaceuticals. A number of delegations highlighted the need to strengthen the capacity of relevant practitioners on how the misuse of pharmaceuticals can be managed.

## C. Way forward

34. As part of the Commission's efforts to enhance the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following-up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, the next thematic session is scheduled to be held during the sixty-third session of CND in 2020. In line with the multi-year workplan, the Commission will focus on how to address the following challenges:

- Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs, and deaths related to drug use have increased;
- 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;
- The adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new psychoactive substances have reached alarming levels; and
- 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.

35. Member States, and interested stakeholders are encouraged to initiate timely preparations for the 2020 thematic sessions to facilitate the participation of relevant experts, with a view to sharing good practices and challenges and to discussing how to address the highlighted challenges through the implementation of the international drug policy commitments of the 2016 UNGASS outcome document, the 2014 Joint Ministerial Statement and the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action.

## II. Chair's summary on the thematic discussions on the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following-up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration (19–21 October 2020)

1. Provided below are salient points, a Chair's summary of the thematic discussion held during the third intersessional meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-third session from 19–21 October 2020. The thematic discussions were chaired by H.E. Ambassador Wolfgang Amadeus Bruelhart (Switzerland), Second Vice-Chair, on behalf of H.E. Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-third session. The summary by the Chair is not subject to negotiation.

### A. 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 a number of challenges to the effective implementation of international commitments.

3. Member States committed in para 7 of the "*Way forward*" to support the CND 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 annual thematic discussions that are 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 second round of CND Thematic Discussions, in line with the 2019 workplan, was held from 19–21 October 2020 at the United Nations in Vienna. The Commission focused its discussions on how to address the challenges, that:

- Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs and deaths related to drug use have increased;
- 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;
- The adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new psychoactive substances have reached alarming levels;
- 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.

5. The 2020 CND Thematic Discussions were held in a hybrid format, with in-person and online participation, and livestreamed to ensure that all interested

stakeholders could follow the deliberations. With over 500 registrations, the meeting brought together experts and policymakers from over 100 Member States, United Nations entities partners, intergovernmental and international organizations and civil society experts from around the world.

6. Each of the three thematic sessions consisted of introductory presentations by UNODC, followed by a panel discussion and an interactive debate. The panels included experts from Member States nominated through the Regional Groups, representatives from United Nations entities, international and regional organizations as well as civil society representatives. Following past practice, civil society panellists and speakers were nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs.

7. Expert panellists participated from Belgium, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uruguay. In addition to introductory remarks and presentations by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Organization of American States (OAS) and European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) made presentations in their respective field of expertise during the panel discussions. Observers from non-governmental organizations, including from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Greece, Lithuania, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uganda, also made statements.

8. In preparation for the 2020 CND Thematic Discussions, a background note, based on the findings of the 2020 World Drug Report and contributions by the UNODC substantive sections, was prepared by the Secretariat and shared with Permanent Missions. Presentations and statements made during the thematic session are available on the Commission's website dedicated to the follow-up of the 2019 Ministerial Declaration ([www.unodc.org/hlr/en/Follow-upProcess.html](http://www.unodc.org/hlr/en/Follow-upProcess.html)).

## **B. Chair's summary of the deliberations**

### **(a) 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: "Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs and deaths related to drug use have increased"**

9. The thematic session started on 19 October 2020 with a discussion on two challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, (a) "Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs and deaths related to drug use have increased" and (b) "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". The expert panel addressing both challenges included experts from Singapore, the United States, the Russian Federation, the World Health Organization, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Narcotics Control Board, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, as well as experts from the World Federation for Therapeutic Communities and Harm Reduction International representing civil society.

10. The Chief of the UNODC Research and Trends Analysis Branch and the Chief of the UNODC Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section introduced challenge (a). UNODC in its presentations introduced the overarching challenges for prevention and treatment, the expansion and complexity of the drug market, and the increasing demand for treatment. In addition, amongst others, the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic among others on people with substance use disorder was discussed. The importance of mobilizing partners at all levels to

provide a comprehensive set of measures for people with drug use disorders to promote and protect their health, well-being, and recovery, was highlighted.

11. Many speakers emphasized the disparity between the increasing number of people who used drugs and the availability of drug treatment, recognizing that only one in eight persons globally had access to proper treatment and rehabilitation services. By referring to international, regional, and domestic statistics, several speakers identified challenges concerning the provision of treatment, the high mortality resulting from drug overdoses, the prevalence of substance use disorders among the youth, or an inadequate number of trained professionals.

12. Several speakers shared national strategies for evidence-based drug treatment, and the importance of addressing the drug problem from a multidimensional perspective including through prevention, criminal justice responses, and evidence-based drug treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare, was highlighted. Speakers also referred to the UNODC-WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders outlining common principles and good practices for drug use disorder treatment services. Some speakers stated that overly punitive approaches, and the criminalization of drug use, would fuel stigma and discrimination.

13. Some speakers mentioned that measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health consequences of drug abuse, by some referred to as harm reduction, such as needle exchange programs, or substitution therapy, had been effective. One speaker shared national experiences with the use of drug consumption rooms. Some speakers also underlined the value of therapeutic communities, which attracted a population with mainly poor prognostic indicators for the treatment of drug use disorders, including polydrug use, or psychiatric comorbidity.

14. Recalling the commitment to “leaving no one behind,” a number of speakers encouraged the adoption of approaches that meet the needs of different groups of people with drug use disorder, particularly vulnerable members of, underscoring limited availability and access to drug treatment for, among others, women or people in prison-settings. Concerns were expressed by several speakers that the COVID-19 pandemic had further exacerbated health conditions of people with drug use disorders. The need for enhancing coverage of gender and age-sensitive, evidence-based treatment, as well as rehabilitation and social reintegration policies, was underlined.

15. Many speakers elaborated on the impacts of the COVID-19 from different perspectives and supported the exchange of lessons learned in this regard. A number of speakers underlined that the COVID-19-related quarantine and travel restrictions had disrupted residential treatment programs and the supply and delivery of measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health consequences of drug abuse, by some referred to as harm reduction, including opioid agonist therapy medications and HIV-related services. Some speakers reported record levels of national opioid and stimulant use, and a high mortality rates from overdoses accelerated as a direct result of the global pandemic. It was reported by some speakers that due to the pandemic and the related interrupted supply, people with drug use disorders, potentially seek new, unknown sources that carry a higher risk of adulteration with lethal synthetic opioids. As part of COVID-19 related measures, it was reported that some countries have eased restrictions on the dispensing of methadone, making distribution more accessible with home delivery of opioid antagonist therapy medications or offering dosing at community pharmacies.

