## UNODC input to the report of the High Commissioner on Human Rights on human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem, pursuant to resolution 54/22

Production of drugs continues to show concerning signs of increase. Global cocaine supply is at record levels and coca bush cultivation has expanded, according to the 2023 UNODC Global Report on Cocaine. Methamphetamine seizures rose five-fold between 2010 and 2020 (WDR 2022). UNODC further reported that the 2022 illicit opium crop in Afghanistan was the third largest area under cultivation on record. In this context, the following is a brief overview of human rights challenges in addressing and countering different aspects of the world drug problem.

According to the 2023 UNODC World Drug Report (WDR, forthcoming), some 296 million people used drugs worldwide in 2021. More young people are using more drugs compared with previous generations, and according to WHO, drug use is rapidly increasing in Africa, outpacing usage increases in other regions. Early onset of drug use among children is associated to higher rates of mental health disorders, including drug use disorders, later in life.

Less than 20% of the 38.9 million people with drug use disorders are in treatment, and access to treatment in health care systems in many countries is very limited or largely absent. A gender gap in treatment is evident, with women accounting for almost one in two users of amphetamine-type stimulants but only one in five in treatment for related disorders (WDR 2022). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted access to essential services for millions of people, including those who use drugs, with continuing negative impacts on public health and reduction of harms.

In the context of this gap in services, nearly 600,000 people continue to die every year due to drug-related causes, namely viral hepatitis, HIV, overdose and injuries (WHO). The epidemics of non-medical use of opioids and mixed-mechanism opioids continue to pose health risks in the Near and Middle East, North Africa, South-West Asia and West Africa. In North America, fentanyl related overdose deaths were at an all-time high during the COVID-19 pandemic (WDR 2022).

Moreover, around half of the estimated 11.2 million people injecting drugs globally have chronic viral hepatitis C, while 10% are living with HIV (WDR 2022). According to UNAIDS, people who inject drugs are at 35 times higher risk to acquire HIV compared to the general population, and injecting drug use is estimated to be associated with 20% of new HIV infections worldwide, outside Africa.

Millions of people come into contact with the criminal justice system for drug-related offences. UNODC analysis found that out of 3.1 million arrested for drug offences globally, an estimated 61% were arrested for possession of drugs, while 78% of the 2.5 million people in prison for drug offences – who account for some 20% of the total global prison population – were sentenced for drug trafficking.

Finally, access to controlled substances for pain relief and palliative care in the context of universal health coverage remains limited: people in low- and middle-income countries, which account for 84% of the world’s population, have access to just 7% of all internationally controlled opioids.