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**MESSAGE TO MEETING OF EUROPEAN UNION
NATIONAL DRUG COORDINATORS
ON ADVANCING HUMAN-RIGHTS-BASED DRUG POLICIES
20 May 2021**

I am pleased to greet this meeting of European Union national drug coordinators.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought home the basic truth that health and human rights are interconnected, and that human rights-driven efforts are crucial if the world is to get on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

My Call to Action for Human Rights emphasizes that it is our common responsibility to put human rights at the centre of all policies and decision-making processes -- including those related to drug control. In line with the international drug control framework, the world needs to pursue a holistic approach that unites health, criminal justice and social services, and that respects and protects human rights. For too long, efforts to address drug-related challenges have exacerbated stigma and discrimination, relied excessively on incarceration, and caused tremendous suffering.

The outcome document of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem is the agreed global framework for balanced, gender-sensitive and human rights-based drug policies. The UN system carries out wide-ranging efforts to support implementation of international drug control policy, underpinned by the UN System Common Position adopted in 2018.

Today the world needs to step up health-, human rights- and development-centred responses to drug supply and demand. The COVID crisis has hindered access to essential medicines and services, while heightening vulnerabilities to drug use disorders and other dangers, as reported in the World Drug Report to be launched next month by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

I welcome the new Drugs Strategy 2021-2025 adopted by the Council of the European Union, and its call for strengthened international cooperation. Working together, we can put people at the centre of our responses to drug challenges, in the pandemic recovery and beyond. Please accept my best wishes for fruitful discussions.