**(b) 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”**

16. On 19 October 2020, the Commission also discussed the challenge that the transmission rate of HIV, the hepatitis C virus, and other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use, including injecting drug use in some countries, remained high. Introductory presentations on the challenge were delivered by the Chief of the

UNODC Research Section and the Chief of the HIV/AIDS Section and Global Coordinator for HIV/AIDS.

17. UNODC reported that according to the latest findings of the 2020 World Drug Report more than 11 million people injected drugs; 1.4 million were living with HIV; 5.5 million are living with hepatitis C and 1.2 million are living with both HIV and hepatitis C. It was further mentioned that in 2019, 10 percent of the new HIV infections worldwide were among people who inject drugs. UNODC further presented the support offered to Member States including COVID-19 related responses.

18. Several speakers reported on progress made and challenges Member States had been facing. Some speakers reported a steady decline in drug injection and new diagnoses among people who inject drugs, even though stimulant injection remained widespread and HCV among people who inject drugs continued to be a concern. Some speakers shared good practices, including on the prevention and control of infectious diseases among people who inject drugs. The importance of data on the prevalence of HIV and in that regard the implementation of CND Resolution 60/8 concerning preventing HIV amongst people who use drugs and increasing financing for the global HIV/AIDS response, was highlighted.

19. Some speakers also shared experiences on preventing and controlling infectious diseases among people who use drugs, including through the distribution of injection equipment and materials; drug dependence treatment; vaccination; testing and treatment of infectious diseases; health promotion; as well as targeted delivery of services. The importance of implementing a comprehensive package of services for persons who use drugs, including targeted HIV and hepatitis prevention, low-threshold access to diagnosis, and anti-retroviral treatment as well as accompanying care and support programmes, was highlighted by a number of speakers. The need to ensure that services focus on treatment and long-term recovery, was underscored by some speakers.

20. Addressing the gender gap, a speaker from UNODC reported that women who use drugs were often more vulnerable to blood-borne diseases than men who use drugs. Some speakers suggested increasing gender-sensitive services to address women's needs appropriately and to jointly progress the implementation of related under CND resolutions, including resolution 61/4<sup>1</sup> on promoting measures for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, hepatitis B and C and syphilis among women who use drugs; resolution 59/5<sup>2</sup> on mainstreaming a gender perspective in drug-related policies and programmes; and resolution 55/5<sup>3</sup> on promoting strategies and measures addressing specific needs of women in the context of comprehensive and integrated drug demand reduction programmes and strategies.

21. A number of speakers addressed challenges related to COVID-19 and highlighted that the global pandemic had further revealed vulnerabilities in the health care systems and challenges for communities and affected populations, including people who use drugs. The importance of ensuring a holistic approach, aimed at long-term recovery, was highlighted by some speakers and the need for health and human rights-based service delivery systems for prevention and treatment for people who use drugs, was stressed.

**(c) 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “The adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new psychoactive substances have reached alarming levels”**

22. On 20 October, the Commission discussed the challenge that “the adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new psychoactive substances have reached alarming levels.” The Chief of the UNODC Research and Trends Analysis Branch and the Chief of the Laboratory and Scientific Section introduced the topic, including presenting relevant findings from the 2020 World Drug Report. The expert panel

<sup>1</sup> Resolution 61/4.

<sup>2</sup> Resolution 59/5.

<sup>3</sup> Resolution 55/5.

discussion preceding the interactive debate included experts from the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Mexico, China, Uruguay, the International Narcotics Control Board, the World Health Organization, the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission from the Organization of American States, as well as an expert from the Dalgarno Institute, representing civil society.

23. A major challenge cited by several speakers was the mimicking abilities of the emerging substances and the lack of practitioners' training on treatment for the adverse effects of new psychoactive substances (NPS). A number of speakers suggested that an increased focus on evidence-based research and strengthening of cooperation and partnership were critical to fully understand the adverse effects of the different NPS. The importance of research on the toxic effects, the use of NPS in combination with other controlled substances, and the long-term effects of NPS, was stressed. Many speakers highlighted the need for training of service providers for the provision of quality assistance and counselling as well as tailored support for people using NPS.

24. Regarding the identification and reporting of NPS, several speakers noted the importance of exchanging information. In that regard INCB platforms were mentioned as a tool to promote partnerships and to prevent the misuse of substances. With an increase in small amount NPS shipments, the cooperation with the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the World Customs Organization (WCO) to heighten alerts on shipments as well as training officers on intelligence sharing and safe handling, was welcomed by some speakers.

25. Several speakers underlined the role of online retailers and sales over the Internet, highlighting that criminals were adapting their modus operandi to the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of speakers highlighted the importance of the UNODC Early Warning Advisory (EWA) system, keeping the international community informed about developments and helping to identify the most harmful, prevalent and persistent substances for international action. Further, the United Nations Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs was presented, which offered interventions to support Member States in identifying and addressing national synthetic drug threats, including through legislative approaches, forensic capacity-building, and enhancing controls on precursor chemicals.

26. It was highlighted by some speakers, that a number of risk factors played a role in the widespread consumption of NPS, and that a variety of vulnerable members of society were affected, many living in impoverished or insecure socio-political environments. A number of speakers expressed concerns regarding the increasing consumption of NPS among young people, the effects on their mental health, and the role of peer pressure. In that regard, the importance of awareness-raising campaigns on the harms associated with consumption was highlighted.

**(d) 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”**

27. The thematic discussion continued on 21 October, focusing on the implementation of the international drug policy commitments to address 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”. Day three of the thematic discussions started with an introduction by the Chief of the UNODC Drug Research Section and an expert presentation from the UNODC Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Unit, Drug Prevention and Health Branch. Experts from Nigeria, India, Switzerland, Mexico, Belgium the International Narcotics Control Board, the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency as well as a civil society expert from the Universidad de La Sabana, formed the expert panel preceding the thematic debate.

28. In the introductory presentation made by UNODC, the main facts and figures illustrating the challenges to the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and suffering, were shared with participants. It was mentioned that the availability of pharmaceutical opioids had increased dramatically in the last decades, especially between 1998 and 2009, and then experienced a slight decline in the last five years. The availability was also analysed from a geographical perspective.

29. Speakers reported on their national statistics, such as the total amounts of prescription of opioids analgesics and cannabinoids, to introduce their domestic situations, and shared national experiences including with regard to efforts made in policy development and coordination, process supply chain, distribution process improvements as well as stakeholder engagement. Some speakers underscored that palliative care and pain relief were essential elements of Universal Health Coverage and expressed concern that many people all over the world received little or no palliative care or pain relief.

