



**STATEMENT OF H.E. MR. JUAN JOSÉ QUINTANA, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
COLOMBIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS IN GENEVA, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE *WHO GUIDELINES ON THE
COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OF OPIOID OVERDOSE***

5th of November 2014

1. First, I want to thank you for organizing this important event and for the presentations made on this fascinating subject.
2. We consider the launch of these guidelines to be very timely, since health systems are now recognizing the need to involve other actors to address the problem of opioid overdose.
3. Indeed, there are great concerns about the widespread prescription of Naloxone by persons without proper medical training, and the collateral side effects of such widespread prescription.
4. Despite the inherent risks of providing Naloxone to users of “Needle Exchange Programs” a significant number of studies indicate that it is possible to train users and their families in the use of this drug, and that the early implementation of such training has prevented a considerable number of fatal overdoses.
5. I would like to say that heroin use is still a relatively small problem, but there are worrying signs. According to the National Study of Psychoactive Substances of 2013, about 32,000 people have used heroin at least once in their lifetimes and about 110,000 people have injected drugs.
6. Therefore, today it is recognized that heroin abuse is a reality in different regions of Colombia and that the use of this drug by injection represents a significant risk to public health.
7. That is why the process of care based on harm reduction is part of the new National Plan for Health Promotion, Prevention and Treatment of Psychoactive Substance Use, adopted by the Ministry of Health and Welfare last July.
8. Currently, the Ministry is preparing a pilot program in Pereira, a city in the middle of the country that has the highest consumption of heroin. Under the program, the Ministry will



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pursue specified harm reduction targets in heroin usage, by delivering hygiene kits containing, amongst other things, a syringe, alcohol, and sterile water.

9. The Ministry of Health will closely monitor and assess the operation and implementation of this program in order to extend it throughout the country.
10. Under this program, Naloxone is part of the list of medicines included in the national health plan and its use is allowed at the inpatient care. Nevertheless, it is recognized that the Ministry of Health must continue to improve the availability of information of cases of poisoning or overdose of opiates in order to fine-tune this policy.
11. Similarly, the program will allow the use of Naloxone in primary care and in methadone programs, as well as in emergency facilities and ambulances.