



## PRESS RELEASE

### WVA opposes rescheduling of ketamine

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#### Introduction

Ketamine is an important drug for anaesthesia in veterinary medicine. It is used for veterinary medical interventions and to restrain dangerous animals. Since it is often the only available, injectable anaesthetic drug, it cannot be missed. The World Veterinary Association (WVA) therefore opposes initiatives to restrict the availability of Ketamine by placing it in Schedule I of the 1971 UN Convention on psychotropic substances. WVA supports the decision of WHO ECDD not to recommend ketamine scheduling.

#### WVA Position

**WVA strongly objects to re-classification of ketamine, as this could lead to ketamine no longer being available to veterinary and medical clinicians, especially in remote areas.** Thus, the WVA supports the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD) – which critically evaluated ketamine in 2006, 2012 and 2014, and – which did not recommend to place ketamine under international control.

WVA is aware of the potential public health problems caused by illicit use of ketamine; however, the impact of the reduction of its availability would allow for incomparable more loss to the global health. National legislation, if implemented and enforced, allows for sufficient control of ketamine use; Even so, it should not take the unjustifiable extent that could limit the actions of human and veterinary medical services in protecting human and animal life and wellbeing.

The WVA position is supported by the World Medical Association (WMA). Dr. Xavier Deau, President of the WMA, said: ‘We understand that the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs is concerned about Ketamine’s use as a recreational drug. However the action it is proposing would make the drug unavailable and increase the level of suffering for people in the most difficult of clinical circumstances (click [HERE](#) for the WMA Press release).

#### Background

Ketamine is widely used for anaesthesia in human and veterinary medicine around the world, and allows surgical procedures to take place in remote places where anaesthesia with inhalants is impossible. Ketamine is also the anaesthetic of choice for emergencies and in disaster relief, both in developing and industrialized countries.

Ketamine is essential for veterinary use, because it is the only injectable anaesthetic that is safe and well tested in the full range of species that the veterinarian must treat. This includes both large and small domestic animals,

children's pets and laboratory animals, large, wild and zoo animals, as well as birds and reptiles. It is safely used by virtually every veterinary practice throughout the world. It has been used safely as prescription only medicine.

Scheduling of ketamine would restrict its availability worldwide, which again would lead to harmful impact on animal health and welfare, as well on public health. It would have economic consequences for agricultural production; it would affect unified efforts of medical and veterinary professions to control a wide range of emerging and re-emerging zoonotic diseases on human-animal-environment interface. A number of such diseases (i.e. Ebola) may take the form of pandemics, especially the ones with their reservoir in wildlife; since veterinarians can administer ketamine by dart-gun injection, it contributes to professional safety when a dangerous animal needs to be approached. Without ketamine there would be huge difficulties in managing many field programmes in epidemiology or conservation medicine e.g. blood sampling and radio-tracking collar attachment.

Endemic zoonotic diseases such as rabies persist both in urban and remote areas of less developed countries; Asia and Africa take the major part of the global burden of this lethal disease, with tens of thousands of people dying every year. A sufficient evidence base proves that the dog population management and anti-rabies vaccination are the most effective means for rabies control and human exposure prevention. Without ketamine being used during spay/neuter surgical procedures, all these worldwide actions would be rendered impossible.

Further information on the proposal to discuss International Scheduling of Ketamine at the 58<sup>th</sup> CND can be found in the following Fact Sheet in English, French and Spanish:

- [Fact Sheet on the Proposal to Discuss International Scheduling of Ketamine at the 58th CND](#)
- [Note d'information sur la proposition de mettre la kétamine sous contrôle international lors de la 58ème session de la CND](#)
- [Hoja informativa sobre la propuesta para discutir la clasificación internacional de la ketamina en la 58ª CND](#)

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*The WVA unites and represents the global veterinary profession. It is the umbrella organization for Local, Regional, National and International Associations of Veterinarians working in different areas of veterinary medicine. The WVA represents around 500.000 veterinarians around the world through its member associations*