



Statement on the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the implementation of the joint commitments of Member States to address and counter all aspects of the world drug problem

1. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs expresses grave concern about the devastating impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic across the world, and pays tribute to the victims, first responders and all other persons whose efforts and commitment, often undertaken at great risk to their health and that of their families, have contributed to the fight against the pandemic.
2. The Commission reaffirms its commitment to international cooperation and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, welcomes initiatives of the United Nations to address the global challenge of COVID-19, including through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and in this regard recalls the thirty-first special session of the General Assembly, convened in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. The Commission recognizes the dramatic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on all aspects of the world drug problem.
4. The Commission recalls the commitments of Member States to strengthening actions at the national, regional and international levels to accelerate the implementation of the joint commitments to address and counter the world drug problem, and encourages Member States to continue their efforts, taking into consideration the drug-related consequences of the pandemic.
5. The Commission reiterates its commitment to respecting, protecting and promoting all human rights, fundamental freedoms and the inherent dignity of all individuals and the rule of law in the development and implementation of drug policies, including in its responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. The Commission recognizes and supports the efforts of law enforcement authorities and members of security forces in the fight against drug trafficking and related crimes, noting that their sustained efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, often undertaken at great risk to their health and that of their families, have resulted in increases in arrests, seizures of drugs and property and the freezing of assets.
7. The Commission submits the present statement as a substantive contribution to the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development, devoted to the main theme, “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”, in addition to the contribution that it has already submitted in 2021.

New trends, challenges and obstacles that the COVID-19 pandemic poses to all aspects of the world drug problem

8. The Commission stresses that the pandemic and resulting lockdowns have led to the development of new patterns of illicit drug use, such as poly-substance use.

9. The Commission notes that emerging evidence in some countries suggests that people with drug use disorders, including those incarcerated, may be at increased risk of more severe illness and mortality from COVID-19 due to underlying health conditions, as well as other factors, which may be exacerbated during the pandemic.

10. The Commission acknowledges that, owing to the nature of the pandemic, the traditional demand reduction infrastructure, which often requires in-person engagement, faces increasing challenges in providing prevention, early intervention, treatment, care, recovery, rehabilitation, and social reintegration measures, as well as measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health and social consequences of drug abuse, at least at the same level as provided before the COVID-19 pandemic.

11. The Commission notes with concern that, owing to challenges that health systems face because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the capacity of drug treatment and health services may be affected, potentially causing an increase in deaths related to drug use.

12. The Commission notes with concern the difficulties encountered by Member States in ensuring the continued access to and availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes throughout the world, and appreciates the work of the International Narcotics Control Board and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, within their respective mandates, in supporting Member States to ensure the access to and availability of such drugs, as well as in raising awareness about the problem.

13. The Commission encourages Member States to continue to address barriers to access to and availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing their non-medical use or diversion into illicit channels, including those related to legislation, regulatory systems, health-care systems, affordability, the training of health-care professionals, education, awareness-raising, estimates, assessments and reporting, benchmarks for consumption of substances under control, and international cooperation and coordination, in particular with a view to ensuring improved responses to a possible future pandemic and other emerging threats.

14. The Commission notes that the COVID-19 pandemic may have initially affected the illicit cultivation, production and manufacture of and trafficking in drugs, and may have also resulted in new methods of manufacture, distribution and marketing of, and trafficking in, some types of drugs.

15. The Commission recognizes that changes in trafficking routes and methods, including increased maritime trafficking and online sales of drugs through both the darknet and the surface web, have resulted in new challenges for law enforcement authorities.

16. The Commission notes with concern that, in the pandemic and post-pandemic period, there may be funding shortages and diversion of resources away from drug-related initiatives, including those relating to drug prevention and treatment and related health and social services, alternative development and law enforcement.

17. The Commission recognizes that, in the long term, the COVID-19 pandemic may lead to an increase in illicit drug cultivation, production and trafficking and other drug-related criminal activities, as well as drug use disorders and related health and social consequences.

Good practices and opportunities

18. The Commission acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the development of new and innovative approaches to drug prevention and treatment and related health and social services, which may result in enhanced cooperation between public health and law enforcement authorities and other relevant stakeholders of Member States at the national, regional and international levels.

19. The Commission notes that, in order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission associated with in-person services, some health systems have introduced or expanded e-health platforms and procedures to prevent drug abuse and provide

medications, counselling and consultations, including telemedicine, and that these innovations may lead to new treatment strategies in future.

20. The Commission underlines the role of drug treatment and social services, peer support and community outreach.

21. The Commission calls attention to the importance of undertaking systematic monitoring, evaluation and data collection in the implementation of new approaches to drug prevention, treatment and related health and social services, with a view to establishing scientific evidence that these interventions foster the desired effects of promoting quality assurance, where appropriate, and to exchanging information in the Commission on best practices for these interventions, once scientific evidence for their effectiveness has been established, and takes note of the contribution of the informal scientific network of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the World Health Organization in this regard.