30. With a view to addressing the challenge, many speakers underscored that there were barriers that contributed to the challenges related to the availability of, and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. Some speakers mentioned that in addition to the systemic and legislative barriers, there were challenges related to appropriate infrastructure and equipment, specifically in palliative care services, as well as misconceptions relating to the misuse of opioids.

31. Many speakers highlighted the importance of striking a balance between ensuring the availability of controlled substances drugs for medical and scientific purposes, including for pain relief and management, while avoiding their misuse and diversion into illicit channels. Some speakers highlighted the role that the International Narcotics Control Board played in supporting Member States to ensure the availability and accessibility of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their diversion and abuse.

32. A number of speakers highlighted the importance of taking into account vulnerable members of society including, children and adults living with life-limiting illnesses, those suffering from traumatic injuries and violence, post-surgical pain and obstetrical complications. Speakers called for policy development and coordination, process improvements, and stakeholder engagements to address the barriers.

33. Many speakers highlighted the need to develop and implement an integrated and balanced approach to addressing the non-medical use of pharmaceuticals that would strike the right balance between prevention, treatment and measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health consequences, including with a view to reducing risks of opioid overdose. The importance of the introduction of prescription guidelines, increased public awareness to reduce the stigma associated with the use of synthetic opioids, education of health care providers, and training for first-line responders was highlighted by a number of speakers.

### **C. Way forward**

34. As part of the Commission's efforts to enhance the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, the next thematic session is scheduled to be held during the sixty-fourth session of the CND in 2021. In line with the multi-year workplan, the Commission will focus on how to address the following challenges, that:

- 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;
- The value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money laundering arising from drug trafficking at the global level remains low;

- The criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities are increasing.

35. Member States, and interested stakeholders are encouraged to initiate timely preparations for the 2021 thematic sessions to facilitate the participation of relevant experts, with a view to sharing good practices and challenges and to discussing how to address the highlighted challenges through the implementation of the international drug policy commitments of the 2016 UNGASS outcome document, the 2014 Joint Ministerial Statement and the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action.

36. In line with the commitments made in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, Member States are further encouraged to submit good practices for publishing on the CND Good Practice Portal [www.postungass2016.org](http://www.postungass2016.org), an initiative that was started with the implementation of the 2016 UNGASS outcome document, requesting the Secretariat to develop a good practice portal that would function as a platform for Member States on which good practices in the practical implementation of international drug policy commitments could be exchanged.

### III. Chair's summary on the thematic discussions on the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration (19–21 October 2021)

1. This document contains a Chair's summary of the thematic discussions held during the first intersessional meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-fourth session from 19–21 October 2021. The thematic discussions were chaired by H.E. Ambassador Dominika KROIS (Poland), Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-fourth session. The summary by the Chair is not subject to negotiation.

#### A. 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.

3. Member States committed in paragraph 7 of the "*Way forward*" to support the CND 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 annual thematic discussions that are 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 third round of CND Thematic Discussions, in line with the 2019 workplan,<sup>1</sup> was held from 19–21 October 2021 at the United Nations in Vienna. The Commission focused its discussions on how to address the following challenges:

- 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;
- The value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money-laundering arising from drug trafficking at the global level remains low; and
- The criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities is increasing.

5. The 2021 CND Thematic Discussions were held in a hybrid format, with in-person and online participation, and livestreamed to ensure that all interested stakeholders could follow the deliberations. With over 600 registrations, the meeting brought together experts and policymakers from over 100 Member States, United

Nations entities partners, intergovernmental and international organizations, and civil society experts from around the world.

6. Each of the three thematic sessions started with introductory presentations by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), followed by a panel discussion and an interactive debate. The panels included experts from Member States nominated through the Regional Groups, representatives from United Nations entities, international and regional organizations as well as civil society representatives. Following past practice, civil society panellists and speakers were nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit.

7. Expert panellists participated from Australia, Cabo Verde, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States of America. In addition to introductory remarks and presentations by UNODC, representatives nominated by the African Union Commission, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), the Organization of American States (OAS), the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), and the Universal Postal Union (UPU), made presentations in their respective field of expertise during the panel discussions. Observers from non-governmental organizations, including from Canada, Colombia, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Nigeria, Serbia, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland also made statements.

8. In preparation for the 2021 CND Thematic Discussions, a background note,<sup>2</sup> based on the findings of the 2021 World Drug Report and contributions by the UNODC substantive sections, was prepared by the Secretariat and shared with Permanent Missions. Presentations and statements made during the thematic sessions are available on the Commission's website dedicated to the follow-up of the 2019 Ministerial Declaration ([www.unodc.org/hlr/en/Follow-upProcess.html](http://www.unodc.org/hlr/en/Follow-upProcess.html)).

## **B. Chair's summary of the deliberations**

### **(a) Opening session**

9. In the opening segment of the intersessional meeting, the UNODC Executive Director welcomed the holding of the CND Thematic Discussions and highlighted that a sophisticated criminal infrastructure has been developed around drug trafficking, creating pockets of mutual interest between traffickers, terrorists, and other criminals.

10. The opening statement was followed by an intervention by the Ambassador of Singapore, speaking on behalf of the Friends of UNODC Research.

### **(b) 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"**

11. On 19 October 2021, the Commission discussed the challenge that 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.

12. Following the opening segment, the thematic session was kicked off by an introductory presentation by the Chief of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch of

UNODC. The expert panel included experts from Colombia, Mexico, Nigeria, Turkey, Europol, INTERPOL, OAS, OHCHR, and UNICRI, as well as an expert from the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs, representing civil society.

13. The Chief of the UNODC Research and Trends Analysis Branch highlighted that **evidence regarding the links between drug trafficking, corruption and other forms of organized crime** was limited, particularly regarding trends at the global level. One speaker mentioned that the evidence of links could be found domestically, but that there was not sufficient evidence about the impact of the observed links. Several speakers shared insights about national challenges regarding the interlinkages between drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime.

14. Many speakers emphasized the **importance of the collection, analysis, and dissemination of comparable and reliable data at the national, regional, and international levels** with a view to increasing the understanding of the links between drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime. Several speakers underlined that the World Drug Report and other UNODC publications presented a valuable source of information for the international community, but that there still existed gaps in data gathering at the global level. Referring to the revised ARQ adopted by the CND, Member States were encouraged to share data and submit the completed ARQ to UNODC to build a comprehensive and factual picture of the situation. One speaker also requested UNODC to continue providing technical support to Member States in completing the ARQ. Member States were encouraged to appoint a national ARQ focal point to facilitate the submission of the ARQ.

