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International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)**

**INCB 141st session
Consultation with Member States:
The human rights dimension of the drug control conventions**

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Statement on terminology

The Board recognizes that the careful use of drug-related terminology, that is the language we use to speak and write about drug control efforts and measures as well as health conditions, can help protect and fulfil the universal human rights we all enjoy under the Universal Declaration and help to prevent discriminatory and exclusionary practices.

We believe, and our publications seek to underscore, that the choice of drug-related terminology can directly affect our collective efforts to protect human rights, promote equal opportunities, and address past discrimination. Carefully addressing terminology emphasizes that non-discrimination is not just a salute to human rights but furthers our obligation to remedy the intended or unintended discriminatory impact of language choices used to articulate drug policies.

Strengthening international drug control cooperation through appropriately chosen language promotes the human rights-strengthening principle that everyone must be treated with dignity and respect when accessing healthcare and social services. Based on this, the Board's publications, for example, prefer the term "substance use disorder" to "drug abuse" not just to promote accuracy but also to curb negative biases and to help combat stigmatization of people who use drugs. This choice of words also pushes back on the notion that substance use disorders are life choices rather than treatable, chronic health conditions.

Careful use of terminology, in and of itself, won't end stigmatization, but it can help those who suffer from substance use disorders enjoy the highest attainable level of health. Careful use of language and terminology can be part of our comprehensive, collective effort to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, including the rights of those affected by substance use disorders who need access to treatment, rehabilitation, social reintegration and recovery services free from discrimination, prejudice, and stigma. The use of non-stigmatizing language can help ensure that people who use suffer from substance use disorders can access treatment and care, reduce social isolation and promote reintegration.

Approaching drug-related terminology through this lens also gives one an opportunity to be sensitive to the ways that language choices can exacerbate the challenges that minority or marginalized communities, women, children and youth, and

people living in poverty sometimes face. The language we choose, therefore, must promote inclusivity, including gender-inclusivity, respect for cultural and racial diversity, and be attuned to aggravated effects on individuals and communities due to multiple forms of discrimination.

As societal approaches to drug control continue to evolve, language precision will help with both effective data collection and better monitoring and evaluation of treaty compliance, including in the areas of access to and delivery of health services.

We recognize that Member States must first and foremost use the terminology and language that meets their national legal and policy frameworks and is understandable to their public. Nonetheless, we must also recognize that inappropriate drug-related terminology can have outsized impacts on the ability of people to access medicines and health services. For this reason, the Board routinely examines the use of drug-related lexicons, such as the lexicon from WHO. Addressing ambiguities in terminology, as well as speaking out against stigmatizing language, helps the Board and Member States collectively address impediments to the availability of controlled substances and the provision of evidence-based prevention and treatment services.

The Board has consistently argued that drug control policies and actions can and must be consistent with Member States human rights obligations; and thus, drug-related terminology should also promote respect for human rights norms, including broader efforts to eliminate discrimination.

The Board remains at the service of Governments taking stock of their human rights obligations inherent in the effective implementation of the drug control treaties and will continue to promote drug control terminology that avoids stigma and discrimination.

Thank you.