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

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Item 3(c) of the provisional agenda\*

**Interactive, multi-stakeholder round tables of the high-level segment****Background note for the interactive, multi-stakeholder round tables of the high-level segment\*\***

1. With the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, Member States decided to **accelerate the implementation of all international drug policy commitments** made over the past decade: 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 therein. Since 2019, the Commission has held yearly, multi-stakeholder thematic discussions to follow-up on progress made in the implementation of all international drug policy commitments.

2. Pursuant to its resolution 66/1, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) will hold **two interactive, multi-stakeholder round tables**, to be conducted in parallel with the general debate during the high-level segment of its sixty-seventh session to take stock of the implementation of all international drug policy commitments and outline the way forward to 2029, in line with the Ministerial Declaration of 2019. The topics of the round tables are **(1) Taking stock: work undertaken since 2019**, and **(2) The way forward: the road to 2029**.

3. This background note is a substantive contribution by the Secretariat to these interactive round table discussions. It has been prepared based on data from the UNODC World Drug Reports and on the Chairs' summaries of the CND thematic discussions held since 2019, which identify the salient points from the deliberations, including on progress made, challenges faced, new developments and lessons learned.<sup>1</sup> **The background note should be read in conjunction with the Chair's summaries of these CND thematic discussions.**

4. More information on the format of the interactive, multi-stakeholder round tables is contained in the note by the Secretariat on the substantive organization of the high-level segment of the CND at its 67th session, in 2024 ([E/CN.7/2024/5](#)).

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

\*\* This document has not been formally edited.

<sup>1</sup> [E/CN.7/2024/CRP2](#).



# Roundtable I

## Taking stock: work undertaken since 2019

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### Introduction

In the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, Member States acknowledged that tangible progress had been achieved in the implementation of the commitments made since 2009 in addressing and countering the world drug problem, including with regard to an improved understanding of the problem, the development, elaboration and implementation of national strategies, the enhanced sharing of information, as well as the enhanced capacity of national competent authorities.

They also noted with concern persistent and emerging challenges related to the world drug problem, including the following:

- That both the range of drugs and **drugs markets are expanding and diversifying**;
- That the abuse, as well as the **illicit cultivation and production 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 domestic diversion in precursor chemicals is on the rise;
- 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 being observed;
- That **the value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money-laundering arising from drug trafficking at the global level remains low**;
- 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;
- That **drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs**, and deaths related to drug use have increased;
- That the **rate of transmission of HIV, HCV and other blood-borne diseases** associated with drug use, including injecting drugs, in some countries, remains high;
- That the **adverse health consequences and risks associated with new psychoactive substances** have reached alarming levels;
- **Synthetic opioids, and the non-medical use of prescription drugs**, present increasing risks to public health and safety, as well as with scientific, legal and regulatory challenges, including in scheduling of substances;
- That the **criminal misuse of information and communications technologies** for illicit drug-related activities is increasing;
- That the geographical coverage and availability of **reliable data** on the various aspects on the world drug problem require improvement;
- That **responses not in conformity with the three international drug control conventions and not in conformity with applicable international human rights obligations** represent a challenge to the implementation of joint commitments based on the principle of common and shared responsibility.

## Where do we stand? Highlights on progress made, persistent challenges and new developments

As noted by participants during the CND thematic discussions held since 2019, progress has been made in a number of areas related to the world drug problem, for instance as regards a **better understanding** of it and its multifaceted nature. In some cases, progress has been made in data collection and analysis, for instance, as indicated during the 2023 CND thematic discussions, on the measurement of illicit financial flows (SDG 16.4), which has contributed to increasing the knowledge base on the topic. There is also increased global awareness of and international guidance on the links between illicit cultivation and production of drugs and the environment. Over the last five years, **technical guidelines and tools** have been developed by UNODC, INCB and other relevant stakeholders to address specific drug-related challenges in support of Member States' efforts.

On the supply side, areas where participants during the CND thematic discussions indicated progress include **the increased number and quality of national early warning systems** to detect, identify and monitor new psychoactive substances, and the **successful dismantling by law enforcement** of several drug trafficking operations, including online trafficking markets such as the Hydra Market in 2022. Progress has also been made by **national laboratories** in many countries in being able to identify a larger range of, in particular, synthetic drugs. Since 2019, several **partnerships and interagency networks** to support criminal justice systems in addressing drug supply have been created or strengthened, such as the Asset Recovery Interagency Networks. **Alternative development programmes** in several countries have expanded their outreach and acquired a more integrated development approach, putting people at the centre and ensuring the need for market access, local ownership, inclusiveness and environmental sustainability.

