

Statement of the Portuguese Health Secretary of State, Raquel Duarte

**General Debate of the Ministerial Segment of the 62nd Session of the
Commission on Narcotics Drugs**

14 and 15 March, Vienna

Thank you Mr. Chair.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to congratulate you, Ambassador Mirghani Bakhet, as Chair of this important Ministerial Segment, as it follows so closely on the heels of the UNGASS 2016 and provides a crucial opportunity to focus on global drug policy and on what we want to achieve together for the next decade and possibly beyond. I also would like to thank Ambassador Vivian Okeke of Nigeria for all her hard work and dedication as Facilitator during the hard negotiations towards this Ministerial Declaration.

We have many important issues to debate over these two days and during next week, and I would like to assure you of the full cooperation of my delegation in successfully carrying out our joint work. I would also like to stress, at this point, that Portugal fully associates itself with the statement by the European Union.

Mr. Chair, Portugal welcomes the Declaration adopted at this Ministerial Segment, and we wait with optimism for the outcome of the work conducted at the two high-level roundtables that will look to the past, present and future of our joint commitments to face the world drug situation.

This Ministerial Declaration takes stock of many of the developments and challenges of the last ten years, and sets the stage for the acceleration of the implementation of all commitments made in the preceding decade, in particular the ones that are part of the most comprehensive of these documents, as it builds upon the others expanding their scope. That document

is the UNGASS outcome document of 2016, the most recent policy consensus the international community agreed to.

Indeed, UNGASS 2016 broadened the scope of global drug policy, by looking at demand and supply in a holistic way, and adding other dimensions to our joint approach, such as health and treatment – namely by minimizing adverse public health and social consequences of drug abuse through appropriate measures and preventing diseases –, but also through clearly affirming that all must be done in a framework of respect and promotion of human rights, in particular through the promotion of proportionate national sentencing policies for drug-related offences.

All this sustained in strong international cooperation, and in tandem with interagency cooperation, to increase effectiveness, while listening to and including civil society, scientific community and other relevant stakeholders in the process.

In a nutshell: the major achievement of the UNGASS outcome document was the recognition of the need to promote and implement a public health approach to drugs, based on scientific evidence and human rights, as well as to ensure that drug policies enhance efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, while emphasizing the importance of ensuring UN system-wide coherence.

At the same time, UNGASS built on the foundations of the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action readdressed the commitment on supply reduction and related measures, including law enforcement, money-laundering and judicial cooperation, which are also essential dimensions of our joint approach to the world drug situation.

Therefore, this Ministerial Segment is an important and unique opportunity for all Member States, civil society and international community as a whole to focus on consolidating and building upon the operational recommendations included in all seven thematic areas of the UNGASS outcome document.

Portugal believes that equal efforts should be invested in all areas of drug policy, in respect of the UN Drug Conventions and other relevant instruments, in particular the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the conformity to which helps to ensure that while pursuing effective drug control policies we also respect the inherent dignity of all human beings.

This Ministerial meeting and Declaration represent an important moment, where we clearly recall the importance of implementing all our commitments, allowing us to better respond to the realities on the ground. This is a truly relevant moment, as we walk to a single track approach, reaffirming the multidimensional nature of those commitments and promoting its implementation in practice.

In this regard the political impetus we provide in this Declaration to the ongoing work to improve the quality and effectiveness of the Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ), in order to implement more targeted and effective drug policies and interventions, which reflect all UNGASS dimensions, is of utmost importance. This is an eminently technical work, but one that is decisive, and one we can't delay any longer!

Ladies and gentlemen,

The recommendations included in the UNGASS Outcome Document, strengthening action on the public health and human dimension of the world drug problem, are not new to Portugal.

Indeed, the Portuguese approach on drugs has been considered a model of best practices, due to the fact that over the past almost 20 years, Portugal has been implementing an integrated and comprehensive drug policy, using as its main guidelines the principles of humanism and pragmatism. Each individual's personal circumstances are assessed in order to determine the best response to his or her specific needs, including *prevention* for those who have not yet been in contact with drugs, *dissuasion* for those illicitly using them and

treatment, harm reduction and reintegration for addicted users. The implementation of a health and evidence based approach was facilitated by the decriminalization of consumption and possession for personal use of all drugs, below defined quantities. A Law, in place since 2001, decriminalized personal consumption of drugs, but maintains drug use and possession illegal, while ensuring access and availability for scientific and health issues, thus respecting the international drug control framework.

Decriminalisation is the most know component of our policy but I have to stress that it's only one of the elements of a comprehensive and integrated approach that includes prevention, treatment, harm reduction, reintegration and, yes, supply-side actions. Indeed, based on scientific evidence, the implementation of harm reduction measures, in particular needle exchange programmes and substitution treatments is a key factor of our policy, in accordance with the right to the highest attainable standard of health.

At the same time, we reaffirmed the commitment on supply reduction and related measures, including law enforcement, money-laundering and judicial cooperation and resources were directed from the prosecution of drug users to criminal networks which promote drugs trafficking.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Portugal would also like to seize this occasion to express and reiterate our deep regret that we have yet to address the abolition of the death penalty to drug related offences. I would like to underline Portugal's unrelenting opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances.

And to conclude, I would like to underscore the expectations for an inclusive debate that is open to new ideas and approaches on how to elaborate the post-2019 global drug policy in order to effectively incorporate the new aspects of international drug control enshrined in the UNGASS Outcome Document and to improve the current situation on international drug policy, reflecting the

crosscutting nature of our current framework and striving to protect the health and welfare of humankind.

And reflecting our commitment to face the challenges posed by the international drug situation we will also like to announce that Portugal will be hosting, in close cooperation with the UNODC, the 13th meeting of the Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies in Lisbon during this year.

Thank you for your attention and I will now address you very briefly in my capacity as Presidency of the Pompidou Group.