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

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Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

Follow-up to the implementation at the national, regional and international levels of all commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the world drug problem**Chair's summary of the thematic discussions on the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration (12–14 November 2024)****

1. This document contains a Chair's summary of the thematic discussions held during the third intersessional meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) at its sixty-seventh session, held from 12 to 14 November 2024. The thematic discussions were chaired by H.E. Ambassador Philbert Johnson (Ghana), Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its sixty-seventh session. The summary by the Chair is not subject to negotiation.

I. Background

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

* E/CN.7/2025/1.

** This document has not been edited.



progress in implementing all international drug policy commitments, with a mid-term 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 have been 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 had adopted in June 2019 a multi-year workplan to discuss how these challenges could be addressed through effectively implementing the provisions contained in the 2016, 2014 and 2009 documents.

4. In March 2024, the Commission adopted the High-level Declaration on the 2024 midterm review, following up to the Ministerial Declaration of 2019, expressing gratitude to the Chairs who facilitated the thematic discussions from 2019 to 2023, and extending appreciation to all participants for their contributions to the review process. Following the adoption of the 2024 High-level Declaration, and in line with the commitment made in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration to foster broad, transparent and inclusive discussions within the CND, the Commission adopted in May 2024 a [workplan](#) for the CND Thematic Discussions from 2024 to 2028.

5. The 2024 round of CND Thematic Discussions was held from 12 to 14 November at the United Nations in Vienna and online. The Commission addressed three challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, namely:

- 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 the illicit demand for and the domestic diversion of precursor chemicals are on the rise;
- 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.

6. As per the [organizational arrangements](#) adopted by the Commission in June 2024, the agenda for the 2024 CND thematic discussions was as follows:

12 November

Morning session: Expanding Range of Drugs and Diversifying Markets

Afternoon session: Synthetic Opioids and the Non-medical Use of Prescription Drugs

13 November

Morning session: Challenges in Illicit Cultivation and Production of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances

Afternoon session: Illicit Trafficking in Substances and Precursors, and Domestic Diversion of Precursor Chemicals

14 November

Morning session: Legal, Scientific, and Regulatory Challenges in Scheduling Substances

Afternoon session: Other Substantive Matters

7. As contained in the organizational arrangements adopted by the Commission, the agenda item “Other substantive matters” aimed to provide space to highlight and

discuss pressing concerns of Member States. The topics proposed by interested Member States ahead of the Thematic Discussions were:

- Challenges to the identification of new illicit drugs: Discussion on strategies and approaches by laboratories to enhance the capacity of forensic personnel and harnessing technology to improve identification methods;
- Harm reduction measures;
- Drug Policy: social determinants, disproportionate impacts, and barriers to service access;
- Current status of the critical review of Coca Leaf, as per the procedures of WHO;
- The relevance of scientific evidence in the work of UN bodies and agencies in the implementation of the Global Drug Policy;
- Challenges to the integrity of the international drug control system.

8. The 2024 CND Thematic Discussions were held in a hybrid format, with in-person and online participation, and were webcast on UN Web TV to ensure that all interested stakeholders could follow the deliberations. The meeting had close to 600 registrations and brought together experts and policymakers from nearly 150 Member States, UN entities, intergovernmental organizations, international partners, and civil society experts from around the world. The first five sessions started with an introductory presentation by a UNODC expert, followed by a panel discussion with questions and answers moderated by the UNODC expert, and by an open discussion with interventions from the floor moderated by the CND Chair. These sessions included a “[Pledge for Action Spotlight](#)” in which interested Member States reported on progress in implementing the pledges they made during the High-level Segment of the CND in March 2024. The session on “other substantive matters” started with an introduction by UNODC and WHO experts and was followed by an open discussion with interventions from the floor moderated by the CND Chair.

9. In preparation for the 2024 CND Thematic Discussions, the Secretariat prepared a discussion guide¹ in line with the background notes prepared for previous CND thematic discussions and based 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 delivered during the 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/67_Session_2024/thematic-sessions.html)https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/66_Session_2023/thematic-sessions.htmlhttps://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/65_Session_2022/TD_statements.html.