On the demand side, many participants referred to the **importance of adopting a comprehensive approach that included evidence-based prevention and treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare within a continuum of care**, exemplified by the increasing implementation of evidence-based family and life skills education, in line with the UNODC/WHP International Standards on Drug Use Prevention. Many participants during the CND thematic discussions also referred to the introduction of **opioid agonist therapy** in some countries as successful in preventing overdoses and death and to the distribution of naloxone for overdose management. HIV incidence among people who use drugs remains high, despite the decline in the general population since 2010. Some countries referred to **needle syringe exchange programmes as successful in reducing incidence of HIV and hepatitis**. Further, **innovations** introduced in drug use disorder treatment services during the COVID-19 pandemic have also shown how thinking creatively can help, even during crisis situations, to overcome barriers and provide effective services to people who need them.

Despite progress made in a number of aspects of the world drug problem, interventions during the CND thematic discussions highlighted that **international drug policy commitments made since 2009 remain only partly fulfilled** and some of the challenges have intensified. There are increasing, in some cases record levels, of **illicit cultivation, production and manufacture** of many drugs, such as cocaine, methamphetamine, and a variety of synthetic drugs, including synthetic opioids. The number of new psychoactive substances on the global market has increased since 2019, and **new trafficking routes and methods**, including via online trafficking, have been adopted by criminal groups, posing challenges to the efforts of law enforcement and criminal justice practitioners. New methods were also observed in money-laundering. On the demand side, **record levels of persons with drug use disorders** were witnessed at 39.5 million globally in 2021, which represented a 45 per cent increase over the last decade. This includes the non-medical use of synthetic opioids that has led to an increase in overdose deaths.

On average, **only 1 in 5 persons with drug use disorders are in treatment**,<sup>2</sup> with a high treatment gap persisting for specific populations, such as women, adolescents and people in contact with the criminal justice systems. In addition, treatment services are **often not voluntary and do not meet quality standards**, and evidence-based interventions are also lacking as regards drug use prevention programmes. While effective treatment exists to prevent and manage opioid overdose, there are **no scalable treatment options for stimulant use disorders**, nor to reverse **non-opioid and new psychoactive substances overdoses**, and further research is urgently needed. Access to **HIV and hepatitis prevention, treatment and care services remain low**.

In addition, **access and availability to controlled medicines remains unequal and low in many parts of the world**, with 84 per cent of the world population accounting for 7.5 per cent of global consumption.<sup>3</sup>

During the CND thematic discussions, speakers referred to the need for concerted **efforts to ensure that drug policies integrate human rights and comply with the international drug control conventions**. This includes the need to ensure health-centred approaches to drug use, such as promoting dignity, equality and non-discrimination in accessing drug treatment and rehabilitation services as well as HIV and hepatitis prevention, treatment and care services. Efforts are also needed to ensure that measures to prevent and counter drug trafficking integrate human rights, such as freedom from inhuman treatment or punishment, freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, right to a fair trial, and the principle of proportionality in the formulation of criminal justice responses. Similarly, as noted by several participants during the CND thematic discussions, some measures, such as the legalization of controlled substances for non-medical and non-scientific purposes, are not compliant with the provisions contained in the international drug control conventions.

The period from 2019 to 2024 has also been marked by new developments. A key one is the **coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic**, which took a heavy toll on public health and the global economy, affecting also the global drug landscape. COVID-19 led, among others, to increased drug use and mental health disorders in many parts of the world. After initial disruptions, organized criminal groups adjusted and adopted new modus operandi, resorting more frequently to maritime and water routes and online sales, maintaining drug production levels unaffected and drug trafficking at the same or even increased levels.<sup>4</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic led to shifts in drug use during the lockdown periods: whereas MDMA, LSD and cocaine were used less due to the closing of social and recreational venues, increased stress, boredom, more free time and changes in financial resources triggered an increase in the use of cannabis, as well as in the non-medical use of pharmaceutical drugs. In North America, overdose deaths, driven by the use of fentanyl, reached unprecedented levels during the COVID-19 pandemic. The closing of non-essential health services and initial disruptions in the provision of services and treatment for people who use drugs were observed in many countries. On the positive side, as mentioned above, the mobility restrictions put in place during the pandemic triggered innovations in the provision of drug use treatment and rehabilitation services which should be leveraged post-pandemic. Some countries reported benefits of easing restrictions on the dispensing of methadone, making distribution more accessible with home delivery of opioid antagonist therapy medications or offering dosing at pharmacies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On a general note, it is important to bear in mind that persisting **gaps in data collection make it difficult to ascertain progress** made across various aspects of the world drug problem. For instance, while fairly well-developed methodologies exist to monitor coca bush and opium

