Distinguished Chair, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first thank the Secretariat for organizing this intersessional meeting and for providing the Thematic discussions guide 2023.

The Netherlands aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union. I also want to express my delegation’s full support for the statement made on Monday by the distinguished ambassador of Switzerland. Let me make a few additional remarks.

Mr. Chair,

The Netherlands welcomes the focus of this afternoon’s thematic discussion on drugs policy and human rights. The significance of this topic is reflected in the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, on ‘Human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem’, that was published August 15th of this year. We welcome this report, which is of key importance for this Commission’s work in Vienna.

The report identifies the lack of, and unequal access to treatment and harm reduction services as a major area of concern. In the Netherlands, addiction treatment and harm reduction have been an important part of drug policy for decades. We believe that everyone should be able to receive help, support and treatment to promote their health and well-being. Over the years, various measures were introduced to that end: from offering reliable information to providing clean needles, methadone or heroin by prescription. Nowadays, the principle of harm reduction is accepted in many more places around the world. Its prominent place in the report brings about a sense of optimism for the future, as far as we are concerned. It is our hope that more and more countries will be able to provide these services to those in need, contributing to equal access to treatment and harm reduction for all. Let me emphasize that such treatment should be voluntary, evidence-based and in compliance with human rights obligations. As the UNODC 2023 World Drug Report¹ indicates, this unfortunately is not always the case.

¹ UNODC 2023 World drug report - Special points of interest, p.8.
Effective drug policy calls for a balanced approach, focusing on protecting public health on the one hand but also combatting organized crime and ensuring safety on the other. In this context, we voice our concern about repressive drug control measures that violate human rights obligations: among which arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, extrajudicial killings and the death penalty. In this context, let me reemphasize the quote from INCB’s 2021 annual report: “States’ actions that violate human rights in the name of drug control policy are inconsistent with the international drug control conventions”. The Netherlands forcefully opposes the death penalty under all circumstances as a matter of principle.

We continue to call on all Member States and UNODC to implement and support drug policy instruments that offer human rights protection. Prominent examples are the 2019 International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policies and the 2018 UN Common Position on Drug Policy. As the EU mentioned, the 2016 UNGASS Outcome document deserves our full attention and support, including in the run-up to and during the 2024 Midterm Review.

In accordance with CND Resolution 63/2 of 2020 on improving data collection and strengthening evidence-based responses, we renew our call upon Member States to cooperate with one another and share information, with the aim of increasing our capacity and collective knowledge regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of our policies.

Lastly, we recognize the need for the active participation and involvement of civil society organizations and other stakeholders throughout the midterm review process, as well as in the implementation of the multi-year workplan that should follow.

Let me conclude by commending you, Mr. Chair for your excellent guidance and leadership of the Commission’s work.

Thank you Mr. Chair.