

Speech for the CND Intersessional Meeting – 1 October 2025

Delivered by Dr. Massimo Barra, on behalf of the International
Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

*Adverse health consequences of and risks associated with new
psychoactive substances have reached alarming levels*

Thank you Chair,

The emergence and rapid spread of the so called new psychoactive substances represent a pressing public health challenge. Synthetic drugs are produced quickly, distributed easily, and carry extraordinary potency. The result is a wave of overdoses and social harm that is already overwhelming communities and health systems in many parts of the world.

What is urgently needed today is a coordinated, health-centered strategy, that places human dignity and easy access to treatment at its core.

History has demonstrated that punitive, criminal justice-led approaches alone are not effective. Too often they push people further into marginalization and away from the care they need.

Allow me to outline three essential priorities for a humanitarian response to this crisis:

First, saving lives through harm reduction and overdose intervention. Expanding access to naloxone and preparing health systems to respond to fentanyl-related emergencies must be considered indispensable measures.

Second, ensuring easy access to treatment without stigma. Evidence-based care for substance use disorders must be

available, affordable, and free from punitive restrictions. Without this, people in need are left without options.

Third, strengthening alternatives to incarceration. Criminalizing drug use perpetuates cycles of exclusion and suffering. Countries that have adopted health-centered approaches have seen reductions in deaths, crime, and pressure on prison systems. Prisons are phatologic and pathogenic. Prison create phatologie. It is in every country's interest to ensure that people with drug disorders are under a treatment regime, not a judicial one , considering the concrete results that such measures can deliver.

Member States should also consider pre-arrest diversion and deflection as evidence-based best practices, enabling police to redirect people with drug problems towards health services instead of the courts. The Red Cross and Red Crescent, together with dozens of international partners, are already working to

promote what we call humanitarian drug policy, through specific programmes, capacity building, and advocacy.

This is the vision of the *Rome Consensus 2.0* initiative — a global call for a health-based, humanitarian approach to drug policy. We warmly invite Member States to join this effort and to bring their support, so that together we can strengthen our collective response.

Thank you.