

National Statement by
Mr. Alex White, T.D.,
Minister of State at the Department of Health,
Ireland
at the
High Level Segment of the
57th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

***** CHECK AS DELIVERED *****

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I would like to begin by congratulating you, Your Excellency, for chairing the High Level Segment of the 57th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. I also wish to associate myself with the statement delivered by Greece on behalf of the European Union.

Since we adopted the Political Declaration and Plan of Action in 2009, the world drug problem has continued to evolve, giving rise to new threats to the health and well-being of our citizens. Ireland has been no exception to this trend.

I would like to take the opportunity of this Mid-Term Review to elaborate on some of the new challenges we have faced, as well as how our own National Drugs Strategy has evolved to take on new evidence-based approaches, while maintaining the overall balance between demand and supply reduction. Our Strategy remains fully consistent with our international commitments, notably the three international drug control conventions, the Political Declaration and Plan of Action, and the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan.

Ireland has been among those Member States that have been most affected by the challenge posed by new psychoactive substances.

In response to widespread public concern in our country about the proliferation of so-called “head shops” which were supplying new psychoactive substances, we controlled approximately 260 substances and introduced innovative criminal justice legislation to make it an offence to sell, import, export or advertise unregulated new psychoactive substances.

These measures have led to almost complete closure of head shops in our State. However, we cannot be complacent in this regard and law enforcement work continues in order to monitor and control availability of these substances through the Internet and any other means.

Tackling the related harms which drug markets bring with them remains a feature of our national drug strategy. In Ireland this has been a problem particularly in the context of drug debt and related violence and intimidation.

To tackle this type of crime, a national programme has been put in place whereby our police authorities work closely in conjunction with a national community based family support organisation. Under the programme, those affected are able to report such criminal activity in a safe and confidential way.

Prevention and awareness programmes constitute a significant part of our response to the drugs problem in Ireland. Effective drug prevention entails more than just giving information on the harmfulness of drugs, but must also build resilience in young people so that they are better equipped to make healthy lifestyle choices. As well as providing substance-use education in schools, we support young people at risk of drug misuse

through running diversionary programmes, providing facilities and services and offering family support. This approach has been complemented by our success in addressing early school leaving.

As regards treatment, our focus is to move people on to a drug-free life where that is achievable. Ireland has a population of 4.6m and there are approximately 12,500 people accessing treatment services in our country, of whom over 9,500 are attending opioid substitution treatment.

In Ireland, it is recognised that harm reduction measures can reduce drug-related harm and facilitate recovery through providing a pathway into services.

There is also evidence that poly-drug use is increasing. In this regard we have broadened our approach to recognise the challenges associated with the combined use of licit and illicit substances, misuse of prescribed controlled medications and the use of new psychoactive substances.

Social integration can also be a difficult challenge for those striving to overcome drug use problems. Ireland's drug rehabilitation framework takes account of the need for all the relevant services from treatment to welfare support to housing, education and employment initiatives to work

in a coordinated way to help individuals make the transition from addiction towards the ultimate goal of recovery.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm Ireland's commitment to the Political Declaration and Plan of Action as well as our readiness to contribute to a continuing debate and dialogue on drugs issues, including through participation at this afternoon's Round-Table on Supply Reduction and looking further ahead to the UN General Assembly Special Session in 2016.

In line with our commitment across all international fora, the promotion and protection of human rights underpins Ireland's approach to drugs policy. It is with considerable concern and regret that we find it necessary in this forum to reiterate our opposition to the imposition of the death penalty under any circumstances.

I would also highlight that a common thread throughout our National Drugs Strategy is the partnership approach, which brings together statutory agencies, law enforcement, local communities and civil society to tackle drugs issues from the ground up. This partnership has been crucial in the implementation of our policies at all levels, from local to international.

In this regard, I would like to reiterate Ireland's continued commitment to the active participation of civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the work of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, all the more so in light of the preparatory process for the UN General Assembly Special Session in 2016.