

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**UN General Assembly Special Session
on the World Drug Problem**

19 April 2016 – General Assembly Hall

**Opening remarks by H.E. Mr Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th session of the General Assembly**

Heads of State and Government, Honourable Ministers, Mr. Deputy Secretary-General, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to welcome you to this 30th Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS).

I wish to thank Minister Løhde for presiding over the opening of this meeting.

I also wish to thank the Commission for Narcotic Drugs in Vienna for leading the preparations for this special session, and I recognize the commitment and engagement of all which resulted in the document we have before us today.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

When young people see their health deteriorate, their life opportunities evaporate and their families disintegrate.

When those seeking treatment are stigmatized and discriminated against, and HIV/AIDS sufferers are marginalized.

When poor farmers struggle to find alternative sources of income, and indigenous peoples face challenges to their century-old practices.

When organised criminals bring in immense profits, attract disenfranchised youth, take over and destroy communities.

When courageous politicians and officers are gunned down, others are corrupted, and the entire State-apparatus is undermined.

When millions are imprisoned for possession, including of small quantities, and others are executed for trafficking.

When supply and demand affects societies differently and solutions in one country results in problems in another.

When those who need controlled substances for medical purposes, cannot have access to them.

When all of this and more comes together, you have the world drug problem.

A problem that demands international action. A problem that can be overcome.

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Excellencies, your presence and your engagement here today is a show of commitment to do just that.

A little over six months ago, many of you gathered in this very hall to embrace the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to send a signal to people everywhere that the transformation towards a more sustainable and just world was underway.

Today, bearing in mind the linkages between the two, we can deliver a similar message: That together we can more effectively address the world drug problem.

With openness and a willingness to learn, we can understand better that which separates us and rally around that which unites us.

We can build upon actions that have proven to work.

During these three days, in the Plenary, in roundtables and in side events, we will discuss the great challenges associated with this issue and how best to address them.

Because no society can claim to be completely free from the dire consequences that illicit drugs bring, or to have no relation to its many causes.

And no country can deny that addressing this problem is a common and shared responsibility.

Clearly, this is a problem with many dimensions – from human rights to sustainable development; from health impacts and the perspective of the drug users, and from corruption to organized crime.

Tackling illicit drugs, therefore, requires a long-term, integrated and multidisciplinary approach.

It calls also for coherence between our public health, social, education, sustainable development and law enforcement policies together with cooperation on local, regional and international levels as well as multilateral responses.

It requires that consideration be given to all the major causes, consequences and related aspects – such as respect for proportionality, for human rights and the rule of law; considerations regarding the well-being of society and of the individual, measures to bring about social stability and security – while striving for comprehensive and balanced policy interventions.

Furthermore, the past has shown that we can equip ourselves better for this challenge if we listen to each-other as member states, because every country experiences this problem and the solutions in their own way.

We must also listen to civil society, the scientific community and academia, parliamentarians, the youth, women, children and affected-communities.

I recognize and applaud the role played by each of these stakeholders in the preparatory process.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

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Notwithstanding the ever-increasing efforts and progress made by States, relevant international organizations and UN entities, as well as civil society, the world drug problem continues to affect the lives of millions of people and undermine sustainable development, political stability and democratic institutions.

It is indeed time to evaluate progress achieved since the last session, to reflect on new approaches and to address evolving and emerging challenges.

I hope therefore that the next three days will be an opportunity to look ahead to where we would like to be by 2019, when the current Political Declaration and Plan of Action comes to an end.

The Special Session on the World Drug Problem is now open.

I sincerely hope that it will provide a space for a productive discussion based on the document prepared by the CND that we are about to adopt.

And, in doing so, I hope that it helps us to address more effectively, more humanely, this complex world drug problem.

Thank you.