22. The Commission emphasizes the importance of the use of existing online database platforms, such as those operated by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Narcotics Control Board, for effective and increased cooperation among law enforcement and forensic officials in gathering and sharing data needed to identify and detect substances.

23. The Commission takes note of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime research brief on COVID-19 and the drug supply chain,¹ as well as the expert meetings and webinars organized by relevant international and regional organizations on drug related topics, which serve as valuable information exchange platforms.

24. The Commission acknowledges that increased social distancing and general isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic have made the use of private sector platforms to market, sell, transport and finance illicit trafficking – a feature of the drug trafficking environment for the past several years – a convenient way to purchase and deliver drugs, and has increased the need for law enforcement, regulatory and other relevant authorities to engage, as appropriate, with the private sector to assist in efforts to detect and interdict trafficking, and takes note of the relevant expert group meetings convened by, inter alia, the International Narcotics Control Board on these topics.

25. The Commission recognizes the important role of the scientific community, academia, civil society, in particular non-governmental organizations, and the private sector in contributing to the efforts of Member States to address and counter the world drug problem, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Actions to take

26. The Commission stresses that addressing and countering the world drug problem require coordinated multidisciplinary efforts and that such efforts should become a top priority in the post-COVID-19 period.

27. The Commission encourages Member States to consider expanding the coverage of and strengthening drug prevention and treatment systems and related health and social services to increase their resilience in order to respond effectively to possible future pandemics and other emerging health threats.

28. The Commission encourages Member States and relevant stakeholders, within their national contexts, to continue to develop and implement innovative drug treatment and recovery delivery systems, such as e-health platforms and procedures, in the post-pandemic environment in order to promote efficient, accessible and durable opportunities for treatment and recovery, where applicable.

29. The Commission encourages national, regional and international efforts to promote viable economic alternatives, in particular for communities affected by or at risk of the illicit cultivation, manufacture, production of and trafficking in drugs, as well as other illicit drug-related activities in urban and rural areas, including through comprehensive alternative development programmes, in particular with reference to

¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “COVID-19 and the drug supply chain: from production and trafficking to use”, Research Brief (Vienna, 2020).

the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development,² which may help to mitigate any negative economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

30. The Commission invites Member States, subject to the availability of resources, to further strengthen measures, strategies, and inter-agency and international cooperation and partnerships, to ensure the access to and availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, which may improve responses to future emergencies, including emergency medical care situations.

31. The Commission encourages Member States to expand law enforcement activities targeting trafficking modalities that have emerged or increased in the context of COVID-19 and to increase coordination between Member States.

32. The Commission encourages all Member States to continue to prevent and counter the diversion of and trafficking in precursors and pre-precursors for illicit use, during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

33. The Commission urges Member States to strengthen bilateral, regional and international cooperation to counter the exploitation by drug traffickers of traditional and online trafficking methods and routes during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

34. The Commission calls upon Member States to enhance, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, access to treatment for drug use disorders for those incarcerated and to promote effective oversight in that regard.

35. The Commission notes that the principle of common and shared responsibility should remain at the core of international cooperation on all aspects of the world drug problem.

36. The Commission commits itself to promoting the provision of technical assistance and capacity-building to Member States, upon request, in particular those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, in addressing and countering the world drug problem.

37. The Commission invites the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, as the leading entity in the United Nations system for addressing and countering the world drug problem, in coordination with relevant United Nations entities and other international organizations, within their respective mandates, to conduct research and collect data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world drug problem, and to regularly inform the Commission about progress made in that regard.

38. The Commission invites Member States and the International Narcotics Control Board, within its treaty-mandated functions, to continue further developing their dialogue, including through regular consultations and the Board's country missions, to lend assistance to Member States in their efforts to effectively implement the three international drug control conventions.

39. The Commission invites Member States and other relevant stakeholders to share, through the Commission, national good practices and lessons learned to improve national drug policies, so that Member States are able to more quickly respond to a possible future global pandemic and other emerging threats.

40. The Commission urges Member States to ensure that no one affected by the world drug problem is left behind in the health response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in efforts to mitigate the drug-related consequences of the pandemic.

41. The Commission commits itself to giving due attention to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during its thematic discussions in 2021 on the implementation of all international drug policy commitments, as follow-up to the Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening Our Actions at the National, Regional and International Levels to Accelerate the Implementation of Our Joint Commitments to Address and Counter the World Drug Problem³ of 2019.

² General Assembly resolution 68/196, annex.

³ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2019, Supplement No. 8 (E/2019/28)*, chap. I, sect. B.

42. The Commission welcomes the efforts made by Member States to comply with the provisions of the three international drug control conventions and other relevant international instruments and to ensure their effective implementation, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

43. The Commission encourages Member States to accelerate the implementation of all international drug policy commitments so that the progress made in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem at the national, regional and global levels is maintained and continued in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences.