II. Chair’s summary of the deliberations

(a) Opening session

10. The opening segment of the thematic discussions featured remarks by the UNODC Executive Director (delivered by the Director of the Division for Treaty Affairs of UNODC), by the President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (via video message), by the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) (via video message), and by the President of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). They recalled the objective of the international drug control conventions to protect the health and welfare of humankind and acknowledged the many persistent and new challenges facing the evolving drug landscape. In their

¹ www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_67/Thematic_Discussions/Discussion_guide_CND_thematic_discussions_Final.pdf.

statements, they further underlined the importance of data- and evidence-driven policies and of international cooperation in implementing all international drug policy commitments, and in promoting public health, safety, security and human rights.

(b) Session 1 on the topic: “Expanding Range of Drugs and Diversifying Markets”

11. On 12 November in the morning, the Commission discussed the topic of “Expanding range of drugs and diversifying markets”.

12. Following the opening segment, the thematic session was introduced with a presentation by the Chief of the Research and Knowledge Production Section at the Research and Trend Analysis Branch (RAB) of UNODC.

13. During the open discussion, **statements** were made by the European Union, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Venezuela, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Russia, Peru, Thailand, Colombia, France, Japan, United Kingdom, Lithuania, Morocco, Belgium and South Africa². Statements were also made by representatives from UNODC, and observers 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 Lebanon and Nigeria.

14. In her introduction on the topic, the Chief of the Research and Knowledge Production Section of RAB highlighted the **increase in drug use and polydrug use** and provided an overview of the diversification of drug markets, including the **rise in stimulant use** and the emergence of **new psychoactive substances**. She highlighted the complexity of synthetic drug markets and the challenges posed by **new drug combinations and trafficking patterns**. Specifically, she highlighted the expansion of the **ketamine** market in new geographical areas, such as in South-East Asia; of **captagon and methamphetamine** in the Near and Middle East; and a **shift to synthetic drugs** in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

15. Throughout the panel discussion and the open discussion with interventions from the floor, speakers reiterated their **commitment to the implementation of the three international control conventions and the international drug policy commitments**, with references to the important policymaking and convening role of the **Commission on Narcotic Drugs**. A number of speakers stressed the importance of anchoring **drug policy responses in human rights** and people-centred approaches.

16. Many speakers described national, regional and global trends related to drug markets, including the **proliferation of drugs, their increased potency and ease of production**. Some speakers referred to **chemical diversification** – the growing diversity of chemicals used in synthetic drugs production. In addition, it was noted that the most common production model of synthetic drugs – namely the use of small clandestine labs close to destination markets – was increasingly being used for the production of some plant-based drugs, such as cocaine.

17. Key challenges highlighted by speakers related to expanding and diversifying drug markets included the **emergence of nitazenes**, a group of synthetic opioids potentially more potent than fentanyls; interlinkages between the high profits from drug trafficking and **corruption**; the tendency for criminal groups to increasingly **shift to a polycrime model**, engaging not only in drug trafficking but also in other types of crime; and the increased sophistication and **innovation in drug trafficking methods**, including through the use of **advanced technologies** such as AIS spoofing to make maritime vessels invisible, and the use of encrypted technology for drug trafficking and the movement of funds.

18. On the demand side, key challenges highlighted included the **increase in drug use disorders and in drug-related deaths**, including from opioid overdose; the disproportionate impact of drug use and barriers to service access for **populations in situations of vulnerability**, including youth in low-income neighbourhoods; and the connection between drug use disorders and **mental health disorders**. Some speakers

² The statement of South Africa was not delivered during the session.

indicated that the **transmission rates of HIV and other bloodborne diseases** remained high.

19. Many speakers highlighted policy measures needed to address challenges related to drug supply, such as the need for creative, collaborative approaches that **strengthen surveillance, investigative techniques and advanced policing capabilities**. Enhancing the **capacity of forensic laboratories** and personnel was considered key, and many speakers highlighted the importance of setting up or strengthening **early warning systems** for the identification of new substances. The importance of **data and real-time intelligence** was underscored by many speakers, including through new sources of information such as wastewater analysis and online marketing, and through the responsible use of reference databases such as on DNA and facial recognition. Existing international tools mentioned in this regard included the UNODC Early Warning Advisory, the INCB platforms Project Ion Incident Communication System (IONIC), Precursors Incident Communication System (PICS) and Global Rapid Interdiction of Dangerous Substances (GRID), and the INTERPOL Response Against Illicit Drugs (IRAID).

