Synthetic opioids and the non-medical use of prescription drugs pose increasing risks to public health and safety, as well as scientific, legal and regulatory challenges, including with regard to the scheduling of substances;

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Mr. Chair, expert panelists and other experts from member states, I take this opportunity to extend our deepest gratitude to CND for this opportunity and for the experts from INCB, UNODC and other organizations for their excellent presentations which gave us great insights on various aspects of the challenges and directions to way forward.

Mr. Chair, the objective of my presentation is to share our views on the challenges and proposals to way forward.

Synthetic opioids and the non-medical use of prescription drugs have become more abundant everywhere around the world, more sophisticated and more diverse than it has ever been before. Overdose deaths, permanent physical and psychological damage including agitation, violent behaviour, psychosis, paranoia and anxiety, fatal and non-fatal intoxications are a few of the devastating consequences we identify today. This emerging problem impacts adversely on the right of people to lead a healthy life, to live in a safe society. Also affects severely on the children and women across the world, socio-economic development of countries and security, stability and sovereignty of the countries.

The prevalence of synthetic opioid use is hard to estimate. The drug market of synthetic opioids, is continuously changing. They are emerging at an unprecedented rate. They are not detected by standard toxicology screens, therefore exposure to new synthetic opioids in cases medical treatment may remain unrecognized and under-reported. Even though in the last few years more evidence has emerged about the harmful effects, information are obtained from data on acute clinical toxicity and often are limited to retrospective analysis, surveys and case reports. Therefore with the existing data we have not been able to assess the extent and scope of the problem (to define the problem as clearly as possible) and determine the effectiveness of the current response to this global issue.

The spiraling growth in the sale of prescription drugs over the Internet, dark net and social media and distribution through international mailing system and express consignment carrier facilities represents a serious challenge to drug safety regulators and law enforcement agencies. Drug law enforcement agencies face many challenges in tackling drug trafficking organizations who exploit scientific developments more heavily in the production of synthetic drugs, use technological advancements, communication tools,
increasingly adopt encryption and other means of concealment, electronic money-laundering with the growth of online financial service companies.

Mr. Chair we would like to emphasize that in order to address the emerging threats effectively and impactful manner, we need to identify the critical deficiencies.
For that we propose the few areas which need to be explored.

a. Considering the significant increase and the complexity of the problem, we need to develop more effective measurable indicators to assess the extent of the drug problem as clearly as possible
b. Secondly, we need to examine whether the current policies address the root cause of the problem.
c. Do the scientific and technical professionals play an active role in drug policy making?
d. Do we have any mechanism to develop coordination and cooperation with scientific professionals and all related agencies at all levels to promote utilization of science, technology and innovative approaches?
e. More effective measurable indicators are also needed to measure the effectiveness of the appropriate actions taken by the Member states in terms of international policy documents.

There are no doubts that scientific evidence is inevitable in the formulation of comprehensive, balanced, coordinated policies to combat against illicit drug trafficking and abuse. Scientific evidence are not properly utilized for intelligence gathering such as identification of the sources of drugs and distribution networks, investigation and operational activities of law enforcement agencies, criminal justice agencies to effectively prosecute drug-related offences and as well as for prevention, treatment and rehabilitation measures.

Government of Sri Lanka has recognized that the drug problem should be addressed in a multilateral setting through effective and increased national and international cooperation and coordination. Committing to the goals and the objectives of the international drug control treaties, other policy documents and recognizing the fact that limited inter- and intra-agency coordination and collaboration is a major drawback to improve the adequate scientific advice on drug policy.
In this context, we would like to express our gratitude to UNODC as the leading entity for scientific, technical and financial support extended to the National Narcotics Laboratory of NDDCB, Sri Lanka so for with which we are confident that we will be able to uplift and strengthening science advice for drug policy. Moreover, NDDCB also has taken many initiative actions in improve of scientific strategies for drug prevention and control in Sri Lanka in partnership with International Network for Government Science Advice (INGSA).

- Expert Meeting on Comprehensive, Balanced and Coordinated Scientific Strategy to Counter Illicit Drug Trafficking and Prevention and Control 05th-06th March 2019, Colombo, Sri Lanka (addressing drug law enforcement challenges through scientific evidence and technical support, role
of scientific professionals in countering illicit drug trafficking and abuse, impact of emerging drug trafficking and abuse problem on the Criminal Justice System and strategies to overcome challenges, challenges on implementation of measures for drug demand reduction, scientific evidence based methodologies for drug prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.)

- Establishment of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) platform (The STI platform is a multi-stakeholder online communication channel which facilitate collaboration and partnerships to coordinate drug prevention and control activities and to work together with NDDCB, the drug law enforcement agencies, health authorities, criminal justice agencies, education sector agencies, scientific community, academia, local governments, NGOs, private sector agencies, civil societies, industry, eligible knowledge-brokers and general-public)
- Memorandum of Understanding on Networking of Drug Testing Laboratories in Sri Lanka
- Guideline on Science Advice on National Drug Policy Making (Preparation in progress)
- Establishment of Scientific Subcommittee under NDDCB to improve scientific advice for drug prevention and control activities

Moving forward we would like to explore innovative approaches which address the root courses of the problem and to better understanding of what increases an individual’s vulnerability to initiating the use of substances which leads to drug use disorders with the technique of mindfulness.

In addiction treatment strategies we try to avoid cues/ triggers. Other treatments suggest substituted behaviors. Instead of drug we substitute is with other substance which is less harm. With this understanding we see how mindfulness will effective in preventing drug abuse and addiction treatment.

Mindfulness is defined as the awareness of thoughts and sensations occurring in the present moment with the acceptance and non-judgmental focus. With this practice you will clearly see when urge or craving arises and before we act on it. The practice inculcates a powerful skill to respond to a given situation appropriately. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that practice of mindfulness is effective and impactful in addressing root courses of drug-related issues by preventing the drug abuse in reducing relapse rate and thereby preventing overcrowding in prisons and treatment settings.

We are in the process of exploring how mindfulness practice would help address the root course of this problem first at individual level then at the societal level with the support of “SatiPasala”, “Mindful school”, a non-profit organization of Sri Lanka which aims at sharing mindfulness with students, teachers, and school and university communities, as well as those in other relevant sectors.
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Furthermore, therapeutic applications of mindfulness practices have proven by research and are being practiced in many countries in school and prison settings.

Therefore, we believe that the introduction of mindfulness to this sector addresses not only the drug-related issues but also other burning issues in the society.

Before conclude I would like to share a video which gives us great insights on the effectiveness of mindfulness in school settings.

Thank you Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.