Agenda Item 5 (d): International cooperation to ensure the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their diversion

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Thank you, Chair. I want to start my intervention by saying, ‘We are in crisis!’ Let me repeat this again: ‘We are in crisis!’ We have been coming to this meeting as if everything was okay – we are not! Have we been ignoring the elephant in the room? Harm reduction clinics have been closed down; people have been denied services due to the severe funding cuts we are experiencing. The International Network of People who Use Drugs conducted a rapid assessment to understand the impact of the current financial crisis on the lives and well-being of people who use drugs, including lifesaving services globally.

Some key preliminary survey findings show that of the 76 responses received over the course of five days, approximately 77%, of which 67% were community-led, noted severe disruption to programmes for people who use drugs, including the provision and availability of Opioid Agonist Treatment. In Africa, 10 countries reported no access to either Methadone and/or Buprenorphine. Similar reports also came from 3 countries in Asia, two in Western Europe, one in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and one in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The loss of harm reduction services, particularly Opioid Agonist Treatment, is leading to increased health risks and will have a direct human impact – I am talking about a return to raging HIV, hepatitis C, and overdose epidemics among people who use drugs globally. So we can forget about achieving the 2030 targets on ending AIDS, including the SDG targets.

In the last couple of days, we have been talking about saving lives – but in fact, we are killing lives – the lives of people who are often neglected, left-behind, and forgotten – people who use drugs.

I will close my statement by reminding everyone to not forget the impact towards OAT services in Crimea annexation in 2014 kill almost 100 people who use drugs due to the OAT service disruption. My name is Anton Basenko, I am a proud drug user from Ukraine. Viva la Ukraine.