20. Speakers emphasized the centrality of **cross-sector collaboration**, for instance between forensic labs, hospitals, and toxicology labs, and of **international cooperation** for joint counter-trafficking operations and for strategies to address drug-related problems. In this context, several speakers referred to the Global Coalition against Synthetic Drugs.

21. To address demand-related challenges, speakers emphasized the importance of evidence-based drug use **prevention programmes**, especially the prevention of early initiation among children and youth; of ensuring access to comprehensive, evidence-based **treatment and recovery services**; and of connecting **mental health services** with drug use prevention and treatment services.

22. During the **Pledge for Action Spotlight** in this session, updates on the implementation of the pledges made at the High-level Segment of the sixty-seventh CND in March 2024 were provided by Lithuania, Italy, Albania and the United States.

(c) **Session 2 on the topic: “Synthetic opioids and the non-medical use of prescription drugs”**

23. On 12 November in the afternoon, the Commission discussed the topic of “synthetic opioids and the non-medical use of prescription drugs”.

24. An introductory presentation was made by the Programme Management Officer leading the Synthetic Drugs Strategy at the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch of UNODC (DLSSB), on behalf of the Chief of the Branch.

25. During the discussion, **statements** were made by the European Union, Venezuela, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Australia, Thailand, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Peru and Colombia. Statements were also made by representatives from UN entities intergovernmental organizations and UN entities, namely UNODC and INCB, and from non-governmental organizations, nominated through VNGOC in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in Spain and Canada.

26. The Programme Management Officer emphasized the complexity and pervasive **threats to global health and security** posed by synthetic opioids and the non-medical use of prescription drugs. She referred to **fentanyl**, which in North America alone was linked to 70% of all drug-related deaths, and to the emergence of **new, potent opioids such as nitazenes**. While initially mainly concentrated in North America, she noted that the **opioid crisis was expanding to Europe and parts of Asia**. Given the recent 95% decrease in opium poppy cultivation, there was the possibility of traffickers shifting towards synthetic opioids, potentially increasing overdose rates. She noted the increase in **the non-medical use of pharmaceutical drugs** in some parts of the world, including opioids, benzodiazepines, and stimulants. At the same time, she noted with concern that 80% of the world population lived in countries with lack of

adequate **access and availability to controlled medicines** for medical and scientific purposes, highlighting the crucial importance of increasing access and availability while preventing diversion and non-medical use.

27. During the panel discussion and the discussion with interventions from the floor, speakers expressed concern about the **public health crisis** experienced in several countries in relation to synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl and tramadol; about the rise in the emergence of **nitazenes**; and about the increase in the non-medical use of **ketamine** and other substances. In addition, several speakers highlighted the growing challenge of **falsified medicines**, including opioids, often of substandard quality, which caused harms to patients and failed to treat the diseases for which they were intended, which could result in a loss of trust in the medications themselves. Some countries reported on national experiences with **early warning systems** to gather and disseminate information on emerging drug trends and develop timely and appropriate responses.

28. Speakers noted the availability of **effective treatment options for opioid use disorders and the prevention of opioid overdoses**, including the use of Naloxone, with new treatment options currently being evaluated. New WHO guidelines on drug treatment and opioid overdose prevention were expected in 2026.

29. Several speakers referred to the importance of ensuring **safe, rational medical prescription and monitoring practices** and described existing prescription measures at the national level. In this context, it was noted that electronic prescribing systems and data sharing among relevant agencies could serve as supporting elements.