15. Several speakers underlined that **profit-driven transnational criminal organizations were involved in different forms of criminal activities at the global level**, that they networked and cooperated with other criminal groups, thereby impeding the rule of law beyond borders. Some speakers reported that **encrypted communication platforms** had been deployed by criminal groups, and key crime areas were identified through several investigations on the encrypted platforms, including but not limited to drug trafficking, money-laundering, corruption, terrorism, firearms trafficking, forgery of documents, or extreme violence. Some speakers reported having observed that criminal groups funded with the illicit gains obtained from one type of criminal activity other criminal activities. One speaker mentioned that among others, drug trafficking remained the cornerstone of criminal organizations and accounted for the largest proportion of criminal groups' profits.

16. With regards to the **challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic**, some speakers expressed the concern that criminal groups were adept at turning obstacles into criminal opportunities, and that the COVID-19 crisis could lead to an increase of drug production, trafficking and consumption, which would potentially further strengthen the nexus between drug trafficking and other forms of crime. A number of speakers reported on national experiences involving criminal groups adapting their trafficking routes, means of transportation and other modus operandi to continue their drug trafficking business during the pandemic. For example, it was reported that due to the reduction of commercial flights, drug traffickers in some countries had expanded the use of smaller "narco-planes" and clandestine landing strips, which posed among others also a serious threat to the environment. It was further noted by some speakers that tools and vehicles employed by criminals for drug trafficking, such as drone and submarines, could also be used for other criminal activities, such as firearms trafficking.

17. The thematic session also touched upon **the nexus between drug trafficking and crimes that affect the environment**. One panellist referred to the example of deforestation and illicit cultivation in Southern America, explaining that illicit cultivation and the consolidation of coca production centres had resulted in the loss of natural resources and impacted protected areas. Another speaker highlighted that deforestation at the national level had been facilitated by the presence of organized crime networks that were related to illicit economies and activities leading to the

destruction of forests and natural resources. One of the expert panellists also addressed the convergence between illegal gold mining and illicit cultivation.

18. Several speakers expressed concerns over **the impact of corruption on the illicit drug trade**, highlighting that corruption could occur at every stage of combating drug-related crime and at every level of the society. In one of the examples highlighted by a speaker, it was suggested that corrupted organizations that were responsible for drug interdiction at the border entry and exits points could further weaken the rule of law, State institutions and hinder economic development. A number of speakers stressed that human rights and the rule of law should be respected, protected, and promoted when addressing corruption and other related crimes. It was further underlined by a number of speakers that good governance, transparency, and accountability should be promoted by ensuring that all acts of corruption were investigated independently and impartially and that those responsible were brought to justice, with asset recovery processes to be initiated, where appropriate.

19. Some speakers also focused on the **increasing links between drug trafficking and terrorism**, and shared good practices during the meeting. For example, some speakers reported that terrorist groups had secured significant financial resources via varied illicit trafficking in goods, including controlled substances. On the other hand, it was reported that in some countries criminal groups were increasingly disinterested in cooperating with terrorist groups to circumvent the scrutiny from law enforcement. In addition, one of the panellists underlined that existing studies suggested that a disproportionate number of militants, a considerable percentage of whom were radicalized militants, had links to criminality, in particular drugs.

20. The **links between trafficking in persons and drug-related crime** were also discussed during the meeting. Some speakers reported that trafficking victims were among those at risk of being exploited in the illicit cultivation and trafficking of drugs. In that context it was highlighted that the fear of the victims to be treated as criminals could be taken advantage of by traffickers to prevent them from reporting to authorities. It was highlighted that the early identification of trafficking victims was key to ensuring the provision of adequate protection and assistance.

21. Some speakers reported that they had observed at the national level **links between drug trafficking and the smuggling of firearms and ammunition**, thereby referring to the observation of a systematic link between armed violence and drug trade, apart from the use of firearms in homicides. One example shared by a speaker suggested that organized criminal groups used firearms to solve territorial and contractual disputes, and to threaten officials. It was underscored that a multidisciplinary and integrated approach was needed to better understand how to address these links.

22. Many speakers stressed the **importance of strengthening bilateral, regional, and international cooperation and of sharing good practices** to address drug trafficking and all other related forms of organized crime and to protect the rule of law, and foster peace and development. It was highlighted that tailor-made and coordinated actions were needed to address the world drug problem. By referring to domestic statistics concerning information requests and mutual legal-aid requests, one speaker alluded to the gaps related to international cooperation in this field and reiterated the importance of prompt responses and cooperation. The importance of developing partnerships, including with civil society in combating transnational organized crime, was highlighted.

(c) **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”**

23. On 20 October 2021, 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 remained low. Introductory presentations on the challenge were delivered by the Chief of the UNODC Research and Trend Analysis

Branch and the Head of The Global Programme Against Money Laundering of UNODC Cybercrime and Anti-Money Laundering Section.

24. UNODC emphasized **the importance of comparing confiscated proceeds of drug crime with drug profits and related financial flows**. A framework to measure illicit financial flows (IFFs), taking into consideration the value of exported drugs and inward IFFs, and the value of imports of precursors and related outward IFFs, was introduced. According to available data, it was reiterated that the value of assets frozen and confiscated in relation to drug trafficking offences remained low. It was further mentioned regarding the commitment to attain sustainable development goal target 16.4 (by 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery, return of stolen assets, and combat all forms of organized crime), that it was estimated that currently less than 1 per cent of criminal proceeds was confiscated. The UNODC experts highlighted that it was not only important to investigate drug trafficking predicate crime and confiscate drugs, but also to conduct parallel financial investigations and confiscate criminal profits and related assets. A number of speakers highlighted in this regard the importance of strengthening inter-agency cooperation and collaboration, including with the public and the private sector, in order to effectively address drug trafficking and money-laundering. UNODC's work, including technical assistance, capacity-building and inter-agency cooperation, in the field of asset recovery inter-agency networks in different regions was also presented by several speakers from UNODC headquarters and the field, including the support provided to various confiscation networks.

25. While referring to **the lack of parallel financial investigations**, many speakers **alluded to possible reasons** why the value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money-laundering arising from drug trafficking remained low. Some speakers identified corruption and weak governance as enabling factors for illicit financial flows related to drug trafficking and underlined that a more systematic approach at the national level was needed to address corruption in the recovery of proceeds. It was further mentioned by some speakers that law enforcement agencies did not always have the necessary financial investigation skillsets to address IFFs. A number of speakers highlighted that different criminal asset confiscation legislations would pose challenges to law enforcement, including regarding the use of conviction-based confiscation and non-conviction-based confiscation in some jurisdictions. One speaker also mentioned that the long duration of asset forfeiture processes could lead to the loss of assets value, low assets productivity, and high administration costs, highlighting that a possible option could be early disposal, allowing certain assets to be sold, such as assets that were at the risk of destruction.

