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**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
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**COMMON AFRICAN POSITION
FOR THE MIDTERM REVIEW OF THE 2019 MINISTERIAL DECLARATION ON
STRENGTHENING ACTIONS AT THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL
LEVELS TO ACCELERATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF JOINT COMMITMENTS TO
ADDRESS AND COUNTER THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM,
14-15 MARCH 2024, VIENNA, AUSTRIA**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its 67th regular session in March 2024, the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) convened a high-level midterm review to assess progress made in the implementation of the 2019 Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening Actions at the National, Regional and International Levels to Accelerate the Implementation of Joint Commitments to Address and Counter the world drug problem.
2. In November 2023, African Ambassadors and delegations in Vienna, Austria participated in a Stakeholder Dialogue titled “**Strengthening Engagement in the CND’s 2024 Midterm Review**”. The event, hosted by His Excellency Ambassador Philbert Johnson of Ghana in his capacity as Chair of the African Group, saw the participation of representatives from the African Union Drug Control Programme Secretariat, among others. During the dialogue, participants voiced the need to establish a unified stance ahead of the midterm review, highlighting collective priorities and common position that reflects the continent’s interests.
3. This Dialogue was preceded by a high-level session on addressing substance use and related mental health disorders among youth, women, and children convened by the African Union Commission in Lusaka, Zambia from 08-10 November 2023 which culminated in the Lusaka Declaration. The Declaration serves as an impetus for national actions to tackle the multi-faceted challenges stemming from the growing availability and use of psychoactive substances trafficked into and locally produced within the continent.
4. The findings from the African Union’s Pan-African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (PAENDU) Trends Analysis Report indicate that nearly 70% of individuals seeking treatment for drug use disorders on the continent between 2016 and 2021 were aged 15 to 34 years. Additionally, during the same period, 1 in 20 individuals treated for SUDs were aged 10 to 14 years. Women accounted for approximately 7% of all entrants to drug treatment in Africa during the index period.
5. The increased burden of substance use, related mental health disorders, and comorbidities among people in vulnerable circumstances threatens the health, socio-economic wellbeing and security of people on the continent and impedes continental transformation espoused in ‘**AU Agenda 2063 - the Africa we want**’.

II. BRIEF REVIEW OF CONTINENTAL PROGRESS TOWARDS ADDRESSING THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM

6. In 2019, the African Union developed a new overarching framework to steer drug policy development on the continent – the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2019-2023) – whose period of implementation has been extended to 2025 to compensate for the time lost due to the COVID 19 Pandemic.

7. This framework, developed and implemented with support from the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), US State Department - was informed, inter alia, by the three international drug control conventions, the Common African Position for the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the world drug problem, and prior declarations and decisions from various conferences of African Ministers in Charge of Health, Population and Drug Control, considering the principle of shared and common responsibility.
8. Through the action plan, the African Union remains committed to advocating for a multi-sectorial, balanced and integrated approach to drug control, cognizant of the global complexities surrounding drug-related issues such as health, socio-economic wellbeing, crime, terrorism and security within Member States.
9. Key achievements include:

A. Drug demand reduction:

- i. The establishment and strengthening of national drug use epidemiology systems in 33 of the 55 African Union Member States.
- ii. Enhanced technical capacity of focal persons from Member States to implement drug demand reduction and epidemiology programmes.
- iii. The rollout of Regional Masters' training in Drug Demand Reduction, supported by funding from INL. Through collaboration with the African Union and support from Regional Economic Communities, notably ECOWAS, a total of 6,215 individuals from 26 African countries were trained by the Colombo Plan Drug Advisory Programme on the Universal Prevention Curriculum, Universal Treatment Curriculum, and Universal Recovery Curriculum. Such training is envisaged to have reached all 55 African countries by 2030.
- iv. Training of competent authorities from Member States in ensuring access and availability of controlled drugs for medical and scientific purposes while preventing diversion.
- v. Integration of Traditional Leaders in drug use prevention, treatment, and care to expand community interventions amid a growing burden of substance use and related mental health disorders on the continent especially among youth, children, and women.
- vi. Ongoing process for the establishment of national youth corps for drug use prevention.
- vii. Convening of the inaugural African Union High-Level Session on addressing substance use and related mental health disorders among youth, women, and children.
- viii. Integration of gender and age-sensitive perspectives in continental and national strategies, and statements.
- ix. Gradual adoption of drug use prevention programmes in schools.
- x. Gradual adoption of the WHO/UNAIDS/UNODC comprehensive package of interventions for harm reduction, within a continuum of care, by Member States.