30. Some speakers referred to the importance of learning from the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic in working together for a common goal, in this case effectively addressing a public health crisis. Measures that were recommended to address the synthetic opioids crisis and the non-medical use of synthetic drugs included the creation/strengthening of **global networks** of scientists, lab and forensic experts, and data experts; building the **capacity of forensic labs** and personnel while leveraging the use of AI tools for data analysis and trend prediction; **improving access to reference standards and files**; promoting **data automatization and centralization processes** to ensure a rapid exchange of information, ensuring user-friendly data displays; supporting **inventories of adopted legislation** to support policymakers in building comprehensive responses; and investing in large-scale, evidence-based **prevention programmes**.

31. Programmes, tools and initiatives mentioned during the session included the UNODC ICE (international collaborative Exercises), the UNODC toolkit on Synthetic Drugs, the UNODC SOS (Stop Overdose Safely) programme, the UNODC Early Warning Advisory, the WHO global surveillance and monitoring system for substandard products and falsified medicines, and the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drugs Threats.

32. During the **Pledge for Action Spotlight** in this session, updates on the implementation of the pledges made at the High-level Segment of the sixty-seventh CND in March 2024 were provided by Zimbabwe and Canada.

(d) **Session 3 on the topic: “Challenges in the illicit cultivation and production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances”**

33. On 13 November in the morning, the Commission discussed the topic of “Challenges in the illicit cultivation and production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances”.

34. An introductory presentation was delivered by the Chief of the Research and Knowledge Production Section, RAB, UNODC.

35. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by the European Union, Peru, Colombia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Netherlands, Indonesia, Japan, Canada, Republic of Korea, Australia, Venezuela, China, Afghanistan and

Morocco. Statements were also made by representatives from UNODC, and from non-governmental organizations, nominated through VNGOC in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in Colombia and Peru.

36. In the introductory presentation, the Chief of the Research and Knowledge Production Section provided an overview of global drug cultivation, production and trafficking trends. She highlighted the increase in the global supply of **cocaine, with record high cultivation and manufacture** levels in 2022; the drastic **contraction of the Afghan opiate market**; and **trends in global drug seizures, dominated by cannabis** and with quantities of amphetamine-type stimulants seized currently at historically high levels. While there had been a decrease in heroin seizures, especially in transit countries, it was not yet clear whether there was a low availability of heroin in destination countries, most likely due to built-up stocks in Afghanistan in previous years. Further, she provided an overview of **direct and indirect impacts of the drug economy on the environment**. Direct impacts included bad cultivation practices resulting in desertification, soil acidification, erosion, water and soil pollution, and bio accumulation in the food chain, as well as water, soil and air pollution resulting from the unsafe disposal of synthetic drugs; and indirect impacts included the investment of drug profits into activities that harm the environment, such as illegal mining and wildlife trafficking.

37. During the panel discussion and the open debate, many speakers presented national trends regarding the cultivation, production and seizure of different drugs, as well as policies being implemented to address related challenges. The policies included demand-reduction measures such as drug use prevention programmes, treatment, care and rehabilitation services; and supply-reduction measures focusing on dismantling organized criminal networks and reducing the illicit cultivation and manufacture of drugs. A few speakers referred to national policies on the medicinal, ancestral and industrial uses of coca leaf and cannabis in line with their domestic regulatory systems.

38. Many speakers expressed concern about the **proliferation of clandestine laboratories** and about the **environmental risks** associated with drug cultivation and production, including risks related to bad cultivation practices, to chemical eradication of illicit crops, and to unsafe storage and disposal practices.

39. A key message emphasized during the session was the importance of addressing the root causes of illicit cultivation and of offering alternative livelihood opportunities for farmers through **sustainable alternative development programmes**. Some speakers referred to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development in this regard. Speakers stressed the need for a shift in alternative development programmes from a product approach to a **holistic, people-centred approach**, engaging all relevant stakeholders and communities at the local level; guided by human rights and environmental sustainability; and supporting market-driven approaches, generating **value chains and industry**. The importance of **leveraging funding**, including through the private sector and the social use of confiscated assets, were also noted in this regard.

40. Speakers stressed the importance of **intelligence sharing, enhancing the capacity and equipment** of relevant national authorities, and of **digital forensics** in detecting and countering illicit cultivation and production of drugs. Regarding digital forensics, some speakers referred to the use of software to create forensic images with original data, to monitoring web sources and devices (wireless cameras, routers, etc.) to identify network traffic and illegal transactions; to the use of cryptocurrency and financial tracking as well as to the use of blockchain analysis tools to trace money laundering.