26. A number of speakers focused on **the modus operandi used** by the transnational organized criminals **in money-laundering**, such as mule accounts, using financial services to transfer illicit gains or cash couriers. Some speakers reported that they had observed criminals involved in money-laundering establishing a parallel underground financial system to process transactions and payments isolated from any oversight mechanisms, thereby making it difficult for criminal proceeds to be traced. One speaker shared national experiences and mentioned in that regard that criminal networks had been increasingly outsourcing their money-laundering business with a view to seek external expertise in a wide range of money-laundering services and to distance themselves from the predicate offences.

27. Some speakers reported **challenges for financial investigations related to the use of cryptocurrency and blockchain** and emphasized that cryptocurrencies were used by criminals to sell controlled substances and transfer their illicit gains abroad, with the blockchain technology allowing a high degree of anonymity. Several speakers highlighted that it was important to strengthen international cooperation in financial investigations, as currency exchanges were done in various jurisdictions and territories. Some speakers shared good practices and recommended among others the establishment of inter-agency and multidisciplinary criminal asset confiscation task forces and the deployment of alternative strategies to investigate suspicious money-laundering and related assets.

28. **In light of the COVID-19 pandemic**, some speakers mentioned that the pandemic impeded their work related to data collection from stakeholders, and thus presented a hindrance to the analysis process regarding suspects' assets related to money-laundering crimes. Some speakers further explained that the COVID-19 related travel restrictions made it more challenging for investigators to conduct financial investigations on the suspected locations of hidden assets. With regard to mutual legal assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was underlined that a lack of political will and the differences in legal systems contributed to the low value of assets seized.

29. With regard to the **reuse of confiscated assets**, it was highlighted by some speakers that the confiscated assets could be used to compensate victims, support efforts to undermine organized criminal groups as well as to strengthen the safety of local communities. Some speakers reported that assets from suspects in money-laundering cases were used for prevention purposes or efforts to address drug trafficking offences.

(d) **2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “The criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities is increasing”**

30. On 21 October, the Commission discussed the challenge that “the criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities is increasing.” The Chief of the UNODC Drug Research Section and the Chief of the UNODC Cybercrime and Anti-Money Laundering Section introduced the topic, including the **statistics and trends regarding the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for drug-related activities**. It was explained that online drug sales occur on the clear web, the deep and the dark web, and that the main advantage of the dark web was the anonymity. It was stressed that the dark web drug markets had expanded, and cannabis and stimulants accounted for a large proportion of sales on the dark web. During the panel discussion it was highlighted that dark web markets were spreading geographically, and serious concerns were expressed over the challenges to obtain reliable and credible data regarding online drug sales. UNODC experts underlined that while the traditional offline drug supply remained to be the most widely used means of distribution, online drug sales had increased dramatically.

31. Many speakers shared information on **national trends regarding illicit drug-related activities facilitated by ICTs**. Some speakers reported that their countries had **during the COVID-19 pandemic** experienced a surge in volume and movement of a wide range of controlled substances, because criminals had swiftly adapted and increased the use of ICTs to avoid disruptions in supply chains. For example, several speakers reported that during the pandemic, e-commerce and the use of postal services including for the movement of illicit goods, had increased. Several speakers also shared details on the prevalent types of drugs available on the clear web, the deep web, and the dark web. It was further reported that new psychoactive substances were frequently traded on the surface web, and heroin, cocaine, cannabis, and amphetamine-type stimulants were primarily traded via the dark web.

32. Several speakers shared **insights of why the Internet had gained attractiveness for criminals engaged in illicit drug-related activities**. It was mentioned, among others, that platforms such as online pharmacies, e-commerce marketplaces, social media platforms and encrypted messaging services, would often lower the technical entry thresholds for criminals to commit crimes online, thereby extending traditional drug trafficking business into virtual domains and reach potential customers worldwide. It was underlined by a number of speakers that by resorting to the dark web, postal services and cryptocurrencies, drug traffickers could minimize the costs and risks of transportation and would allow for funds to be moved instantaneously. Many speakers concurred that due to the anonymity of the dark web and the fact that criminal networks were dispersed globally, it was difficult to target and dismantle drug trafficking operations on the darknet. A further challenge reported during the panel discussion was that with the use of ICT, there was no need for criminals to disclose their identities or meet in person, with the result that even if one

member of the group is identified, and detained, often little information would become available that could dismantle the networks.

33. Several speakers shared experiences on how drugs were sold online including **information on the modus operandi used by criminals involved in online drug-related crimes**. It was reported that selling drugs online often had four steps, including advertising online, ordering online, payment through cryptocurrencies and delivering by postal services or drops. It was reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, drug syndicates adopted trafficking ventures, taking advantage of ICTs to assist them in the transportation of bulk cargo, as well as smaller nodes for redistribution across borders by air, land, and sea. Speakers shared that in some countries criminal organizations increased their control measures by carefully monitoring the movement of their containers and parcels online. One speaker highlighted that some websites had been disguised as “Internet pharmacies” supplying controlled substances without fulfilling the legal and administrative requirements established for traditional pharmacies.

34. Regarding **challenges to address drug-related criminal activities facilitated by ICTs**, speakers mentioned among others the lack of dedicated legislations and technical capacities as well as insufficient international cooperation and collaboration. It was underlined by many speakers that regulatory systems should be strengthened, and legal and policy frameworks should be harmonized to address the challenges. In addition, one speaker mentioned that the need to upgrade equipment and train officers, as well as ensure real-time investigations presented a challenge for some countries, leading to gaps between criminal and investigative capacities. The importance of conducting parallel financial investigations was highlighted by several speakers. One speaker reported that biometric identification systems, facial recognition and other technologies had been deployed to address challenges related to the dark web. It was also highlighted by one speaker that artificial intelligence could support law enforcement to overcome the challenges of investigating digital supply chains related to controlled substances, including by carrying out keyword searches across the dark web forums that promoted marketplaces.

35. Many speakers reiterated that cooperation and effective multilateralism remained key to addressing these global challenges. The importance of sharing of information and effective coordination at the national, regional, and global level, as well as with relevant industry partners, including through public-private partnerships, was highlighted by several speakers.

### C. Way forward

36. As part of the Commission’s efforts to enhance the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, the next thematic session is scheduled to be held during the sixty-fifth session of the CND in 2022. In line with the multi-year workplan, the Commission will focus on how to address 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.

