

Geneva, 12 March 2019

Public Statement of the Global Commission on Drug Policy on the CND ministerial segment declaration

Government authorities gathering this week in Vienna at the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) have the opportunity of correcting the course of international drug policy and ending decades of harm resulting from its failures. Unfortunately, this opportunity will not be seized.

The CND ministerial segment marks the target date of the 2009 political declaration to address the so-called “world drug problem”. The international community agreed then to “eliminate or reduce significantly” the production, trafficking in and consumption of illegal drugs over the next decade.

Clearly, these objectives have not been achieved at any level. Over USD 100 billion is spent annually on law-enforcement activity attempting to fight an illegal market with a turnover estimated at USD 500 billion. Coca and opium production reached record levels in 2017 and only a part of that was seized. And in the last decade a large number of potent synthetic drugs were designed.

Worse still, the emphasis on prohibition with the aim of creating a “drug-free world” has resulted in devastation for millions of people who use drugs, cultivators, women used as couriers, families, ethnic minorities, and vulnerable communities. Human rights violations, violence, disproportionate sentencing, prison overcrowding, public health crises, and endangered state institutions continue to break lives all over the world.

The supposed cure is worse than the initial problem. As the late Global Commissioner Kofi Annan said: “Drugs have destroyed many lives, but wrong government policies have destroyed many more.” However, countries are going to renew their commitments to outdated repressive approaches. As former President of Colombia and Global Commissioner Juan Manuel Santos said, “One keeps pedaling, pedaling and pedaling, and making great efforts, only to find out that one hasn’t really moved.”

Now, notwithstanding these facts – and without conducting any formal review of the impact of the policies in the past decade – ministers appear poised to adopt a new declaration that, once again, consecrates prohibition as the only approach to drug control.

Not only does this insistence on preserving the status quo guarantee that the world will continue to suffer the harms of drugs and of failed policies, it also threatens the relevance of the international drug control system itself.

Indeed, support of prohibition, enforced through repression, has eroded. The international consensus is broken and the international drug control framework is no longer universally observed because it no longer reflects reality.

Countries are therefore developing highly diverse responses to managing the risks posed by drugs. Some continue to believe in the possibility of a 'drug-free society' and see abstinence as the only option, while others are taking a more pragmatic approach, implementing harm reduction measures and offering innovative treatment options; some continue to impose harsh penalties for drug offenses, including extrajudicial killings, while others are decriminalizing use and possession and offer alternatives to punishment for low-level actors, or even experimenting with legal regulation.

Many of the decisions taken at the CND ministerial segment are long-lasting and can have negative effects on other global development objectives. This is the reason why the members of the Global Commission on Drug Policy have written directly to the Heads of States represented at the CND. The stakes are too high simply to forge ahead with yet another prohibitionist declaration that will further divide the international community.

We, the members of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, sincerely hope that those making these decisions will not find themselves on the wrong side of history. We urge them to acknowledge the shift in paradigm that has already taken place, examine the evidence, and choose to strengthen a much-needed international system by embracing those policies that have proven to work. Finally, we urge them to allow countries to experiment with policies that address their particular concerns, with a full respect for fundamental rights, and offer some hope of effectively managing the presence of drugs in society.

###

Quotes by Members of the Global Commission on Drug Policy

"Drug use is intrinsically linked to human behavior, socioeconomic challenges and cultural environments. While this reality is recognized on the ground by civil society and by more and more policymakers, the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs risks weakening inter-governmental cooperation and making the multilateral system irrelevant in this debate on drugs if there is no thorough review of the impact of prohibition over the past half-century."

- **Ruth Dreifuss**, Chair of the Global Commission on Drug Policy and former President of Switzerland

"Without prohibition, transnational organized crime would have been deprived of the huge and incomparably profitable market that has allowed it to flourish, control territories and spread violence. Without prohibition, we could have avoided the militarization of the state response to drugs, which conflicts with every global effort to sustain peace."

- **Juan Manuel Santos**, former President of Colombia and Nobel Peace Prize laureate

“I have seen the impacts of marginalization, of stigma and discrimination, of criminalization and of rejection of people who use drugs, and the use of current drug policies against the poorest communities. And I wonder how we will ever end this cycle of arbitrary repression against the poor if the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs continues to refuse to align its work with global efforts to eradicate poverty that are carried out by other UN entities.”

- **Olusegun Obasanjo**, former President of Nigeria

“A fundamental principle of the Sustainable Development Goals is to leave no one behind. No goal can be considered to be achieved in 2030 if it is not achieved for all. Unfortunately, by ignoring the harm perpetrated by current drug policies to development, the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs in its ministerial declaration has ensured that people who use drugs are left behind.”

- **Helen Clark**, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and former Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

“In the current global environment, drug policy concerns that cut across development objectives should include the major themes of our times. We need to ask ourselves: how do current policies support sustainable peace, orderly migration or poverty eradication? It appears that we will not receive an answer from the Commission on Narcotic Drugs ministerial segment.”

- **Louise Arbour**, former High Commissioner for Human Rights

“We need to end our addiction to punishment if we are to have any hope for a more just and sustainable future for everyone. The consideration of addiction as “evil” due to prejudice and ideology makes it impossible to find suitable remedies.”

- **Mohamed ElBaradei**, Director General Emeritus of the International Atomic Energy Agency and Nobel peace prize laureate

“The disproportionate and needless war on drugs mobilizes massive resources affecting nearly all of society, without actually helping those who truly need help.”

- **Sir Richard Branson**, Founder of the Virgin Group, co-founder of the Elders

For more information, please contact:

Eric Grant

Communications Officer

+41 79 124 1523

eric.grant@globalcommissionondrugs.org

###

About the Global Commission on Drug Policy

[The Global Commission on Drug Policy](#) is an independent body comprising 24 members, including 12 former heads of state or government and four Nobel Prize laureates. Its purpose is to bring to the international level an informed, evidence-based discussion about humane and effective ways to reduce the harms caused by drugs and drug control policies to people and societies.

The Global Commission on Drug Policy has issued [eight reports](#) since its creation in 2011. These respectively detail the extent of the failure and damage of five decades of prohibition and punitive measures, reveal the impact of repressive policies on health epidemics such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis, the inequitable access to essential pain medication, biased perceptions surrounding drugs, the need to prioritize public health approaches, decriminalization of drug use and proportional sentencing and, ultimately, the responsible legal regulation of psychoactive substances.

The Commission has also published [two position papers](#), on the opioid-fueled overdose crisis in North America and on drug policy and the Sustainable Development Agenda.