

Joint Statement
77 World Health Assembly
Commission B – Item 29
Matters for information: progress reports
H. Public health dimension of the world drug problem (decision WHA75(20) (2022))

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of Norway, Mexico, Hungary, Belgium, Latvia, The Netherlands, Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Portugal, Greece, Estonia, Georgia, Finland, Slovakia, Guatemala, Armenia, Romania, Moldova, Ecuador, Ireland, Slovenia, Canada, Spain, Costa Rica, Croatia, Kiribati, New Zealand, Cyprus, Australia, Bolivia, Switzerland, Brazil, Ukraine, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Andorra, Jamaica, Panamá, United Kingdom and Colombia.

We thank the Secretariat for the report on the public health dimension of the world drug problem.

We recognize the crucial role that WHO plays in promoting efforts to address the health dimension of the world drug problem in drug policies and, the need for drug control measures that cover the entire public health continuum and are grounded in the fundamental public health principles of equity, individual freedoms, social justice and human rights. We also recognize the importance of increasing efforts to mobilize resources and strengthen WHO's capacity to address these issues.

We welcome the actions carried out by WHO outlined in the report, such as WHO's guidance on mental health and drug consumption, access to controlled medicines, and opioids overdose, as well as the coordination and collaboration with other UN agencies and partners, in particular UNODC and INCB. However, we consider that urgent action is needed to accelerate progress against persistent and expanding drug-related challenges that endanger health, human rights, and well-being.

The demand for and supply of illicit drugs have reached unprecedented levels, disproportionately burdening our health systems. Patterns of illicit manufacturing and trafficking of drugs are shifting rapidly, and the evolution and proliferation of illicit synthetic drugs is expanding at an alarming pace, creating a major crisis, with unprecedented levels of overdose deaths.

At the same time, despite their indispensability, millions of people across the world, especially in developing countries, continue to suffer because of inadequate access to and limited availability of controlled medicines, including due to affordability and other existing barriers.

All these evolving drug-related issues directly impact the right to health and well-being. Evidence shows that drug use disorders are multifactorial health conditions that can only be effectively addressed through inclusive, rights-based and non-discriminatory treatment, health care, harm reduction, social protection and rehabilitation provided in

the context of health systems that guarantee non-stigmatization. We need to strengthen the alliance with civil society and the private sector, to create favorable conditions to realize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

The international drug control system needs rethinking based on concrete evidence, so we can start making progress together by ensuring that we are appropriately focused on achieving our common goals and objectives to protect the health and well-being of humankind. One key step in that direction would be to foster greater coherence throughout the UN System, promoting regular exchanges between Vienna, Geneva, and New York, and to better engage civil society in our efforts.

We hereby unite our efforts to put the public health dimension in drug policies back in the priorities of WHO work. We expect to engage constructively with other member States in order to put people first in drug responses as part of our broader efforts. This means prioritizing public health, developing prevention initiatives, eliminating the stigma associated with drug use and disorders while ensuring the access to and availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and suffering.

In view of our common objectives and shared responsibilities, we appeal for global solidarity and cooperation to reduce the immense human suffering caused by a phenomenon that is occurring worldwide. If we want positively to impact the lives of individuals, households, and communities around the globe, we need a transformation in our vision for world drug policy, based on a realistic, scientific and, evidence-based assessment, and a pragmatic response.