

Media Update

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United Nations

SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT TRAFFICKING 26 June 2021

Science and trust in science are the hero and lesson of the pandemic; the world needs both to win against the virus. Scientists delivered safe and effective vaccines in record time. Access to reliable and verifiable information is making the difference between life and death.

Action based on evidence is crucial for our responses to drugs, too.

The world drug problem remains an urgent challenge that threatens to exacerbate pandemic impacts and hinder a healthy and inclusive recovery. The forthcoming World Drug Report 2021 from the United Office on Drugs and Crime shows that deaths attributed to disorders related to drug use have nearly doubled over the past decade. New HIV infections among adults worldwide have declined in recent years, but not among people who inject drugs, who accounted for 10 per cent of new infections in 2019.

International cooperation has helped to limit the proliferation of new psychoactive substances, but the problem is shifting to poorer regions where control systems are weaker. Dark web drug sales continue to rise, and non-medical use of pharmaceuticals, including opioids, is expanding.

Drug trafficking and organized crime fuel and perpetuate cycles of violence and conflict. Armed groups and terrorists profit from the illicit drug trade, and the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic has left millions of people even more vulnerable to drug crime and illicit crop cultivation.

Disparities in access to essential controlled medicines in low- and middle-income countries have been further heightened in the pandemic. For example, medical professionals in West and Central Africa in 2019 had four doses of pain medication every day for one million inhabitants; in North America, the number of doses was nearly 32,000.

Investing in balanced prevention as well as control of drug use and drug use disorders produces solid returns -- saved lives, healthier populations, improved workforce participation and productivity, and reduced criminal justice costs.

Many of the risk factors associated with crime and violent behaviour are also drivers of drug use, and targeted efforts focusing on these overlapping dynamics -- including childhood maltreatment and lack of social support -- can help to strengthen prevention.

Moreover, research suggests that law enforcement and policing need to go after the criminals at the upper levels of the drug trafficking chain, who reap the highest profits and wreak the greatest violence.

Public-private partnerships - with tech companies, postal and courier services, and shipping companies - represent an essential frontline response in the new fight against drug traffickers, who are increasingly exploiting the legal cargo trade and postal services to move their illicit product.

Better data is also helping to identify trends and enable real-time monitoring of rapidly shifting trafficking routes. Science-driven early warning systems are helping to predict emerging drug threats. Greater international cooperation and support are needed to help low-income countries to take advantage of these advanced capabilities.

The theme of this year's observance of the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, "Share facts on drugs. Save lives" is a call for solidarity. I urge all Member States to listen to the science and take action, building on agreed international frameworks and drawing on United Nations support for health and justice.