



Public Statement on the UNGASS 2016 process and draft outcome document

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An historic opportunity to achieve more humane and effective drug policy is at risk. The 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the world drug problem is the first of its kind in 18 years. The initiative for urging forward UNGASS came from sitting presidents of Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico. The UN General Assembly endorsed the call for an open, honest and evidence-based debate.

The process of drafting an outcome document for UNGASS has been disappointing. Since it began in late 2015, the deliberations in Vienna have been neither transparent nor inclusive. Closed doors negotiations ensured that crucial priorities were neglected and outdated policies retained. The voices of civil society, concerned UN agencies, and the majority of UN member states have yet to be heard.

The outcome document is long on rhetoric, but short on substance. Although it includes positive references to human rights and public health, it offers no hard solutions to make them stick. None of the last three outcome document drafts proposed by the 53 member states serving on the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) will result in meaningful change. There is no recognition of the failures of the present system to reduce supply and demand.

Fortunately, there is evidence of ways to put people's health, safety and human rights first. These fundamental aspirations cannot be met without:

- Ending the criminalization and incarceration of drug users;
- Abolishing capital punishment for drug-related offences;
- Empowering the World Health Organization (WHO) to review the scheduling system of drugs on the basis of scientific evidence;
- Ensuring a broad spectrum of treatments for dependent people and services designed to reduce the harms of drugs; and
- Allowing governments to apply different approaches to drug regulation in order to maximize public health and disempower organized crime.

Governments around the world are already testing out innovative forms of drug regulation. They should be encouraged to do more. There is also much to be learned from the successful regulation of alcohol and tobacco that also pose serious health risks when abused. Ultimately government-led regulation and prevention is the surest pathway to reducing the negative effects of drug use. Yet regulation is still prohibited by the UN Drug Conventions.

There is still time to get the UNGASS process back on track. This will only happen if heads of state lay the foundations for a more effective global drug control system that puts peoples' lives and dignity first. Moving the negotiations from Vienna to New York could also increase the transparency of the process and the scope of UN member state participation.

For more information on UNGASS and Global Commission on Drug Policy (GCDP) Minimum Agenda for UNGASS, access the GCDP the Q&A at:

<http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/docs/statementungass2016-question-and-answers.pdf>

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