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From: Presidency
To: Delegations

Subject: European Union Statement on the occasion of the CND Intersessional Meeting, Vienna, 25-28 September 2018 - Ensuring the availability of and access to controlled substances exclusively for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their diversion

Delegations will find in annex the final version of the European Union Statement on the availability of and access to controlled substances exclusively for medical and scientific purposes which was expressed, on behalf of the EU, at the CND Intersessional Meeting on 26 September 2018 in Vienna.



European Union

Statement on the occasion of the
Intersessional Meeting 25-28 September 2018

Commission on Narcotic Drugs 61st session

Vienna, 26 September 2018

Ensuring the availability of and access to controlled substances exclusively for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their diversion

Madam Chair,

The European Union and its Member States wish to thank you for organising this intersessional meeting in which we can continue the preparations for the Ministerial segment of the 62nd CND with a special focus on the availability of and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes as well as share our experience in that field.

The EU and its Member States appreciate fully the importance of the access to and availability of controlled substances such as opioid medications in the treatment of pain and opioid dependence, whilst also acknowledging the potential for the diversion and misuse of these medications. The global lack of access to and availability of controlled substances for pain management, palliative care but also the treatment of mental health and neurological disorders, such as anxiety and epilepsy is indeed a global health concern, and leads to avoidable and unacceptable suffering in many parts of the world. At the same time, the growing misuse of some psychoactive medicines in certain parts of the world is highly problematic.

However, the opioid epidemic in certain parts of the world cannot disengage us from ensuring adequate access to and availability of controlled substances globally as enshrined in the UN drug conventions and confirmed in the UNGASS outcome document. We are of the opinion that it is the enforcement of the provisions in the existing framework of the international drug control conventions that provide adequate guarantees to prevent the misuse of psychoactive medicines. We also note, however, that the inadequate interpretation of the international drug control systems in place may inadvertently limit the availability of and access to the medicines.

The EU and its Member States advocate the need to remedy the situation as for example in some of the actions outlined in the EU Drug Action Plan for 2017 to 2020 that tackle both

aspects, namely availability and access and diversion, in a balanced manner. Thus, seeking to increase the availability of and access to these medicines, medical practitioners and other health care professionals receive special training on the use and regulation of such controlled medicines as part of their continuous professional development. One example of an EU action as regards this particular topic is the EU project CODEMISUSED, developed by a partnership of researchers and pharmacy industry experts. The results of the project will increase understanding of customer sales, purchasing habits and patterns of use, misuse and dependence, as well as will allow strengthening tracking systems, pharmacy dispensing practice and prescription procedures, along with treatment protocols, public health and drug information campaigns. This in turn, may provide an example of a best practice approach on how one is to better provide availability of and accessibility to these controlled medicines without inadvertently aiding and abetting their diversion.

We believe that the methodology and results of the EU-funded project on access to opioid medication in Europe, called ‘ATOME’, such as the use of the WHO document on “Ensuring balance in national policies on controlled substances: guidance for availability and accessibility of controlled medicines”, could provide examples for interested UN member states, by developing tailor-made solutions for improved access to opioid medicines.

Several EU Member States finance concrete projects on the ground in Africa in the framework of the UNODC - WHO - UICC Joint Global Program on "Access to Controlled Drugs for Medical Purposes While Preventing Diversion and Abuse" or the INCB Learning Project.

In Nigeria, the EU-funded project "Response to Drugs and Related Organised Crime in Nigeria" has taken a comprehensive approach to drug control issues that includes a special focus on increasing access to controlled medicines within a context of a strong regulatory system that protects patients and healthcare workers from harm. The EU highlights that the reference documents of this project have first been elaborated with national competent authorities.

Madam Chair,

The EU and its Member States support the efforts of the WHO, UNODC and INCB in providing technical guidance and assistance in tackling existing barriers and guaranteeing the availability of and accessibility to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes for those in need. We are glad that the topic of access to controlled medicines constitutes one of the six areas of the Memorandum of Understanding that was concluded between the Executive Director of UNODC and the Director General of WHO in 2016. In the same vein, we welcome a regular exchange of views and the enhancement of coordination efforts on this issue among these competent organisations. We also underline the importance of working with civil society and scientific community, as well as the private sector in this area given their role, expertise and networks.

Thank you.