41. During the **Pledge for Action Spotlight** in this session, updates on the implementation of the pledges made at the High-level Segment of the sixty-seventh CND in March 2024 were provided by the United Kingdom and South Africa.

(e) **Session 4 on the topic: “Illicit trafficking in substances and precursors, and domestic diversion of precursor chemicals”**

42. On 14 November in the afternoon, the Commission discussed the topic “Illicit trafficking in substances, and domestic diversion of precursor chemicals”.

43. An introductory presentation was delivered by a Programme Management Officer at the Border Management Branch of UNODC.

44. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by France, Canada, Colombia, Brazil, Thailand, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, Peru, the United States of America, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the European Union, South Africa, Ecuador, China, and Lithuania. Statements were also made by observers from intergovernmental organizations and UN entities (INTERPOL and UNODC), and from non-governmental organizations, nominated through VNGOC in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in Malaysia and the United States of America.

45. In his introductory presentation, the Programme Management Officer noted that the illicit manufacture of substances relied on the **production of precursor chemicals, diverted by criminal groups**. He further noted the global nature of trafficking in precursor chemicals and drugs, and the **poly-crime model** employed by many organized groups, often involved in the trafficking of drugs as well as of other commodities, such as arms. The high profits obtained by criminal groups from drug trafficking often surpassed the capabilities of some States. Key measures highlighted in preventing and countering drug trafficking were data sharing to track changes in trafficking routes and investing in the enhancement of investigation techniques.

46. During the panel discussion and the open debate, speakers expressed concern about the **extent of, and sophistication in the methods used for drug and precursor trafficking**. It was noted that, in many cases, illicit drug manufacture resembled industrial enterprises with advanced equipment and efficient chemical use. This complexity, coupled with the globalization of clandestine labs, posed significant challenges for international law enforcement. Another key challenge mentioned by speakers was the **use of non-scheduled and designer precursors to evade existing controls**, challenging regulatory efforts and effective monitoring. Speakers noted the **shift from international to domestic diversion of precursors**, complicating enforcement efforts given the non-mandatory nature of domestic trade controls – a gap exploited by traffickers and applicable to common markets such as the one in the European Union. In addition, it was noted that some industries produced precursors without being aware of their illicit uses, pointing at the need to **work closely with the private sector**. Some speakers referred to tools like the PEN online system for the exchange of information between competent national authorities on planned exports of precursor chemicals that are under international control.

47. In the context of increased seizures of drugs and precursor chemicals, it was noted that many countries faced **challenges with their temporary storage and final disposal** due to a lack of infrastructure, financial constraints, and logistical issues. Reference was made in this regard to the UNODC illustrated guide for the disposal of chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs, and to the Solutions, Training and Advice for Narcotic Disposal (STAND) programme.

48. Speakers shared national trends and policies to prevent and counter the trafficking of drugs and precursors, including in prison settings, through legislative measures, such as novel ways of scheduling substances, and cross-border cooperation measures. Some speakers noted the importance of basing cooperation against transnational organized crime on the principles of shared responsibility and respect for national sovereignty.

49. Key measures proposed to address challenges related to illicit trafficking in drugs and precursors included: the **standardization of regulations and traceability platforms**; the **protection of confidential data** to prevent misuse of information that could compromise ongoing investigations and the integrity of entities involved;

securing the **equipment** needed for seizures; the **use of digital tools to centralize and systematize information** on regulated chemical precursors to facilitate tracking and reducing response times to potential threats; as well as the use of **technology and AI for law enforcement to predict the chemical make-up of new precursors** and keep the pace with criminal networks. In addition, many speakers referred to the importance of **collaborating with the industry sector**; of ensuring **multisectoral cooperation** to strengthen joint efforts such as among experts in pharmacology, toxicology and customs; and of strengthening **data sharing and international and cross-border cooperation**.