37. Member States, and interested stakeholders are encouraged to initiate timely preparations for the 2022 thematic sessions to facilitate the participation of relevant experts, with a view to sharing good practices and to discussing how to address the highlighted challenges through the implementation of the international drug policy commitments of the 2016 UNGASS outcome document, the 2014 Joint Ministerial Statement and the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action

#### **IV. Chair’s summary on the thematic discussions on the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following-up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration (21–22 September 2022)**

1. This document contains a Chair’s summary of the thematic discussions held during the first intersessional meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-fifth session from 21–22 September 2022. The thematic discussions were chaired by H.E. Ambassador Ghislain D’Hoop (Belgium), Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-fifth session. The summary by the Chair is not subject to negotiation.

##### **A. 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.

3. Member States committed in paragraph 7 of the “Way forward” to support the CND 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 that are 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 fourth round of CND Thematic Discussions, in line with the 2019 workplan<sup>4</sup>, was held from 21–22 September 2022 at the United Nations in Vienna. The Commission focused its discussions on how to address 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.

5. The 2022 CND Thematic Discussions were held in a hybrid format, with in-person and online participation, and livestreamed to ensure that all interested stakeholders could follow the deliberations. With around 700 registrations, the meeting brought together experts and policymakers from over 100 Member States, United Nations entities, intergovernmental organizations, international partners, and civil society experts from around the world.

6. Both thematic sessions started with an introductory presentation and keynote introduction by experts from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

<sup>4</sup> [www.unodc.org/hlr/en/Follow-upProcess.html](http://www.unodc.org/hlr/en/Follow-upProcess.html).

(UNODC), followed by a panel discussion and an interactive debate. The panels included experts from Member States nominated through the Regional Groups, United Nations entities, intergovernmental organizations, international partners, and civil society. Following past practice, civil society panellists and speakers were nominated through the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs (VNGOC) in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit.

7. Expert panellists participated from Brazil, China, Czechia, Kenya, Mexico, the Philippines, Portugal, Singapore and the United States of America. In addition to the introductory presentations and remarks by UNODC, representatives nominated by the World Health Organization (WHO); the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB); the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the African Union Commission; the Council of Europe Pompidou Group; the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA); the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States (OAS-CICAD); the Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage, Thailand; and the Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) made presentations in their respective fields of expertise. Observers from non-governmental organizations, including organizations based in Australia, Colombia, France, Ghana, India, Macao (Special Administrative Region of China); Türkiye and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland also made statements.

8. In preparation for the 2022 CND Thematic Discussions, a background note<sup>5</sup>, based on the provisions of the international drug control conventions; CND policy documents; and reports and documentation of UNODC, WHO, INCB, as well as other United Nations entities, intergovernmental organizations, and international partners, was prepared by the Secretariat, shared with Permanent Missions, and made available online. Presentations and statements made during the thematic sessions, for which consent was given for publication, are also available on the Commission's website.

## **B. Chair's summary of the deliberations**

### **(a) Opening session**

9. The opening segment of the intersessional meeting featured in-person remarks by the UNODC Executive Director and INCB President, as well as online remarks by the Human Rights Council President. 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 positioning human rights at the heart of drug policy, given the complementary and mutually reinforcing nature of the drug control and human rights obligations.

### **(b) Thematic Session 1 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”**

10. Over the course of both days, 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.

11. On 21 September 2022, following the opening segment, the thematic session was kicked off by introductory presentations by the Chief of the Research and Trend

<sup>5</sup> [www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND\\_Sessions/CND\\_65/background\\_note\\_TD\\_2022.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_65/background_note_TD_2022.pdf).

Analysis Branch and the Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch of UNODC. The panel included experts from Brazil, China, Czechia, Kenya, Mexico, Singapore, the United States, UNODC, WHO, INCB, OHCHR, the Council of Europe Pompidou Group, and OAS-CICAD, as well as an expert nominated by VNGOC, representing civil society.

12. The Chief of the UNODC Research and Trend Analysis Branch focused on **five elements of the drug control conventions in protecting the health and welfare of humankind**, namely criminalization; prevention, treatment and care; alternatives to imprisonment; international cooperation; and data collection. She highlighted that there was a **continuum of responses between conformity and non-conformity**, and that more data were required. It was noted that the available evidence showed that **globally, drug use and drug-related deaths were increasing, while availability of and access to controlled medicines remained largely imbalanced**.

13. The Chief of the UNODC Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch explained that **the conventions seek to strike a balance between ensuring adequate availability of and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their diversion and abuse**. He added that, as evidenced by the scheduling mechanism, the drafters of the conventions envisaged a **rule-based, but flexible system of control, which allowed for measures to be reviewed as knowledge and science evolved**. In the same vein, **the conventions could be implemented in full accordance with human rights obligations**.

14. The thematic session underscored the **importance of respect for human rights in drug policy**, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the drug control conventions. Several speakers recalled the objective of the drug control conventions to protect the health and welfare of humankind, stressing that compliance with human rights obligations was integral to drug policy, and not optional. Several speakers underscored that the **right to health was a fundamental human right**, and that the enjoyment of the right to health of all people, including those who use drugs and those with drug use disorders, was applicable irrespective of the fact of their drug use.

15. Several speakers acknowledged that the **drug control conventions gave Member States flexibility** in the determination of responses to actions that are not in line with the provisions of the conventions, in accordance with their national specificities. During the thematic session, examples were shared of how Member States have been exercising this flexibility through the adoption of different approaches, including the decriminalization of certain drug-related offences, in line with the overarching principal of the drug control conventions to protect the health and welfare of humankind.

16. The thematic session discussed various facets of adopting a **public health approach to drug policy**. Several speakers shared good practices relating to **alternatives to conviction or punishment** – moving from criminalizing and penalizing personal drug use to a more person- and health-centred approach **focusing on treatment and rehabilitation of individuals**. It was noted that this approach could, among others, reduce stigmatization and discrimination, in turn leading to increased health-seeking behaviour and fewer drug use-related deaths, as well as reduce prison overcrowding. Several speakers also highlighted the value of **evidence-based prevention and demand reduction interventions**, including early education and family skills programmes, in **protecting the community, particularly the most vulnerable, including children and young people, from the potentially dangerous effects of controlled substances**. In this regard, some speakers delved further into the need to **address root causes**, including, among others, poverty and lack of education.

17. Several speakers stressed the importance of recognizing drug use diseases as multifactorial and biopsychosocial health disorders and **mainstreaming the treatment of drug use diseases**. Some speakers advocated for **increased access to voluntary drug treatment**, especially for women, children and persons detained in

prison, to close the gap in the treatment of drug use diseases. A number of speakers highlighted that **people who use drugs, especially people who inject drugs, were at risk of HIV and other blood-borne diseases**, and that it was critical to improve their access to drug treatment services, to address and counter the spread of HIV and blood-borne diseases, as well as drug use-related deaths. In this regard, stigma, discrimination, and punitive laws were recognized as key barriers to access to treatment. Some speakers cited, in this regard, that decriminalization of personal drug use could encourage people who use drugs to seek treatment, in turn reducing their risk of acquiring HIV and other blood-borne diseases.

