

# CANADA –APRIL 20 2016

## TECHNICAL SERVICES – NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION OR WEB

Mr. Chair, Heads of State and Government, Ministers and distinguished delegates. I am honoured to participate in this Special Session of the UN General Assembly.

This gathering is an opportunity to revisit our efforts in global drug policy.

A few weeks ago, in preparation for this event, I met with a group of NGOs in Ottawa. There were lawyers, doctors and highly articulate activists. But the most powerful voice of all belonged to a mother.

She was there to tell the story of her young daughter, who lost her life due to complications of substance use. She described watching her daughter slip away, as she struggled to access the treatment and services that may have saved a beautiful, fragile life.

Stories like this are far too commonplace. Countless lives are cut short due to overdoses of licit and illicit drugs.

Today, I stand before you as Canada's Minister of Health, to acknowledge that we must do better for our citizens.

I am proud to stand up for drug policy that is informed by solid scientific evidence and uses a lens of public health to maximize education and minimize harm.

As a doctor who has worked in both Canada and sub-Saharan Africa, I've seen too many people suffer the devastating consequences of drugs, drug-related crime, and ill-conceived drug policy.

Fortunately, solutions are within our grasp.

In my own country, I am impressed with the work of Insite, a supervised consumption site where people with addiction access the care and support they need.

I am proud at how quickly we are making naloxone antidote kits more available, to save lives from opioid overdoses.

I sense an urgency to work together to find solutions, from big cities to remote indigenous communities.

I know this goodwill and generosity also exists internationally.

Indeed, I was heartened by the INCB President's recent reminder to us that we must put health and welfare at the centre of a balanced approach to treaty implementation.

Our approach to drugs must be comprehensive, collaborative and compassionate. It must respect human rights while promoting shared responsibility. And it must have a firm scientific foundation.

In Canada, we will apply these principles with regard to marijuana.

To that end, we will introduce legislation in Spring 2017 that ensures we keep marijuana out of the hands of children and profits out of the hands of criminals.

While this plan challenges the status quo in many countries, we are convinced it is the best way to protect our youth while enhancing public safety.

Canada will continue to modernize our approach to drug policy. Building on our successes, such as Insite, our work will embrace upstream prevention, compassionate treatment, and harm reduction.

We will work with law enforcement partners to encourage appropriate and proportionate criminal justice measures. We know it is impossible to arrest our way out of this problem.

Addressing problematic drug use is a shared challenge. The solutions are also collective - involving governments, indigenous peoples, civil society, youth, scientists and key UN agencies.

I acknowledge that other countries and cultures will pursue approaches that differ from Canada's.

I believe that—if we respect one another's perspectives and seek common ground—we can achieve our shared objective: protecting our citizens.

Better yet, we can improve their lives.

Thank you.