UNODC Executive Director, Ms. Ghada Waly, said the above in her statement at the opening of the CND Thematic Discussion on 23 October, delivered on her behalf by Jean-Luc Lemahieu, Director of the Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs, UNODC.

The December thematic discussions continued the work started in the October session, of the comprehensive stock-taking of progress made by the international community across all 11 challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, in the lead up to the 2024 midterm review.

The Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, also reiterated the Organization’s commitment to addressing the complex challenge of “minimizing the harms of illicit drug use, providing high quality prevention treatment and harm reduction services for drug users, and ensuring safe and timely access to controlled medicines for those in need”.

H.E. Mr. Miguel Camilo Ruiz Blanco, Chair of the CND at its 66th session, presided over the meeting.
HYBRID PARTICIPATION

With over 600 registrations not including webcast observers, the meeting brought about experts and policymakers from over 160 Member States, UN entities, intergovernmental organizations, international partners, and civil society experts from around the world.

FORMAT

In 2023, the thematic discussions are conducted over two intersessional meetings in October and December, with half a day devoted to the discussion of one specific challenge. The current report covers the proceedings of the December session. For each challenge, introductory remarks were followed by an open discussion, which will be summarized in a Chair’s summary, which will be presented in a conference room paper to the 67th CND regular session in March 2024.

23 October
- Morning: Expanding & diversifying range of drugs & drug markets
- Afternoon: Record levels of drug abuse & illicit cultivation, production & trafficking

24 October
- Morning: Increasing links between drug trafficking, corruption & other forms of organized crime
- Afternoon: Low value of confiscated proceeds of crime related to money laundering arising from drug trafficking

25 October
- Morning: Criminal misuse of information & communications technologies for drug trafficking
- Afternoon: Non-compliance of responses with international drug control conventions & human rights obligations

4 December
- Morning: Increase in drug-related deaths - unmet need for drug treatment & health services
- Afternoon: High transmission rate of HIV, HCV & other blood-borne diseases associated with drug use

5 December
- Morning: Adverse health consequences associated with new psychoactive substances
- Afternoon: Health & regulatory challenges posed by synthetic opioids & non-medical use of prescription drugs

6 December
- Morning: Low availability of internationally controlled substances for medical & scientific purposes
- Afternoon: Way forward

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Building on the past CND thematic discussions, a consolidated discussion guide covering all 11 challenges identified in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration was prepared by the Secretariat to facilitate dialogue and an active exchange of best practices.
INTERNATIONAL DRUG POLICY COMMITMENTS

At its 62nd 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 Ministerial Declaration of 2019, Member States committed to support the CND in continuing transparent and inclusive discussions involving all relevant stakeholders on effective strategies to address and counter the world drug problem, including through the sharing of information, best practices and lessons learned.

Member States further resolved to review in the CND in 2029 the progress made in the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, with a midterm review in 2024. The Commission decided, in its resolution 66/1, that the midterm review will consist of a 2-day high-level segment in addition to the 5-day regular session of the CND. The 2-day high-level segment will include a general debate and two multi-stakeholder roundtables on the topics of “Taking stock: work undertaken since 2019” and “The way forward: the road to 2029”.

The opening segment of the intersessional meeting featured remarks by the 66th CND Chair, H.E. Mr. Miguel Camilo Ruiz Blanco, UNODC Executive Director, Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly (delivered on her behalf by the Director of the Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs), the Director-General of WHO, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, and the President of INCB, Prof. Jallal Toufiq (delivered on his behalf by an INCB member). They emphasized that much more needs to be done to promote the health and well-being of people.
Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of meeting needs and deaths related to drug use have increased.

Kamran Niaz, Epidemiologist, Drug Research Section, UNODC, spoke about the problematic use of drugs, drug-related deaths, and services to address the problem. In particular, he highlighted that women remain under-represented in treatment, and expressed the concern that nearly a third to half of people in treatment in 2021, depending on the region, were below 25 years old. He further shared that while prevention policies were commonplace, evidence-based interventions and accreditation standards were often missing.

Justice Tettey, Chief, UNODC Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch, emphasized the need to invest in long-term and comprehensive promotion of health and well-being for all, by investing in evidence-based drug-use prevention, drug treatment, rehabilitation, care, and health services.

Speakers acknowledged that access to treatment remained insufficient. Speakers reiterated the importance of drug use prevention, especially in educational settings; the effectiveness of harm reduction measures; as well as the need to involve the community and civil society. Member States also highlighted the importance of supply control and demand reduction.
Kamran Niaz, Epidemiologist, Drug Research Section, UNODC, provided an overview of the prevalence of people who inject drugs, of HIV and hepatitis C associated with drug use, as well as related support services. He also highlighted that prisons remain a high-risk environment for the transmission of infectious diseases.

Justice Tettey, Chief, UNODC Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch, underscored that community-led, integrated and tailored services to prevent and treat HIV, Hepatitis C and other blood-borne diseases were crucial. He also shared information on effective measures that can be implemented to prevent the spread of HIV, Hepatitis C and bloodborne diseases, including harm reduction services, such as needle and syringe exchange programmes, opioid agonist therapy, or the distribution of opioid antagonists, such as naloxone.