18. Several speakers recalled the **principal of common and shared responsibility** and stressed that **international cooperation lay at the heart of the drug control conventions**. Many speakers called for **enhanced coordination and cooperation at all levels to address and counter all aspects of the world drug problem**, underscoring that **Member States had a responsibility to work together including with United Nations entities, civil society and other relevant partners**, to effectively achieve the aims of the drug control conventions. Various areas for enhanced cooperation were mentioned, including the sharing of information, good practices and lessons learned; the enforcement and investigation of drug-related offences, in particular drug trafficking; mutual legal assistance; extradition; seizures; and transfer of proceedings.

19. The subject of **improving availability of and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their diversion** recurred throughout the thematic session. Many speakers acknowledged the importance of controlled medicines for a variety of purposes, including pain management, palliative care and the treatment of drug use diseases. Several speakers highlighted the **significant global disparity in access to medicines containing controlled substances**, and the **disproportionate impact of shortages on low- and middle-income countries**. A range of good practices in improving availability and access was shared, including streamlining the supply chain; easing regulatory restrictions; educating medical professionals on the rational use of controlled medicines; and raising public awareness. Several speakers also highlighted the importance of **balanced evidence-based national drug policies**, which ensured that patients could access controlled medicines, as well as prevention, treatment and care services, while preventing the diversion of controlled substances into illicit channels. In this regard, it was recalled that the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence made scheduling recommendations based on the assessment of the harm and therapeutic use of a substance in the global context.

20. Divergent views were expressed, including regarding the **legalization of the non-medical use of controlled substances, including cannabis and cannabis-related substances**. Some speakers shared national experiences stemming from the decriminalization and/or legalization of non-medical cannabis use. Other speakers referred, with regard to legalization, to lacking compliance with the provisions of the drug control conventions, and expressed concern, including in relation to the perception, particularly among young people, of the risks related to the non-medical use of controlled substances. Findings of the 2022 World Drug Report on cannabis legalization were cited, and the need for further research was underlined.

(c) **Thematic Session 2 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”**

21. On 22 September 2022, the thematic session was kicked off by introductory presentations by the Chief of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch and the Chief of the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Section of UNODC. The panel included experts from Kenya; Mexico; the Philippines; Portugal; UNODC; WHO; INCB; OHCHR; UNAIDS; UNDP; the African Union; EMCDDA; the Mae Fah Luang

Foundation under Royal Patronage, Thailand; and OSCE; as well as an expert nominated by VNGOC, representing civil society.

22. The Chief of the UNODC Research and Trend Analysis Branch focused on **three indicators of human rights** – equality and non-discrimination; the right to liberty and security; and participation. Regarding equality and non-discrimination, reference was made to the vicious cycle associated with drug use diseases, stigma, and access to prevention, treatment, care and rehabilitation services, as well as the resulting socioeconomic disadvantages experienced by those affected by drug use diseases. Two trends were highlighted – first, that higher socioeconomic groups were more likely to initiate drug use, but lower socioeconomic groups were more likely to progress from drug use to drug use diseases; and second, that women faced greater stigma for drug use and had less access to treatment than men. Regarding the right to liberty and security, various areas were highlighted, including components of the criminal justice system, such as sentencing practices and prison conditions; security from drug-related violence; and availability of and access to controlled medicines, as well as prevention, treatment and care services. Regarding participation, the importance of considering the human rights of all stakeholders, including people who use drugs, drug offenders and those who live around them, was stressed.

23. The Chief of the UNODC Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Section focused on **proportionate sentencing for drug-related offences**, as an example of an issue which cuts across drug control and human rights. She explained that the goal of proportionate sentencing was to reach an **individualized sentence**, which takes an offender's specific needs into account; and that to achieve a proportionate sentence, both the sentencing process and outcome had to be proportionate. In terms of **process**, proportionality entailed considering the **seriousness of the offence**, including the offender's role in the illicit activity and, for drug-related offences, the quantity of drugs involved; as well as the **offender's personal circumstances**, including health needs, family and socioeconomic situation, and risk and protective factors. In terms of **outcome**, proportionality entailed moving from imprisonment as the default to considering non-custodial options. In this regard, the UNODC Toolkit on Gender-Responsive Non-Custodial Measures was recalled.

24. Several speakers also addressed the issue of **proportionality of criminal justice responses**. Regarding the enforcement of drug-related offences, some speakers underscored the importance of moving away from the punitive policing of drug use and enabling law enforcement officers to respond appropriately and proportionately to drug use and mental health issues. Several speakers touched on the importance of equal access to justice, a fair trial, and proportionate individualized sentencing. In relation to persons with drug use diseases, several speakers highlighted the value of reducing coercive sanctions, including imprisonment, and diverting them to prevention, treatment and care services.

25. Divergent views were expressed regarding the use of the **death penalty**. A number of speakers opposed the use of the death penalty under all circumstances, including for drug-related offences, calling for the immediate abolition and commutation of death sentences. One speaker recalled that there was no international consensus relating to the use of the death penalty.

26. Several speakers stressed the importance of **strong partnerships and an integrated approach between the justice, health and social sectors** at the national and international levels. Many speakers called for **increased training and capacity-building** for policymakers and practitioners involved in drug policy, as well as **participatory approaches and increased community engagement** in policymaking and implementation. In this regard, some speakers highlighted the importance of adopting a **gender- and age-focused approach**, as well as **considering the specific needs and challenges of indigenous communities and marginalized groups**, to avoid drug policies that are discriminatory in design and/or enforcement.

27. The meeting also discussed the subject of **alternative development**, and the importance of supporting persons involved in the illicit cultivation of drugs and drug

crops to **transition to sustainable alternative livelihoods**. In addition to supply reduction, it was highlighted that such efforts would protect persons from exploitation by organized criminal groups engaged in drug trafficking, in turn leading to reduced drug-related violence and deaths.

28. Responding to the discussions over the course of both days, several speakers concluded that there was **no “one-size fits-all” approach** to integrating human rights considerations into drug policy, and that a contextual approach was necessary in determining the appropriate national response to drug-related challenges.

29. Different views were expressed regarding the inclusion of a chapter on human rights and drug policy in one of the upcoming editions of the World Drug Report. A number of speakers expressed support for the inclusion, while other speakers expressed concern and called for further discussions on the matter. One speaker proposed to focus rather on evaluating the progress made in the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, in light of the 2024 midterm review. The Chief of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch clarified UNODC’s internal elaboration and clearance process for the publication, underlining the requirement for extra resources for additional thematic chapters.