Needle and Syringe Programmes are now operational in ten African Union Member States while opioid agonist therapy has seen progress in some countries.

- xi. Positive progress towards the adoption and implementation of Alternatives to Incarceration, and the Tokyo, Bangkok, and Nelson Mandela rules

B. Drug supply reduction:

- i. Development of programmes to address the challenge posed by synthetic drugs
- ii. Collaboration with international partners to establish regional organised crime observatories across Africa as well as the African Organized Crime Index to combat Transnational Organized Crime.

C. Other areas:

- i. Enhanced international and regional cooperation through participation in several platforms that include the Global Coalition on Synthetic drugs; the Global Dialogue on Drug Demand Reduction between Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean; International Consortium on Quality in Substance Use Disorders Treatment; Global Women Recovery Network; and inter-agency thematic working groups.
- ii. Establishment of an inclusive and balanced African Civil Society platform and the African Youth forum to contribute to regional dialogue on drugs.

III. PREAMBLE

We, Heads of State and Governments of the African Union and the African Group to the United Nations Office in Vienna, Austria

1. **MINDFUL** that the world drug problem remains a common and shared responsibility that requires effective and increased international cooperation and demands an integrated, multidisciplinary, mutually reinforcing, and balanced approach to drug supply, demand reduction and harm reduction strategies, as well as ensuring the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, while reducing the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances,
2. **RECOGNIZING** the efforts made by Member States and other stakeholders since 2019 to address the world drug problem, mitigate drug-related harm and vulnerabilities, reduce stigma, and overcome the identified challenges outlined in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration,
3. **ACKNOWLEDGING** the significance of the Special Side Event, “***Africa’s New Public Health Order: Rejuvenating the Global Health Security Agenda***” on the margins of the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, in 2022,
4. **RECALLING** the commitments articulated in the Declaration of the “***African Union High-Level Session on Addressing Substance Use and Related Mental Health Disorders Among Youth, Women and Children***” held in Lusaka, Zambia from 06-10 November 2023,

5. **ASLO RECALLING** the African common position on controlled substances and access to pain management drugs, adopted at the 5th Session of the Conference of African Ministers in charge of Drug Control (CAMDC5), in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 08 - 12 October 2012,
6. **REAFFIRMING** the comprehensive and balanced “*African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2019-2025)*”, whose fundamental objective is to improve the health, security and socio-economic wellbeing of the people in Africa by addressing the drug situation on the African Continent,
7. **ALSO REAFFIRMING** the African Union’s “*Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*”, with its overarching goals of poverty eradication and inequality reduction based on the human rights approach and creating opportunities for all,
8. **CONSIDERING** SDG target 3.5 that calls for strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, and the commitments related to people who use drugs in the 2021 Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS; and **RECOGNISING** the importance of harm reduction in realizing the right to health, including but not limited to HIV prevention, and in addressing drug-related health issues in the community and in closed settings,
9. **CONVINCED** that Africa’s current demographic structure, with a highly youthful population, offers significant potential for socio-economic transformation,
10. **CONCERNED** by the increased availability and use of illicit drugs in Africa, especially amongst young people and women, and the projected 40% increase in substance use disorders among African youth by 2030, as highlighted in the *World Drug Report (2023)* and reports from the Pan-African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (2019-2021),
11. **ALSO CONCERNED** about the insufficient access to controlled drugs for the management of moderate to severe pain in Africa, and calls for enhanced efforts to ensure availability, accessibility, and affordability of controlled substances for developing countries particularly, Africa,
12. **COGNISANT** of the inadequate capacity on the continent for evidence-based drug use prevention, treatment, harm reduction, rehabilitation, reintegration and aftercare, including in terms of policies, infrastructure, personnel, funding, and service quality integration,
13. **ACKNOWLEDGING** the importance of balance and proportionality in drug policies at the national level, including the value of addressing drug use as a health issue by providing effective prevention, treatment, harm reduction and rehabilitation support as alternatives to punishment,
14. **WELCOMING** the African Civil Society Common Position on Drugs, and acknowledging the significant contributions made by the private sector, civil society and affected communities to the development, implementation and evaluation of drug policies and interventions,

