

Notes for an Address by

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for the Opening of the

60th Session of the

United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs

March 13, 2017

Vienna, Austria

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OPENING REMARKS:

Madame Chair, Ministers, Heads of Delegation, Distinguished Delegates, and Members of Civil Society:

Le Canada est heureux de participer à la soixantième session de la commission des stupéfiants. À travers le dialogue et les contributions des nombreux États représentés dans ce forum, nous committons nos efforts à continuer de relever les défis posés par les activités illicites liées à la production et au trafic de drogue ainsi que d'adresser les dommages sociaux causés par ces drogues.

Canada is pleased to participate in the 60th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Through the dialogue and contributions of the many States represented in this forum, we continue to work together to address the new and continuing challenges posed by illegal drug-related activities and the health and social harms that they cause.

Canada remains steadfast in our commitment to work together with the international community, to continue to improve global health, safety, and security. And we do so with the highest regard for the dignity of humanity, and respect for human rights.

The progress that we made together last year at the UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) was a milestone in our continuing efforts, and one that we must now strive to implement.

But even as we continue to make progress, significant challenges remain.

Of primary concern to Canada is the rapidly increasing rate of opioid-related overdose deaths, and the devastating impact this crisis is having on individuals, families and communities. A record number of Canadians have died from drug overdoses in the past year.

This crisis has been driven by both the overprescribing of opioid medications, and the emergence of substances such as fentanyl and its analogues, which are being illegally imported, and mixed into the illegal drug supply – often without the users’ knowledge.

In response to this opioid crisis, Canada has taken action by developing a comprehensive plan tackling both these aspects of the issue. Our provincial, territorial and local governments, medical partners, community organizations and volunteers, as well as law enforcement and first responders are working together to save lives.

In addition to new prevention activities, two examples of the numerous actions underway in Canada are the removal of the requirement for a prescription to access Naloxone – an opioid overdose reversing drug, and the November 2016 scheduling of six chemicals used in the production of fentanyl.

Canada now controls both ANPP and NPP, which the CND will consider for scheduling on Thursday. I'd like to take this opportunity to reiterate that Canada has experienced the harms associated with illegal trafficking in fentanyl firsthand, and we call on the international community to take action to place its precursors under international control as an urgent public health measure.

Canada also continues to move forward with its plan to legalize and strictly regulate access to cannabis – to keep it out of the hands of youth and to keep profits out of the hands of criminals.

In the last year, the Task Force on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation completed and made publically available its report on the design of a new system. This advice is being considered by the Government of Canada as legislation is being developed. As the Minister of Health stated at UNGASS last April, the federal government will introduce legislation this spring.

At the UNGASS, Canada's Minister of Health also spoke in support of a drug policy rooted in a public health approach. This approach is evidenced in the new Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy announced in December which restores harm reduction as a key pillar alongside prevention, treatment and enforcement – all of which are supported by a strong evidence base.

Evidence shows that a comprehensive public health approach that is inclusive of harm reduction measures alongside prevention, treatment, and enforcement actions, works. Providing a continuum of care to support individuals who use drugs at every point in their journey is essential. Those who are outside of the treatment system, for whatever reason, must be treated with dignity and respect. In addition to preventing overdose fatalities, lowering the transmission of infectious disease, and reducing the rates of drug-related crime, harm reduction measures can also

help bring drug users into first contact with the health care system, where they can access treatment.

To support the implementation of Canada's new drug strategy, strong, modernized legislation, is now before Canada's Parliament. The comprehensive Bill proposes to ensure an appropriate balance between public health and public safety by better equipping both health and law enforcement officials with the tools they need.

Il convient de noter, parmi le grand nombre de changements proposés dans ce projet de loi, les dispositions visant à lutter contre l'émergence de nouvelles substances psychoactives. Les changements proposés dans le cadre de ce projet de loi donneraient à la ministre de la Santé du Canada le pouvoir d'ajouter rapidement une substance à une nouvelle annexe de substances désignées.

Notable among the many proposed changes in that Bill are provisions aimed to combat the emergence of new psychoactive substances. Changes proposed as part of this Bill would give Canada's Minister of Health the authority to quickly add a substance to a new schedule.

The rapid emergence of dangerous NPS poses a significant challenge to the international drug control community, and therefore also requires a robust and coordinated international response.

Canada would like to reiterate its position that all drug policy must be rooted in the recognition of, and respect for, human rights.

Sanctions for crime, including drug-related crime, should be proportionate to the nature of the offence. In this regard, Canada opposes the use of the death penalty in all cases, everywhere, and continues to call for its abolition. Moreover, criminal justice responses to drug-related criminality must respect due process – Canada condemns the use of extrajudicial sanctions, and executions in particular, and calls for an end to this.

Madame Chair, fellow Members – I'd like to conclude my statement by emphasizing that Canada is committed to working with the international community on global drug control issues.

We look forward to contributing towards the work of this Commission, in the current session, and in the future.

THANK YOU.