<sup>2</sup> UNODC *World Drug Report 2023*, Booklet “Special Points”, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> UNODC *World Drug Report 2021*, Booklet 5: COVID-19 and Drugs: Impact Outlook.

poppy cultivation and estimate production of heroin and cocaine, very few countries have information and/or report on the extent of cannabis cultivation, and indoor cultivation is very difficult to measure. The manufacture of synthetic drugs is also not assessed as methodologies are lacking. Data are also scarce on the indicator identified to globally monitor Sustainable Development Goal target 3.5 “coverage of treatment interventions (pharmacological, psychosocial and rehabilitation and after care services) for substance use disorders”. Overall, many countries lack the capacity, effective coordination and financial resources to produce good-quality drug information. The need for high-quality, disaggregated data to ensure informed policy decisions at the national, regional and international levels remains crucial.

## Questions for discussion

- **Share Success Stories:** What notable achievements and successes has your country or organization experienced since 2019 in advancing international drug policy commitments, and how can these be of help to others? Do you have experience with innovative data solutions that have helped to improve timeliness and accuracy of the understanding of the threats posed by drugs?
- **Addressing Challenges Head-On:** In your experience, what are the most pressing gaps and challenges that require immediate attention to facilitate a comprehensive, integrated, and balanced approach to combating the world drug problem? Please provide concrete recommendations for addressing these challenges.

## Roundtable II

### The way forward: the road to 2029

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#### Introduction

In the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem, including accelerating the implementation of all existing drug policy commitments, and resolved to review progress made in 2029, with a midterm review in 2024. Member States also reiterated that efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to effectively address the world drug problem are complementary and mutually reinforcing. In this context, with the 2029 end-of-cycle review of the Ministerial Declaration set to take place one year before the end-date of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Commission's review can make an important contribution to the broader development agenda.

During the 2023 CND thematic discussions, one of the meetings was devoted to discussing the way forward, including preparations for the 2024 midterm review, and actions that could be undertaken by the Commission and Member States from 2024 to 2029 to accelerate the implementation of all existing drug policy commitments before the final review. It is expected that the Commission will decide on a road map to hold intersessional thematic discussions from 2024 to 2028 that include the challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, which remain relevant today.

The implementation of drug policy commitments can be accelerated by analysing persisting challenges and new developments through the lens of cross-cutting issues: cooperation at all levels; data collection and analysis; innovation and new technologies; and capacity-building and resource mobilization.

#### Cooperation at all levels

The complexity and multifaceted nature of the world drug problem requires enhanced cooperation among all relevant stakeholders at the national, (sub)regional and international levels. At the national level, cooperation among relevant domestic authorities, including in the health, education, justice, social and law enforcement sectors, is key to designing and implementing comprehensive, coordinated and effective drug policies. There is a need for coordinated operations and exchange of information, including drug-related intelligence among law enforcement and border control agencies, at the regional level. The Commission's subsidiary bodies, the Heads of National Law Enforcement Agencies (HONLEAs) and the Subcommission, provide important opportunities for regional cooperation, addressing specific challenges in each region and bringing practical recommendations to the attention of the Commission. Cooperation at the international level, based on the principle of common and shared responsibility, is equally crucial in accelerating the practical implementation of joint commitments, including through the sharing of data and good practices globally.

A good practice highlighted during the CND thematic discussions to address drug trafficking is the engagement of a wider range of sectors in partnerships at the different levels, including of law enforcement, criminal justice professionals, postal services, shipping services, the chemical industry, the banking sector and ICT companies.

Inclusivity is a key element of cooperation. All policy documents since 2009 have recognized the importance of stakeholder engagement, including United Nations entities, regional and international organizations, civil society, the scientific community, academia and the private sector. With a view to implementing inclusive, human rights-based, people-centred and scientific evidence-based drug policies and programmes, all relevant stakeholders need to bring their comparative advantages to the table, including the knowledge and understanding of those working on the ground.