### **C. Way forward**

30. As part of the CND’s efforts to enhance the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, the next thematic session is scheduled to be held during the Commission’s sixty-sixth session in 2023. In line with the multi-year workplan, the Commission will undertake a comprehensive stocktaking, in the lead up to the 2024 midterm review, of the progress made in implementing all international drug policy commitments as reaffirmed in the Ministerial Declaration.

31. Member States, and interested stakeholders are encouraged to initiate timely preparations for the 2023 thematic sessions to facilitate the participation of relevant experts, with a view to sharing good practices and to discussing how to address the highlighted challenges through the implementation of the international drug policy commitments of the 2016 UNGASS outcome document, the 2014 Joint Ministerial Statement and the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action.

## V. Chair's summary on the thematic discussions on the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following-up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration (21–23 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.

### A. 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 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>6</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.

<sup>6</sup> [www.unodc.org/hlr/en/Follow-upProcess.html](http://www.unodc.org/hlr/en/Follow-upProcess.html).

**(a) Thematic Discussion I, 23–25 October 2023:****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”

**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”

**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”

**(b) Thematic Discussion II, 4-6 December 2023:****Day 1: 4 December 2023**

*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”

**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”

**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:* 1/2 day closing with a focus on the way forward

5. The 2023 CND Thematic Discussions were held in a hybrid format, with in-person and online participation, and were webcast on United Nation 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 eleven 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.

6. In preparation for the 2023 CND Thematic Discussions, the Secretariat prepared a discussion guide<sup>7</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)).

7. 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.

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

## **B. Chair's summary of the deliberations**

### **(a) Opening sessions**

9. 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.

10. 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 wellbeing of societies.

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

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

12. 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.

<sup>7</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).

13. The Research Officer provided an overview of **supply chains** for drugs of natural and synthetic origin, pointing 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.

14. 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 the CND.

15. During the discussion, **statements** were made by Switzerland on behalf of 47 Member States<sup>8</sup>, Italy, the European Union, the United States of America, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Thailand, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Peru, France, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Lithuania, Ecuador, Jordan, the Russian Federation, Australia, Brazil, Japan, Egypt, Colombia, 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, the Russian Federation, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine.

16. 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.

17. 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**.

18. Several speakers noted with concern the increase in the **illicit production and non-medical use of synthetic drugs**, including synthetic opioids such as fentanyls, 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

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<sup>8</sup> Albania, Argentina, Australia, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, European Union and its 27 member States, Honduras, Iceland, Mexico, Moldova, Norway, New Zealand, San Marino, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Uruguay.

than of single precursors, which was also identified by the INCB as a good model to address the rise in illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs.

19. 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.

20. 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.

21. 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.

22. 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 community level.

23. 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.

24. 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 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”**

25. 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.

26. 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.

27. 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**.

28. 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 program 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.

29. 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 of America, 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.

30. 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.

31. 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. **Poly-drug 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.

32. 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.

33. 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 the 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.

34. 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 the 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.

35. **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 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”**

36. 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.

37. 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.

38. 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.

39. 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.

40. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by the United Kingdom, Mexico, the European Union, the United States of America, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ecuador, Türkiye, Pakistan, Australia, Tunisia, Colombia, the Russian Federation, Sudan, Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, France, and Paraguay<sup>9</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 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 of America, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the European Union and Sudan.

41. 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.

42. The **profit-driven nature of organized crime**, including drug trafficking, was emphasized by many speakers, indicating the need to **focus on combatting 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.

43. 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.

44. 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

<sup>9</sup> The statement of Paraguay was submitted only in writing and posted on the website as received.

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**.

45. 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 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”**

46. 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.

47. 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.

48. 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.

49. 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.

50. 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 of America, 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 the United Republic of Tanzania.

51. 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.

52. 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).

53. 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.

54. 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 tracing of virtual assets.

55. 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 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “The criminal misuse of information and communications technologies for illicit drug-related activities is increasing”**

56. 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.

57. 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.

58. 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.

59. 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.

60. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by the United Kingdom, the European Union, the United States of America, 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 of America, and Israel.

61. 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 minimise the chance of detection.

62. **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 combatting 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.

63. 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 specialised 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.

64. 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 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”**

65. 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.

66. 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.

67. 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.

68. 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.

69. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by the Singapore on behalf of 43 countries<sup>10</sup>, Belgium, the European Union on behalf of the EU and its Member States, Slovenia, Pakistan, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Kuwait, Malta, Brazil, the Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Australia, the United States of America, 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 the International Narcotics Control Board, 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 of 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 of America and Poland. The following delegations exercised their right of reply: State of Palestine, Israel, Sudan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, and the United States of America.

70. 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

<sup>10</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, State of Palestine, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Zimbabwe.

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.

71. 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.

72. 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.

73. 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.

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

75. 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.

76. 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.

77. 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 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs and deaths related to drug use have increased”**

78. 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.

79. 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.

80. 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 opioids 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.

81. 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.

82. 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 of America, 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 the 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 of America.

83. 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**.

84. 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 under-represented among people having access to and using the services available in many parts of the world.

85. 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.

86. 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.

87. 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.

88. 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 socio-economic perspective, was also highlighted as an important element of drug policies.

(i) **Thematic Session 8 on 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”**

89. 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.

90. 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.

91. 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 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.

92. 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.

93. 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 of America, 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.

94. 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.

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

96. 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.

97. 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.

98. **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. **Multi-sectoral 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 2019 Ministerial Declaration Challenge: “The adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new psychoactive substances have reached alarming levels”**

99. 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.

100. 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.

101. 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**.

102. 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**.

103. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by the European Union, the United Kingdom, Mexico, the United States of America, 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 Africa 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 of America, Kazakhstan and Türkiye.

104. 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**.

105. 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.

106. 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.

107. **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.

108. 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 the 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 the 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 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”**

109. 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.

110. 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.

111. 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 was 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**.

112. 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.

113. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by the United States of America, 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 Africa 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.

114. 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.

115. 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.

116. 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.

117. A number of speakers shared **experiences and measures taken** at 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.

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

- (l) **Thematic Session 11 on 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”**

### C. Way forward

119. 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.

120. A **joint presentation was delivered by the Chair, the first Vice-Chair and the Secretary of the Commission** at its sixty-sixth session on the modalities and expected outcome of the 2024 midterm. The then Vice-Chair and incoming Chair of the sixty-seventh 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.

121. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by Mexico, the European Union, the United States of America, 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, the United Republic of Tanzania and Mexico.

122. 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 **roadmap 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.

123. 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.

124. 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.

125. 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 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.

126. **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 regards to online trafficking.

127. 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 roadmap to 2029.

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

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