15. **REAFFIRMING** the fundamental objective of the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2019-2025) to improve the health, security, and socio-economic well-being of the people in Africa by addressing drug trafficking and problematic drug use in all its forms and manifestations, and preventing the onset of drug use, and
16. **DETERMINED** to contribute to the realization of the “Africa We Want” as espoused in the African Union Agenda 2063, Aspiration Number 6 which focuses on achieving an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential offered by African people, especially women and youth, and caring for children.

IV. OUR COMMITMENTS

We hereby, commit to the following:

17. **EXPRESS** our unwavering support to the Chair of the 67th Session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), as the representative of the Africa Group to the United Nations in Vienna, Austria,
18. **SEIZE** the opportunity of the 2024 midterm review of the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, actively engaging at a high-level to ensure that Africa’s voice is heard and fully integrated into the global debate on the world drug problem,
19. **SUSTAIN** our coordination and mutual support mechanisms, including through additional stakeholder dialogues, to foster a unified voice and cohesive action, both during the midterm review and beyond,
20. **STRENGTHEN** collaboration among African Union Member States, the African Civil Society Forum on Drugs, and pertinent stakeholders, to tackle the multifaceted and urgent challenges related to the continent’s drug situation and emerging global drug threats posed by novel psychoactive substances,
21. **IMPLEMENT** comprehensive drug prevention strategies targeting all stages of human development, with particular emphasis on early interventions for families, schools, and communities, and monitor the status of implementation through accountable surveillance systems,
22. **SUPPORT** the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in its endeavours to devise effective strategies to address and counter the world drug problem, advocating for a multilateral approach involving relevant stakeholders, with a focus on addressing Africa’s drug accessibility, availability and affordability challenges in pain-relief medication and palliative care,
23. **SCALE-UP** the documentation and dissemination of best practices, policies and experiences from the national level to facilitate knowledge exchange and understanding, including a broad range of examples from government, civil society and community-led responses,

24. **FOSTER** access to information on all facets of drug demand reduction and harm reduction within a continuum of care as a fundamental human right,
25. **SUPPORT** education and professionalization efforts for the workforce engaged in drug use prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, recovery, and reintegration,
26. **EMPHASISE** that the objective of drug policies should be to improve the health, safety, welfare and socio-economic wellbeing of individuals and societies by adopting comprehensive and balanced measures encompassing demand reduction, harm reduction, access to controlled medicines, supply reduction, crime prevention, human rights, alternative development, and international and regional cooperation, as articulated in the *African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2019-2025)* and the Outcome Document of the 2016 UNGASS on the world drug problem,
27. **EXTEND** technical assistance including capacity-building support and normative guidance, to assist Member States and other relevant African stakeholders in the development of effective, scientific and evidence-based drug policies and responses, as well as the collection of robust and disaggregated data, and
28. **COLLABORATE** towards crafting a concise, action-oriented outcome document for the midterm review, encapsulating key priorities and challenges faced by the continent of Africa, and providing a framework for sustained dialogue and action to address the world drug problem up to 2029 and beyond, while remaining **cognizant** of the 2030 target date for the Sustainable Development Goals.

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