In leading a United Nations system-wide coordination on drug related matters, UNODC will continue to support coordination and cooperation at all levels beyond 2024, making best use of the expertise of the United Nations system partners in supporting Member States with the practical implementation of the policy documents. Through its annual thematic discussions, the Commission fosters broad, transparent and inclusive discussions among all interested stakeholders, bringing together the different views and expertise on the various aspects of the world drug problem. To ensure broad access to these annual exchanges, the thematic discussions are broadcast live and all inputs received from participating experts,<sup>5</sup> as well as the Chair's summaries of the discussions, are made publicly available online. In the broader framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Commission also continues to enhance its collaboration with other United Nations and intergovernmental bodies, seeking to strengthen horizontal cooperation with the other functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, expanding interaction and the active exchange of views on issues of common interest.

## Data collection and analysis

The generation of high-quality data and their availability in a timely manner is key to understanding the global drug landscape and is the basis of evidence-based policymaking and monitoring. The forensic capacity of national drug testing and toxicology laboratories should be continually enhanced to ensure accurate scientific data is used for early warning information on emerging drug threats and for developing responses at both national and international levels.

In the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, Member States noted with concern that the geographical coverage and availability of reliable data on the various aspects on the world drug problem required improvement. Member States committed to improving the collection, analysis and sharing of quality and comparable data, in particular through capacity-building, in close cooperation with INCB, WHO, UNODC and other relevant partners, including through the cooperation between the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the Statistical Commission.

The three international drug control conventions require parties to annually submit drug-related data to the United Nations, which is implemented through the UNODC Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ) and the Individual Drug Seizures (IDS) reporting. Replies to the UNODC annual report questionnaire are however often incomplete or delayed. In CND resolution 60/1 of March 2018, Member States invited UNODC, in close cooperation with Member States, to reflect on possibilities to strengthen and streamline its existing data-collection and analysis tools, including improving the quality and effectiveness of the annual report questionnaire. After an inclusive process that involved several consultations with Member States and international organizations, as well as two Expert Group Meetings, the revised and streamlined ARQ<sup>6</sup> was endorsed by the Commission on Narcotics Drugs during its 63rd session in March 2020. In May 2021, the new ARQ was launched, together with a new platform that facilitates data collection. The IDS reporting is also incomplete, with a number of Member States who either have never submitted data on individual drug seizures or are reporting such data very irregularly. For 2022, 92 Member States submitted data to UNODC on IDS while 129 submitted the ARQ.

During the CND thematic discussions held from 2019 to 2023, the importance of quality data, as well as the challenges faced by countries in collecting reliable and disaggregated data, was a recurrent topic stressed by participants. Many speakers noted the need for more data, among others, on the use of the darknet for drug trafficking; on the intersection between different types of crime to better understand the impacts on governance, communities and the environment; on the proceeds of crime related to drug trafficking; on the health risks associated with new psychoactive substances, also with a view to finding an effective medical treatment; and on the consequences of cannabis legalization for non-medical and non-scientific purposes. Insufficient capacity and resources, mistrust and lack of coordination among

<sup>5</sup> 2019 Ministerial Declaration Follow-up Portal:

[www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/62\\_Session\\_2019/portal.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/62_Session_2019/portal.html).

<sup>6</sup> E/CN.7/2020/12.



agencies, as well as legal barriers to exchanging data owing to data protection regulations were identified, among others, as important obstacles to data collection and sharing.

The thematic discussions also provided an opportunity to share valuable data at global, regional and national levels, including on innovative methodologies such as waste-water analysis, a method that may be comparatively inexpensive to collect data on drug consumption and estimate market size, and also on the methodology developed by UNODC and UNCTAD to measure illicit financial flows. In addition, tools for data collection and sharing developed by UNODC, INCB, WHO, INTERPOL and other entities, were also presented to a global audience during the thematic discussions.

Moving beyond 2024, it will be crucial to enhance the capacity of governments for data collection and analysis, in line with global reporting obligations, to improve the response rate and expand the geographical and thematic reporting on data across all policy commitments. It will also be important to strengthen evaluations so as to draw accurate conclusions on the impact of national interventions. There is also a need to make maximum use of new technologies to monitor changes in drug cultivation, production and trafficking.

