

INTERVENTO SIDE EVENT 10 MARZO 2025 Vienna

(Piano italiano Fentanyl)

Dear Executive Director Ghada Waly

Distinguished Panelists and Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

The new synthetic drugs - led by fentanyl - are revolutionising the geography of drug trafficking.

From the point of view of illicit producers, fentanyl and similar substances are preferable to traditional drugs: they have low production costs, are cheap, highly addictive and easy to manufacture using a variety of common chemicals that are readily available, concentrated and therefore easy to conceal and smuggle.

The production of synthetic drugs on the massive scale we have seen in recent years is only possible thanks to the extensive chemical industries of sufficiently large and complex economies. This means that drugs no longer come exclusively from Latin American or Southeast Asian countries, where local agricultural production could be used to synthesise substances for the rich Western markets.

Analysis of major cryptocurrency platforms (Elliptic, TRM and Chainalysis) has uncovered several companies supplying fentanyl precursors, more than 90 of which are based in China. Ninety percent of these companies accept payments in the cryptocurrencies bitcoin and tether, facilitating the laundering of billions of dollars. Seventeen of these companies have even publicly offered to supply fentanyl, despite the Chinese government's 2019 ban. Other companies offer a range of chemicals, including synthetic opioid precursors, amphetamines and methamphetamines.

These operators' cryptocurrency wallets - electronic payment instruments that can generate and store cryptocurrency value, send and receive payments in crypto, monitor the balances of stored values, and connect to the various blockchain networks - receive tens of millions of dollars through thousands of transactions, with an increasing number of payments sent to addresses shared by

precursor suppliers. This enables the acquisition of additional precursors for the production of fentanyl.

Artificial Intelligence also plays a key role in the field of new drugs. The latter is exploited not only by “professional” illicit laboratories, to identify new chemical synthesis processes, but also by neophytes, to easily acquire the notions useful in the chemical processing of substances from legally acquired products and tools.

Italy was one of the first countries to develop a national plan to prevent the abuse of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids in 2024.

There is no current emergency in Italy, but we want to be prepared and able to respond quickly if one were to occur.

The characteristic feature of this plan is that it involves, under the coordination of Department for AntiDrugs Policies and other Addictions, all the main actors whose actions are relevant in this field, namely: most Italian ministries, law enforcement agencies, research centres, poison control centres, forensic toxicologists and, of course, the Italian National Drug Early Warning System.

The plan is divided into two main parts: the first covers prevention measures and the second emergency management.

For each agency involved, it outlines both the actions to be activated and the transversal actions involving the support and cooperation of several agencies.

Preventive measures include: strengthening controls to prevent the diversion of medicinal substances, increasing the monitoring of the Internet and providing law enforcement agencies with rapid identification tools for synthetic drugs.

We have also set up a network of forensic toxicology laboratories throughout the country to improve the ability to carry out toxicological tests on seized substances. Meanwhile, we aim to raise awareness of the phenomenon of fentanyl and synthetic drugs among judicial authorities so that they request thorough analyses in cases of suspected acute intoxication or violent deaths.

We have also standardised the protocols of hospital laboratories and forensic toxicology laboratories and activated emergency rooms, intensive care units and emergency clinical laboratories to carry out targeted analysis in cases of acute intoxication. The plan also includes training for law enforcement officers, health professionals and social workers.

Finally, I would like to say that our action has not been limited to drawing up the plan, as we are holding regular coordination meetings in order to have a constantly updated overview of the situation.

Thank you very much for your attention, and I would particularly like to thank Executive Director Waly for being with us today, as well as her colleagues from UNODC, and the panellists for their very interesting contributions to our discussion.

In the face of new challenges, it is crucial to be able to count on the expertise and cooperation of specialised international agencies and all our partners around the world.