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**Statement by Prof. Jallal Toufiq,
President of the International Narcotics Control Board**

**67th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
High-level side event:
“Global call for action: scaling up evidence-based, social and
health services to address substance use disorders”
Thursday 14 March, 17:00-18:30**

Madam Chair, Ms. Waly, Ministers, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to be here today, and I would like to first express my gratitude to the organizers of this event, mainly Switzerland and Italy, for the invitation. Being here is not only an honour as the President of the INCB, but it is also significant for me as well due to the ideals and principles that have guided my professional life as a medical doctor and a psychiatrist.

Over the last decades, I have witnessed first-hand how evidence-based prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation services help patients overcome substance use and substance use disorders. However, in many countries, these services are not always available, and access to them is hindered by stigmatization

and discrimination, preventing vulnerable groups from obtaining crucial assistance for their health and welfare.

The commitment made by State Parties to the drug control conventions requires them to give special attention to, and take all practicable measures for, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and social reintegration. While the conventions do not prescribe specific approaches, they underline the importance of ensuring that provided services are based on evidence of efficacy, success and effectiveness. In this context, I would like to mention the significant contributions of UNODC and WHO in developing the International Standards for the treatment of drug use disorders, which INCB actively promotes.

Treatment of drug use disorders, rehabilitation, and social reintegration are key operational objectives of the recommendations on drug demand reduction in the outcome document of UNGASS 2016. The General Assembly, in this document, recognizes drug dependence as a complex health disorder that can be treated through evidence-based and voluntary treatment programs, calling for enhanced international cooperation in developing and implementing treatment initiatives. This aligns with the theme chosen for this event, emphasizing the need to scale up services appropriately.

Despite the relevance given to the issue in treaties and official documents, there is a significant gap in the availability of

resources for treatment and rehabilitation services. Globally, WHO estimates that only 1.7 beds per 100,000 people are available for the treatment of drug and alcohol dependence, with a stark disparity between higher- income and lower-middle-income countries.

UNODC reports that globally only 1 out of 6 people in need of drug dependence treatment has access to those treatment programs, and, again, the resource gap is more pronounced in lower- and middle-income countries. Furthermore, within countries, access to treatment and rehabilitation services tends to be unequal, with a lack of gender-sensitive treatment services contributing to the disproportionately low access for women with drug problems.

Another facet of the treatment gap is the disparity in the type of treatment available and accessible. Globally, only a third of countries report the availability of psychosocial interventions, and less than a quarter report the availability of medication-based interventions, despite strong evidence supporting their effectiveness.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The Board has continuously emphasized the need for countries to protect the rights of people impacted by drug use disorders, advocating for non-discriminatory access to treatment, rehabilitation, and social reintegration services.

The evidence available demonstrates that the treatment of drug dependence is highly cost-effective and less expensive than criminal justice interventions. It should be viewed as an essential element of the right to health, with a priority on developing specific interventions for specific vulnerable groups.

INCB has recommended that governments develop a cadre of skilled and trained personnel to provide evidence-based treatment for drug use disorders. Collaboration with non-governmental organizations and civil society partners is encouraged to improve the availability and reach of treatment services, reduce stigma and discrimination, and ensure that effective treatment is easily accessible to all who need it. Continued research is also crucial to finding effective treatment for all types of drug use disorders.

People affected by drug use disorders have the right to be treated with dignity, just like any other person affected by any other health condition. Scaling up services is an imperative for all of us.

Thank you.