## **Innovation and new technologies**

There are a number of reasons why innovation matters in addressing the world drug problem. First, drug trafficking groups quickly adapt their *modi operandi* to circumvent existing regulations and to avoid detection, including via online trafficking and novel drug concealment methods. For law enforcement and judicial efforts to succeed, keeping abreast of new developments and responding in new ways that criminal groups may not anticipate is essential. Developing evidence-based, innovative measures to address them can bring international efforts closer to fulfilling joint drug policy commitments. Second, there is much potential in new technologies to complement existing efforts in reducing drug supply and demand. The use of new technologies can advance joint efforts to detect and monitor substances, to identify and disrupt drug trafficking groups, and to raise awareness about evidence-based policies for drug use prevention and treatment. Technological know-how and equipment will play a key role in leveraging innovation.

In the 2016 UNGASS outcome document, Member States committed to stimulate innovation, entrepreneurship and employment in the context of sustainable urban development initiatives, and to promote partnerships and innovative cooperation initiatives with the private sector, civil society and international financial institutions to create conditions more conducive to productive investments targeted at job creation in areas and among communities affected by or at risk of illicit drug cultivation, production, manufacturing or trafficking.

During the 2023 CND thematic discussions, leveraging innovation was stressed by a number of speakers as a key element for inclusion in the outcome document of the 2024 midterm review. Improvements stemming from innovations in drug policy and practices introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, include drug service provision through the use of telehealth (the use of telephone lines and online communication tools), and various strategies to ensure access to medication and sterile equipment. Innovations that have been demonstrated to be effective and safe should be sustained to ensure promote access to services. Also reported to be key in moving forward are efforts to promote innovative measures and partnerships to dismantle criminal groups despite their constantly changing techniques, including via online trafficking.

## **Capacity-building and resource mobilization**

The lack of capacity and resources to implement balanced, integrated, evidence-based policies is a challenge at the national, (sub)regional and international levels. Securing adequate resources at the national level, enhancing the capacity of domestic authorities and providing enhanced assistance to requesting Member States are key elements to successfully implementing the drug policy



commitments, as well as securing sufficient resources to establish and sustain international and regional initiatives.

In the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, Member States committed to continuing to mobilize resources, including for the provision of technical assistance and capacity-building at all levels, to ensure that all Member States can effectively address and counter emerging and persistent drug-related challenges. Member States also committed to increasing the provision of technical assistance and capacity-building to Member States, upon request, in particular those most affected by the world drug problem, including by illicit cultivation and production, transit and consumption. Further, Member States requested UNODC to enhance technical assistance and capacity-building for the implementation of all commitments, in consultation with requesting Member States and in cooperation with other relevant United Nations entities and stakeholders, and to invite existing and emerging donors to provide extrabudgetary resources for that purpose.

As the leading United Nations entity in drug-related matters, UNODC provides a wide range of tailored technical assistance activities to countries. The Office provides legislative advice and legal drafting support, training and capacity-building activities, assistance in the development of national policies and strategies, and has issued a wide array of operational tools, guides and practical resources for policymakers, legislators, non-governmental organizations and practitioners who work in areas covered by the UNODC mandate. Implementing the commitment to provide enhanced technical assistance beyond 2024 requires adequate and stable financial resources at all levels, including for UNODC to be able to fulfil its mandate and provide, upon request, targeted technical assistance and capacity-building on all the commitments made since 2009.

During the CND thematic discussions held since 2019, key areas for which enhanced capacity-building was considered essential to advance the implementation of joint drug policy commitments included – among others – the conduct of financial investigations for online drugs trafficking and the tracing of virtual assets; data collection and analysis; the detection and safe handling of chemicals; evidence-based prevention and treatment of drug use; the prevention and treatment of HIV, HPC and other blood-borne diseases; the prevention and treatment of disorders associated with new psychoactive substances; and increasing access to and availability of controlled medicines, including through rational and safe prescription practices.

The Pledge4Action initiative to be conducted during the 2024 midterm review will provide an opportunity for Member States to translate commitments into actions through implementing concrete initiatives, strengthening collaboration with stakeholders and providing financial contributions. Member States will be invited to provide updates on their pledges during the CND thematic discussions between 2024 and 2029.

## Questions for discussion

- **A joint vision for the future: Could you share examples of partnerships that have been successful in addressing drug-related challenges? What elements explain their success?**
- **Better data: Could you share good practices to strengthen data collection and analysis relating to the world drug problem?**
- **Leveraging innovation: In your experience, what are innovative practices that have worked well and can benefit the international community?**
- **Making it happen: What steps can Member States take to ensure the allocation of sufficient resources, including with a view to enhancing technical assistance, including capacity-building?**