50. To prevent and mitigate the impact of drug use, especially on young people, some speakers highlighted the need to promote **community-based interventions and prevention strategies**, including through the use of social media and alert systems to protect young adults. For incarcerated persons with drug use disorders, some speakers noted the importance of providing voluntary **treatment and rehabilitation services** while in prison, as well as of ensuring education and employability opportunities and family and community support upon release to lower the chances of relapse.

51. During the **Pledge for Action Spotlight** in this session, updates on the implementation of the pledges made at the High-level Segment of the sixty-seventh CND in March 2024 were provided by Armenia, Australia, Türkiye, China and Ecuador.

(f) **Session 5 on the topic “Legal, scientific and regulatory challenges in scheduling substances”**

52. On 14 November in the morning, the Commission discussed the topic “Legal, scientific and regulatory challenges in scheduling substances”.

53. Introductory remarks were delivered by the Secretary of the CND and by the Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Section of UNODC.

54. During the discussion that followed, **statements** were made by Islamic Republic of Iran, Thailand, the United Kingdom, Japan, the European Union, Czechia, Australia, Singapore, Canada, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Brazil and France. Statements were also made by a representative of UNODC and from non-governmental organizations, nominated through VNGOC in cooperation with the UNODC Civil Society Unit, including organizations based in Jordan and Kenya.

55. The Secretary of the CND highlighted the **dual goal of the three international drug conventions**³, namely ensuring **access to essential narcotic and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their misuse and diversion** into illicit channels. She provided an overview of the **scheduling process** (the process of placing substances under international control), including the distinct roles of the WHO, the INCB and the CND, and referred to an e-learning tool and brochure prepared by the Secretariat to support Member States in familiarizing themselves with the scheduling process⁴. The Chief of the Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Section highlighted the need for the **scheduling system to be built on scientific evidence and to be implementable**. He highlighted the need to have the more prevalent, persistent and harmful substances under international control, and stressed that no progress would be made without the effective implementation of scheduling decisions. Further, he noted the need for the international community to scale up access of, and availability to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

³ The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1954 as amended by the 1972 Protocol; the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971; and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.

⁴ E-learning tool on scheduling:

www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/Mandate_Functions/scheduling-elearning-tutorial.html; Brochure on scheduling: www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/Scheduling_Resource_Material/19-11955_Drug_Conventions_eBook.pdf.

56. During the panel discussion and the open debate, many speakers reaffirmed the international drug conventions as constituting the cornerstone of the international drug control system, and the CND's leading role in international drug policy.

57. A key message emphasized by speakers was the **importance of proactively sharing real-time information** on evidence of non-medical use, seizures, intoxication, and route of administration of substances, including with the support of AI tools, to enable informed scheduling decisions grounded in scientific evidence. It was noted that, while there had been progress in forensic technologies and in analytical chemistry, forensic equipment was costly, and many countries faced a gap in access.

58. **Challenges mentioned with regards to the international scheduling process** included the lack of available data on drug use and harms of some substances; the diversity and fast emergence of new substances compared with the length of time it took for a substance to be effectively controlled; limited national capacity to enforce balanced control measures – often leading to diversion or de facto bans of controlled substances; and the divergent approaches taken to domestic scheduling, which made international cooperation difficult. Regarding the scheduling of precursors under the 1988 Convention, key challenges were the fact that many precursors had licit uses, and the increase in the use of designer precursors, “chemical relatives” made with the sole purpose of evading controls.

59. A few speakers expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the international scheduling system in addressing current drug-related challenges, partly due to the emergence of new trends and new psychoactive substances since the time when the Conventions were adopted, and to the fast-evolving drug markets. On the other hand, several speakers affirmed that the international drug conventions remained relevant and effective today, having placed many harmful substances under international control, and that, to **overcome existing challenges in the scheduling system, it was important to make better use of the flexibility contained within the conventions and of the CND's authority in the scheduling decision-making process**. In this context, some speakers mentioned the provisions contained in the 1961 and 1971 conventions for applying provisional controls to substances before a formal decision by the CND was made, which allowed for quick responses to emerging challenges. Speakers also referred to the option for countries to be proactive and enact national control measures, as they could often be applied more quickly than international measures.

