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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Horizontal Working Party on Drugs

Subject: 63rd CND Special Event on 26 June 2020 - Discussion on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world drug situation - Opening Statement expressed on behalf of the European Union and its Member States

Delegations will find in annex the Opening Statement expressed by the Commission on behalf of the European Union and its Member States at the CND Special Event on 26 June 2020 for the discussion on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the world drug situation.

European Union
Opening Statement on the occasion of the
Special discussion: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the world drug situation

63rd Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
26 June 2020

Distinguished Chair, Director Waly, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

First of all, the European Union and its Member States would like to express our solidarity to all countries affected by the pandemic, as well as condolences and sympathy to all the families of the victims of COVID-19.

As the coronavirus crisis is ongoing, the European Union and its Member States would like to thank you, Mr. Chair, and to thank Ms. Waly and the UNODC for giving us the opportunity to exchange on the COVID-19's impact on the world drug situation. UNODC is an important partner for the EU in addressing the world drug situation in an integrated, balanced and evidence-based manner.

The coronavirus outbreak has brought major challenges to our societies and economies, and put the multilateral system under serious strain. However, this test opens up opportunities for new and innovative ideas and methods to strengthen our engagement to address global challenges.

Two of our EU agencies, the EMCDDA, the EU's Drug Agency, and EUROPOL, have joined forces to improve understanding of drug market developments under COVID-19 and their impact on public health in the EU and on our internal security.

Their reports, like the ones by UNODC, demonstrated that the current public health crisis raises serious concerns for the people who use drugs and for drug service providers, to be able to ensure service continuity for those with drug problems, and the protection of those offering care and support for this population - additional risks that need consideration and mitigation. More generally, the stigmatisation and marginalisation associated with some forms of drug use may not only increase risk but also create barriers for promoting risk reduction measures.

On the security side, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought changes and new trends in serious and organised crime, not only in the EU but globally.

Reports by EMCDDA and EUROPOL showed higher prices, local shortages and reduced purity for some drugs, while noting continued violence among suppliers and distributors. It also showed how organised crime groups are changing their business models, while consumers and dealers are changing their approaches. Both Agencies will present the main elements of their report in a moment.

These developments are not wholly unexpected and mirror the adaptability and flexibility of organised crime displayed in other crises. In addition, some of the more far-reaching and longer-term impacts of the pandemic will only become apparent later, making the need to anticipate the fast-evolving drug situation even more pressing. But we can already deduce that the pandemic will create conditions in which Europe and the world will face significantly increased drug market challenges in the medium to long term.

To conclude, let me emphasise that tackling the challenges posed by COVID-19 requires multilateral responses and international solidarity. In that context, the EU has put its full weight behind the UN Secretary General's efforts to coordinate UN-wide response to defeat the virus.

The European Union and its Member States, as the world's largest donor, are also at the forefront of this effort, with a series of concrete actions taken to support our partners. For example, with our Member States and European financial institutions, we have combined resources for € 36 billion - that is what we call the "Team Europe" package - to support partner countries and the most vulnerable in tackling the pandemic. Tomorrow (*on 27 June*), the EU will host a final pledging summit where businesses, foundations and citizens can join forces with public donors. The money that we will raise will finance testing programmes, treatments and vaccines for countries everywhere in the world and for everyone who needs them.

Our response to the pandemic's impact on the world drug situation should be guided by the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and its promise to leave no one behind, while remaining fully integrated, balanced and evidence-based.

We are very happy to have this exchange this afternoon,

Thank you very much, Distinguished Chair.
