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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
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Subject:	EU Statement on the occasion of the second intersessional meeting of the 66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (Vienna, 4-6 December 2023) - Challenge: "The availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and palliative care, remains low to non-existent in many parts of the world".

Delegations will find in the Annex the above-mentioned statement as expressed on behalf of the EU and its Member States at the second intersessional meeting of the 66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) (Vienna, 4-6 December 2023).



European Union

Statement at the Thematic session 5

**Second Intersessional Meeting
66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**

Vienna, 4-6 December 2023

Challenge: “The availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, including for the relief of pain and palliative care, remains low to non-existent in many parts of the world”

Distinguished Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 2016 UNGASS Outcome Document highlights the need to address the low availability, accessibility and affordability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, it is essential that access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines is ensured for patients around the world.

In this context, the EU and its Member States would like to reiterate our grave concern over the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine resulting from Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine. The World Health Organization (WHO) has documented 1400 attacks¹ on health care in Ukraine since the invasion by the Russian Federation in February 2022, including attacks against health care facilities, transport and supplies. This is the highest number the WHO has ever recorded in any humanitarian emergency. It highlights the difficult and dangerous circumstances in which the country's health system operates, and the challenges of providing both routine and emergency health-care services. Attacks hinder access to health care for tens of thousands of people, increasing the risks of illness and death. This emergency situation requires urgent action to ensure unimpeded access to medical care and provisions, including medicines containing internationally controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. The EU, its Member States and partner countries have offered assistance including medical supplies, and is coordinating medical evacuations of Ukrainian patients in urgent need of treatment, transferring them to hospitals across Europe to receive specialised care.

¹ <https://extranet.who.int/ssa/Index.aspx>

Mr Chair,

The availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes remains an issue elsewhere in the world as well, even if the international efforts are showing results in several regions. As noted in the World Drug Report 2023, disparities in such availability and access have remained. In 2021, 86 per cent of the global population lived in countries where the availability of pharmaceutical opioids for medical use was below the global average. It is also important to consider the existing differences in access to these medicines for people in vulnerable situations, including women and children.

INCB's most recent report on the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes (2022) notes that often countries may not be accurately reflecting the actual medical needs of their populations in their reported demand, resulting in disparity in availability. A major problem is also the limited access to affordable opioid analgesics, such as morphine. According to competent national authorities, most important impediments to availability are problems in sourcing, lack of training and awareness of professionals, fear of addiction and limited financial resources as well as cultural attitudes, and fear of diversion.

In this context, the EU and its Member States would like to once again express their appreciation for the special initiative of the previous Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Ambassador Ghislain D'Hoop of Belgium relating to improving the availability of and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. The special events highlighted the remaining challenges in this area, raised awareness about this important issue and will help us to move closer to the implementation of our international commitments in the area of availability.

In line with the EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025, we will continue to support efforts on promoting and implementing capacity-building and awareness-raising activities regarding the access to and the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes and we will continue working to ensure that this goal is enshrined in all national drug control policies and practices.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.
