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AFRICAN UNION JOINS THE GLOBAL COALITION TO ADDRESS SYNTHETIC DRUG THREATS

The African Union (AU) has joined the Global Coalition of more than 80 countries, led by the United States of America, and International organisations including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) to address challenges caused by synthetic drug trafficking and use throughout the world. Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, H.E. Amb. Minata Samate Cessouma, pledged the AU's commitment to the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats, during a virtual launch led by US Secretary of State, Mr Antony J. Blinken on Friday 7th of July 2023.

Synthetic drugs are killing people across the globe, straining public health systems, and emboldening drug producers and traffickers who use illicit profits to destabilize countries where they operate. Also known as “designer drugs” or new psychoactive substances (NPS), synthetic drugs are intoxicating substances manufactured to mimic effects of controlled drugs. They have no legitimate medical uses and are usually marketed as cheap substitutes for real drugs in the form of cannabinoids (chemically similar to marijuana) or cathinones (chemically similar to amphetamines) and are deadly to the health of users.

“Africa is under siege as a major transit hub for trafficked drugs destined for lucrative European markets. We are indeed facing a challenge of epic proportions and find ourselves at cross roads.” said H.E. Amb. Minata Samate Cessouma during the launch of the Global Coalition.

On the one hand, the African continent is experiencing a rise in drug trafficking and related crime including corruption and other forms of transnational organized crime such as trafficking in human beings and firearms, cybercrime, money laundering and illicit financial flows. On the other, the continent is confronted by rapidly rising consumption of synthetic drugs, an exponential growth in the number of people who use drugs and those with substance use and related mental health disorders especially youth, women and children. The African Union's Pan African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (PAENDU) report for 2019-2021 highlighted the challenge of synthetic drugs such as Tramadol and Methamphetamine, and a meteoric rise in new psychoactive substances trafficked and clandestinely produced for local consumption.

“To us, harnessing the demographic dividend remains central to realising Africa's aspiration for socio-economic transformation. It presents a great opportunity to building resilience of young people and addressing root causes of some key challenges facing Africa today, including drug trafficking and use, forced migration, radicalization and violent extremism” underscored Commissioner Samate Cessouma. “African Union is working with its member states to implement the overarching continental drug action plan whose main goal is to improve the health, security and socio-economic well-being of people in Africa by addressing drug trafficking and

problematic drug use, in all its forms and manifestations and preventing the onset of drug use” the Commissioner added.

The high level meeting was also addressed by US Secretary of State, Mr Blinken, WHO Director General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Prime Ministers, and Ministers of Interior, Drug Control, Crime Prevention, Security and Intelligence of member states of United Nations and representatives of other international law enforcement organizations who are part of the coalition.

The Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats will help accelerate efforts against illicit synthetic drugs and employ coordinated approaches to prevent illicit drug manufacturing, detect emerging drug threats, disrupt trafficking, address illicit finance, and respond to public safety and public health impacts. Additionally, the Global Coalition will develop solutions, drive national actions, and create synergies and leverage among like-minded countries who agree that countering illicit synthetic drugs must be a global policy priority.

Read more about the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2019-2023) @ <https://au.int/node/36768>

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