

## UNODC ROSAF and UN Botswana commemorates World Drug Day and launches the 2022 World Drug Report

27 June 2022, Phakalane, Botswana: Under the theme “Addressing drug challenges in health and humanitarian crises” and focusing on addressing transnational drug challenges stemming from situations of crisis, United Nations Botswana led by Mr. Zia Choudhury, Resident Coordinator and Ms. Jane Marie Ongolo, UNODC ROSAF Regional Representative, commemorated World Drug Day and launched the 2022 World Drug Report.

Welcoming participants that included national authorities, non-governmental organizations, religious leaders, academia, researchers and media, the Resident Coordinator expressed delight that it is the first time that the commemoration of World Drug Day and launch of 2022 World Drug Report is being held in Botswana. “So, this is a very significant moment which I hope is not the last. I am looking forward to even more collaboration in the coming years, said the Resident Coordinator” Mr. Choudhury emphasized the importance of de-stigmatization. “One message I have is that drugs and misuse of them should not be stigmatized, as is the case in many contexts” he said. He further highlighted that the extent of drug abuse in Botswana is not known and that information available is anecdotal. This must change. “There is nothing to be ashamed of. We must know how our communities are affected by drug abuse. It can be slow and insidious, as has happened in many countries. This kind of information cannot remain anecdotal, it must be understood with hard data and then we can discuss openly and work out how to protect the vulnerable. We continue to advocate to protect the right to health for the most vulnerable, including children and youth; people using drugs; people with drug use disorders; and people who need access to controlled medicines”, added Mr. Choudhury. In conclusion, *the Resident Coordinator read the message of support from the United Nations Secretary General, António Guterres.* <https://bit.ly/3c4dM3j>



Figure 1: UN Botswana RC, Mr. Zia Choudhury welcoming participants

In a video recorded message and played to participants, UNODC Executive Director, Ms. Ghada Waly highlighted that the harms of illicit drug use can affect anyone, but they often have the deepest impact on those in crisis. “We need to reach those who are most difficult to reach, because they need us the most: people in refugee camps and humanitarian settings; people at risk of being left behind as a result of the pandemic; and people facing barriers of stigma and discrimination,” she said. Ms Waly further said that “women are among the foremost victims of conflict and crisis, and they often face greater barriers to treatment for drug use disorders. In some parts of the world, the proportion of women among treated patients is below ten per cent. We need to ensure access to care for all, including in emergencies”. <https://bit.ly/3AMssP5>



Figure 2: Ms. Jane Marie Ongolo, UNODC ROSAF RR presenting the key findings of the 2022 World Drug Report

Presenting the 2022 World Drug Report, Ms. Jane Marie Ongolo informed participants that according to the report, drug use remains high worldwide and around 284 million people aged 15-64 used drugs worldwide in 2020, a 26 per cent increase over the previous decade. Young people are using more drugs, with use levels today in many countries higher than with the previous generation. In Africa and Latin America, people under 35 represent the majority of people being treated for drug use disorders. Further, she highlighted, the report indicates that drug

use among adolescents is higher than adults and that more than 11 million people worldwide inject drugs. Of these people, 1 in 8 are living with HIV and half living with hepatitis C. In terms of production and according to the report, expressed Ms. Ongolo, cannabis is still the most widely produced substance, cultivation of opium poppy is declining while coca bush cultivation is stabilizing. <https://bit.ly/3yY6QWB>

In concluding the presentation, Ms. Ongolo quoted from the Executive Secretary’s message “We need to ensure access to care for all, including any emergencies. We also need to ensure that controlled medicines are available for pain relief around the world and in humanitarian settings. As the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, we are committed to providing care and support to the people affected by illicit drugs, no matter the circumstances. Everyone has a role to play, from governments to civil society to individuals in bringing the necessary attention and resources to this issue. And we stand ready to work with all of you. Let us show those who need us that we care by providing the care that they need in these times of crisis.”



Presenting concluding remarks, Mr. Monametsi Sokwe – Executive Secretary, Botswana Council of Non Governmental Organizations thanked the UN in Botswana and UNODC for the commemoration of the World Drug Day and launch of the 2022 World Drug Report. He affirmed the non- governmental sector’s commitment to work together with the government and other relevant entities to address the scourge of drugs in Botswana. He also reaffirmed the importance of evidence-based data to inform policy and programming moving forward.