60. Several speakers shared national **scheduling measures and innovations**, including group listing of chemically similar substances, and the listing of substances with no known legitimate uses. In the international context, some speakers referred to **CND resolution 65/3**, which invited the INCB to provide “relevant information, if any, about derivatives and related chemicals which may readily be converted to or used in place of that substance during illicit manufacture, as well as recommendations of monitoring measures for these chemicals”. For the first time in 2024, the CND decided, based on a recommendation by the INCB, to schedule 12 esters of two parent substances that were closely related to them and may readily be converted or used in place of other substances for illicit drug manufacture, despite the fact that no seizures had yet been made.

61. The creation of a **centralized mechanism** was recommended for countries to **share information on their domestic lists of controlled substances and of control measures** applicable to these substances in order to facilitate international cooperation by ensuring that the relevant authorities were aware of the regulations in other countries for the purpose of export and import controls, and for transnational investigations.

62. In discussing the importance of **balancing control measures and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes**, speakers referred to useful tools/measures in that regard such as adapting national regulatory frameworks

to prioritize access to specific substances, the WHO List of Essential Medicines, and improving prescription practices.

63. During the **Pledge for Action Spotlight** in this session, updates on the implementation of the pledges made at the High-level Segment of the sixty-seventh CND in March 2024 were provided by Brazil and Algeria.

(g) Session 6 on “other substantive matters”

64. On 14 November in the afternoon, the Commission discussed topics proposed by Member States under the agenda item “other substantive matters”. The topics were:

(a) Challenges to the identification of the new illicit drugs: discussion on strategies and approaches by laboratories to enhance the capacity of forensic personnel and harnessing technology to improve identification methods;

(b) Harm reduction measures;

(c) Drug policy: social determinants, disproportionate impacts, and barriers to service access;

(d) Current status of the critical review of Coca Leaf, as per the procedures of WHO;

(e) The relevant of scientific evidence in the work of UN bodies and agencies in the implementation of the Global Drug Policy; and

(f) Challenges to the integrity of the international drug control system.

65. Introductory presentations were delivered by the Chief of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch of UNODC on topics a-e, and by the Director of the Department of Health Product Policy and Standards at WHO on topic f.

66. On the topic “**Challenges to the identification of the new illicit drugs: discussion on strategies and approaches by laboratories to enhance the capacity forensic personnel and harnessing technology to improve identification methods**”, a brief introduction was made by the delegation of Singapore which had proposed the topic. Statements were made by China, Thailand, Switzerland, Egypt and Colombia.

67. During the discussion, speakers stressed the importance of enhancing drug forensic capacity, including enhancing the knowledge of lab personnel and equipment; the need for communication systems that allow setting up early warning systems, early risk mitigation, and smooth data exchange among law enforcement and other actors; and of international cooperation. While the promising nature of machine learning and chemical analysis was mentioned, it was noted that implementation was challenging in resource-limited settings. A few speakers referred to harm reduction measures and the national provision of drug checking services, thereby underlining its value in monitoring drug markets, raising awareness among the general population and at times reducing drug use.

68. On the topic of “**Harm reduction measures**”, a brief introduction was made by the delegation of the European Union which had proposed the topic. Statements were made by the United States of America (on behalf of 35 countries including USA⁵), the Netherlands, Italy, China, Australia, Norway, Ghana, Venezuela, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Greece, Colombia, Mexico and Ukraine.

69. During the discussion, many speakers referred to the importance of promoting a balanced and integrated approach to drug policy, ensuring a continuum of care from drug use prevention to recovery and reintegration in society. Mentions were made to the politization of the term “harm reduction”. Some speakers reaffirmed their

⁵ Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay.

commitment to harm reduction policies, presenting evidence on their impact in saving lives, preventing the spread of infectious diseases, and stressing that they promoted a philosophy of hope and compassion anchored in public health and human rights. National harm reduction measures shared included needle and syringe programmes, the use of naloxone for overdose prevention and management, drug consumption rooms and drug checking services. Other speakers cautioned against the promotion of a term for which there was no internationally agreed definition and hence no clarity on all the types of interventions it encompassed; stressed that prevention, treatment and rehabilitation should remain the focus of their work; and the need to avoid unintended meanings, such as the use of harm reduction to promote legalization of drug use for non-medical or scientific purposes. They expressed concern about the implementation of some measures considered to fall under the umbrella of harm reduction, including consumption rooms, called for scientific evidence on the impacts of harm reduction measures, and for national drug policy measures to adhere to the international drug conventions.