Speakers shared national experiences and strategies with regard to prevention and treatment of HIV, Hepatitis C and other blood-borne diseases among people who use drugs. Speakers also highlighted the need to decrease stigma amongst people who use drugs and people with drug use disorders, and the importance of ensuring non-discriminatory access to health and social services.
Chloé Carpentier, Chief of Drug Research Section, UNODC, provided participants with the trends in new psychoactive substances (NPS), including trends in number of NPS in the market, quantities seized, the use of NPS compared to controlled drugs, and its use in internet users and young people. She also elaborated on the harms to health posed by NPS.

Adding on to Ms Carpentier’s presentation, Justice Tettey, Chief, UNODC Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch, further elaborated on related harms posed by NPS, such as the sedative effects of NPS on drivers. He further underlined the difficulty of treating overdoses because many individuals often do not know the composition of the consumed substances. He highlighted the crucial role of early warning systems, evidence-based drug use prevention programmes, and treatment, rehabilitation and care continuums.

Speakers shared experiences in monitoring and addressing the use of NPS within their territories, and highlighted the increase in NPS on the illicit market. Speakers also expressed concerns about the adverse health consequences and risks associated with the use of NPS, and underscored the importance of effective prevention, education, access to treatment, and a strengthened early warning system as part of a comprehensive public health response to address the threat of NPS.
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.

Chloé Carpentier, Chief of Drug Research Section, UNODC, provided an overview of the trends in synthetic opioids as reported in the 2023 World Drug Report, including the record high in seizures of pharmaceutical opioids in 2021, and an overview of the non-medical use of opioids in different regions. She also spoke about the fentanyl crisis in North America and tramadol crisis in North, West, Central Africa; Near and Middle East; and South West Asia. She concluded with the current challenges posed by synthetic opioids.

Justice Tettey, Chief, UNODC Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch, emphasized the need to develop strong, comprehensive and integrated national drug prevention treatment and care responses, and include evidence-based tools to prevent and manage opioid overdoses. He also highlighted the importance of understanding that different synthetic drugs were used by different population groups, and the need to tailor interventions to different target groups to amplify their effectiveness.

Speakers expressed concerns about, and echoed challenges in addressing the synthetic drug crisis in their countries. They shared strategies on countering the crisis, including stricter controls of opioid medicines, public awareness and education campaigns, and the use of naloxone. Speakers also underscored the importance of early warning systems, intelligence sharing and cooperation amongst stakeholders.
THEMATIC FOCUS: 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.

Kamran Niaz, Epidemiologist, Drug Research Section, UNODC, shared an overview of the availability and access to controlled substances, in particular the inequalities across countries. He provided information about the main barriers, as well as other factors influencing access to and availability of controlled medicines for pain management.

Justice Tettey, Chief, UNODC Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch echoed the importance of ensuring access to narcotic drugs and psychoactive substances for medical and scientific purposes. He reiterated the need to make opioids available for alleviating pain, while preventing diversion into illicit channels, with a view to avoiding the unintended consequences of using such medications, was protected.

Speakers recalled the importance of ensuring availability of and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including as the purpose of the international drug treaties, and shared national experiences and measures put in place in this regard. A number of speakers highlighted the importance of continuous efforts to raise awareness and promote rational use of prescription drugs, and the need for an effective import/export authorization system in place. In addition, the need for regulation of production and functioning national distribution channels was also emphasized. The need for pain medication in humanitarian settings was also underscored.
H.E. Mr. Miguel Camilo Ruiz Blanco, Chair of the CND at its 66th session, briefed participants on the upcoming 2024 Midterm Review.

Briefing on High-Level Segment

H.E. Mr. Philbert Johnson, at the time 1st Vice-Chair of the CND and Chair-Nominate of the 67th session, then introduced his Pledge-4-Action Chair’s initiative which will take place during the General Debate of the high-level segment of the 2024 Midterm Review. The initiative provides Member States with an opportunity to concretely express their commitment in addressing the world drug problem.

On the way forward, participants shared their views on what the outcome document of the 2024 Midterm Review should reflect.
The 2024 Midterm review will serve to assess progress made in the implementation of all international drug policy commitments as set forth in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration.

The high-level segment of the 2024 Midterm Review will be held from 14 to 15 March 2024, ahead of the regular session of the CND at its 67th session which will be held from 18 to 22 March 2024.

An end-of-cycle review of the implementation of all international drug policy commitments is planned for 2029.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and experts,

We would like to express our appreciation for your participation in the second intersessional meeting of the 66th CND held from 4 to 6 December 2023, as well as the reconvened session from 7 to 8 December 2023.

We look forward to welcoming you again at the 67th session of the CND next year, from 14 to 15 March 2024 for the high-level segment and from 18 to 22 March 2024 for the regular session of the 67th CND.

With many thanks and kind regards from Vienna,

Jo Dedeyne-Amann, Secretary of the Commission