



**European Union Statement**  
**on the occasion of the 3rd Intersessional Meeting**  
**of the 63rd Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs,**  
**Vienna, 19-21 October 2020**

**Thematic session 3: *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***

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. The following countries align themselves with this statement: the Republic of North Macedonia\*, Montenegro\*, Serbia\*, Albania\*, Bosnia and Herzegovina\*, Ukraine, Iceland+, Norway+, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. The European Union and its Member States wish to thank you for organising this intersessional meeting. This discussion should help us accelerate the implementation of our joint commitments, as stated in the 2016 UNGASS Outcome Document, in line with the 2019 Ministerial Declaration.

2. In particular, in the Outcome Document, the international community stressed again that the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and suffering, remains low to non-existent in some countries of the world. The international community highlighted the need to enhance national efforts and international cooperation at all levels to address the low availability of such substances by promoting measures to ensure their availability, accessibility and affordability for medical and scientific purposes. In this context, it should also be mentioned that controlled substances such as opioids are the mainstay for the symptomatic treatment of breathlessness, which is particularly important in the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.

\* Candidate Countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania as well as potential Candidate Country Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland and Norway are members of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. At the beginning of the preamble to the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the community of states clearly stated the need to ensure access to internationally controlled substances for medical care and scientific research, with the patient at the center of our efforts.

4. We need to recognize that some internationally controlled substances are indispensable in relieving pain and suffering, and we are convinced that in this field we can do better.

5. The European Union and its Member States are very grateful that the INCB and the WHO have repeatedly placed the appropriate use of internationally controlled substances at the center of discussions. In almost 60 years since the adoption of the Single Convention, these efforts have led to an increase in the use of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes.

6. The international efforts of recent years are showing results in several regions. This is highlighted in the annual report of the INCB. And yet, in many parts of the world, internationally controlled substances for medical purposes are still not available, accessible or affordable, for various reasons, as we have all recognized in the 2016 UNGASS Outcome Document. This is particularly regrettable as the improved knowledge and opportunities for the treatment of chronic diseases and cancer have increased the need for controlled substances in pain management and palliative care.

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. The high number of drug-related deaths resulting from inappropriate medical therapies with opioids in some parts of the world is tragic and severe. Therefore, it is important that the medical use of opioids is in the hands of appropriately trained physicians and medical personnel, and is based on an appropriate risk-benefit analysis in each individual case of treatment. This stimulates the European Union and its Member States to constantly review the regulations and guidelines on access to opioids for therapeutic purposes in order to prevent abuse and to avoid diversion for illicit purposes.

8. It is all the more important to maintain an appropriate balance between the prevention of suffering through adequate care and the prevention of abuse – this being one of the overall objectives of the international drug control systems. In setting these two goals, people's health

is the focus of our efforts. For that reason, it should be essential for all states to improve the necessary conditions for the rational medical use of internationally controlled substances.

9. Misinformation and ambiguities in communication should be addressed. It is of utmost importance to provide factual and scientifically verifiable information. We must not give up talking about the opportunities and risks of a therapy with internationally controlled substances. We must not give up emphasising the success of this form of therapy, especially for patients in need of pain management and palliative care.

10. The treatment of pain and severe suffering as well as palliative care are essential needs. The provisions of the Single Convention are designed in such a way that these needs can be met in every respect from an international regulatory perspective. From a medical care perspective, it is particularly difficult to accept that people continue to suffer because of no or inadequate availability, or the lack of affordability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes in reliable pharmaceutical quality.

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. It has been 10 years now since the member states of the CND set guidelines with CND-Resolution 53/4, to enable us to achieve adequate availability of internationally controlled licit drugs for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their diversion and abuse.

12. This year the European Union and its Member States once again underlined the importance of this topic with their CND-Resolution 63/3 highlighting the promotion of awareness-raising, education and training as part of a comprehensive approach to ensure access to and the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes and improving their rational use.

13. Building on the progress made so far, the international community should continue to focus on more actions to improve the adequate availability and affordability of internationally controlled substances for medical purposes in reliable pharmaceutical quality, without prejudice to monitoring and control measures. The European Union and its Member States are willing to make their contribution to this, in line with our joint commitments.

Thank you Mr. Chair.

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