



PRESS RELEASE

Historical moment of a global drug policy: harm reduction is mentioned in the UN resolution for the first time

Prague, 2. 4. 2024 – The United States of America introduced the UN resolution on drug overdose prevention in the margins of 67th session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in Vienna, March 14-22, 2024. For the first time in the history of the UN, the resolution directly calls on Member States to implement harm reduction measures in national legislation as an essential part of drug policy to protect public health and to minimise the adverse health and social impacts of illicit drug use, particularly posed by synthetic drugs. This is the first resolution since the CND was established to be adopted by vote with no consensus.

Jindrich Voboril, National Drug Coordinator of the Czech Republic comments: *"I consider this moment to be a ground-breaking change. The US resolution finally introduces the concept of harm reduction at the UN level. This resolution is a strong evidence of a gradual rational paradigm shift on a global level. It seems that more and more states are realising that excessive repression does not lead to an improvement in the drug situation. I also see it as a crucial that the reference to harm reduction, and step back from abstinence oriented approach, is being made in the context of drug overdose prevention. Several hundred thousand people, often young people, die every year and their lives can be saved",* and he adds: *"The Czech Republic has been a pioneer in harm reduction for 30 years. We are one of the few countries in the world with a very low number of overdose from illicit drugs or due to the onslaught of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS among people who use drugs. But this, of course, is also related to the reasonable financial resources that we spend on this type of prevention."*

The key element for the adoption of this resolution was the cooperation of the EU Member States and other like-minded countries, which managed to defend an evidence-based approach during the negotiations. Although the Czech Republic is not currently a member of the CND, i.e. has no right to vote, we actively participated in the whole process of negotiations. The resolution was adopted by vote for the first time in the CND history. The vote, in which the resolution was supported by a majority of the CND members¹, was therefore the first time ever that the so-called Vienna spirit of consensus was broken. Even though more than one hundred UN Member States, including the Czech Republic, are already implementing some form of harm reduction measures in their national policies, resolution of this kind has only now been adopted.

Although harm reduction remains a sensitive issue at the UN level, the adoption of this resolution marks a shift in the perception of harm reduction measures at the international level. Among the rational drug policy measures called for in the resolution on overdose prevention are the availability of opioid agonist treatment or naloxone programme.

¹ The resolution was supported by Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Finland, France, Ghana, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Portugal, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States and Uruguay. The Russian Federation and China voted against the adoption of the resolution, while Algeria, Armenia, Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic, Iran and Zimbabwe abstained.

Furthermore, the CND at its 67th session voted to adopt a resolution on alternative development and two resolutions on the availability of and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes and on rehabilitation and recovery as part of the treatment were adopted by consensus.

Jindrich Voboril, National Drug Coordinator has been part of a number of panel discussions. The Czech Republic held bilateral meetings with representatives of Malta, Colombia and Bolivia. The Czech Republic also organised a panel discussion (side event) on the psychoactive substances regulation and the concept of psychomodulatory substances, which was well attended.

More information and documents

Resolution on prevention of drug overdose is available on the UN website (Draft proposals, document E/CN.7/2024/L.5): *Preventing and responding to drug overdose through prevention, treatment, care and recovery measures, as well as other public health interventions, to address the harms associated with illicit drug use as part of a balanced, comprehensive, scientific evidence-based approach (Albania, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czechia, Denmark, France, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Latvia, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America)* – at the time of this Press release is published **unedited revised document**

Press release UNAIDS: *UNAIDS welcomes the adoption of a crucial resolution recognizing harm reduction measures at the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs*

Press release IDPC: *Harm reduction' takes centre stage as UN drug policy breaks free from the shackles of consensus*

Information from the 67th CND session are also published on the UNODC website

Information about the UN are available on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

For media

Mgr. Jindrich Voboril, National Drug Coordinator, M +420 725 805 865, E-mail jindrich.voboril@vlada.gov.cz

Interview requests and questions can be sent via David Hlustik, david.hlustik@vlada.gov.cz, M +420 602 244 776