70. On the topic of **“Drug policy: social determinants, disproportionate impacts, and barriers to service access”**, a brief introduction was made by the delegation of Australia which had proposed the topic. Statements were made by Thailand, the United States of America and Colombia.

71. During the discussion, speakers noted the differential impacts of drug use and access to services according to different conditions, such as socio-economic status, digital access, adverse childhood experiences, age, race and ethnicity. The difference between drug initiation and drug use disorders was noted, with high-income persons more likely to initiate drug use, and low-income persons more likely to develop a drug use disorder. Speakers highlighted the importance of designing and implementing comprehensive support measures including related to housing and transportation, health coverage expansion, educational and employment opportunities, resilience for children, and accessible and stigma-free screening, treatment and rehabilitation services.

72. On the topic **“Current status of the critical review of Coca Leaf, as per the procedures of WHO”**, a brief introduction was made by Bolivia which had proposed the topic. Statements were made by Mexico, Peru and Colombia.

73. During the discussion, the representative of WHO provided an update on the status of the critical review of the Coca Leaf requested by Bolivia in June 2023, noting the steps to be followed in the scientific review and public consultation processes, with a recommendation by WHO expected at the end of 2025. A speaker highlighted the importance of the coca leaf for its national identity and culture, referring to traditional and medicinal practices including by indigenous peoples, and considered the scheduling of coca leaf to be a historical error, lacking in scientific evidence, that should be reversed. Another speaker expressed concern that the removal of the coca leaf from the schedule of the 1961 Convention would be an incentive for the further diversion of the coca leaf for cocaine production and trafficking, noting that around 10% of coca leaf had legal, traditional or industrial uses, with around 90% being diverted. The speaker referred to the impacts of coca leaf cultivation on crimes that affect the environment, on illicit financial flows, on vulnerable communities, and noted the importance of taking into account, during the critical review, the ease of convertibility of coca leaf into controlled substances, their abuse potential, non-medical use, and dependence. Two delegations asked questions on the scheduling process to the representative of WHO which were responded to after the meeting.

74. On the topic **“The relevant of scientific evidence in the work of UN bodies and agencies in the implementation of the Global Drug Policy”**, a brief introduction was made by Colombia which had proposed the topic, followed by a statement by the United States of America.

75. During the discussion, a speaker underscored the importance of grounding drug policy in scientific evidence and real-time data, guided by collaboration within the UN system and with civil society stakeholders. The speaker expressed the view that

some of the current drug policy measures at times led to greater harm than drugs themselves. Another speaker highlighted the importance of science and evidence, indicated that data was only as good as what Member States provided, and thanked UNODC for its work on drug research and technical assistance to countries on drug use prevention and treatment and on supply reduction measures.

76. On the topic “**Challenges to the integrity of the international drug control system**”, a brief introduction was made by the Russian Federation which had proposed the topic. Statements were made by Venezuela, the United States of America, Türkiye, the Islamic Republic of Iran, China, Belarus, Algeria, Cuba, Pakistan, Singapore.

77. During the discussion, many speakers reiterated their commitment to the implementation of the international drug conventions and highlighted the core role of UNODC, WHO, and INCB in the international drug control system. A number of speakers expressed concern about the increasing trend to legalize cannabis use for non-medical or scientific purposes, pointing at the misperception of a low risk to health despite evidence of the increased potency of and harms related to cannabis. Some speakers referred to the importance of international cooperation and of joint efforts and innovation in addressing new drug-related challenges. Some speakers highlighted the importance of utilizing the flexibility existing within the drug control conventions to develop policy responses tailored to national needs, and other speakers underscored the need to ensure uninterrupted access to and availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

78. Statements on the agenda item “other substantive matters” were also made by representatives of UN entities (UNODC, UNAIDS), and by representatives of civil society organizations and other entities.
