



Civil society statement coordinated by the Geneva Platform on Human Rights, Health and Psychoactive Substances,

for the “Geneva-Vienna Dialogue on the World Drug Problem”

11 May 2018

The Geneva Platform on Human Rights, Health and Psychoactive Substances, on behalf of a number of civil society organisations, warmly commends the organizers of this dialogue between Geneva and Vienna-based UN entities and the speakers on the panel for this significant initiative, representing for us civil society members, a clear concrete implementation of recent UN General Assembly and Commission on Narcotic Drugs recommendations on the need for increased inter-agency dialogue on drug policy issues.

While the Commission on Narcotic Drugs leads on drug control policies, the UN system itself, through various resolutions adopted by Member States, has made it clear that drugs are a horizontal issue requiring a societal response enshrined in human rights and citizen safety, and allowing for sustainable development. The importance of increased UN inter-agency cooperation is reflected in the UNGASS 2016 Outcome document and numerous CND resolutions.¹ The UN Secretary General has recently called for strengthened cooperation between the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other United Nations entities ahead of 2019. While UNODC is tasked with leading on this work, other UN entities should engage proactively in this important process towards developing an “organisation-wide strategy across the three founding pillars of the United Nations system — development, human rights, and peace and security — in support of the preparations for the sixty-second session of the Commission, to be held in 2019.”²

As civil society organisations concerned with ensuring a coherent global drug policy we are keen to see the outcome of this process. Building on the UNGASS outcome document, we firmly believe that it is through interagency cooperation such as today’s initiative, that human

¹ For example, CND Resolution 60/6 (stating the decision of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs to continue
² Resolution A/RES/72/198, p.20

rights, global health and sustainable development will be better reflected in UN deliberations on drug-related issues; and that this constitutes a crucial part of achieving balanced and people-centred drug policies at the international, regional, national and local levels.

Towards this end the strong engagement of the OHCHR at the 61st session of the CND in March this year was very welcome and Geneva-based bodies including OHCHR and relevant special procedures, WHO, and UNAIDS should continue to ensure a strong presence in Vienna. We recommend that other entities should have standing invitations to the CND meetings as well as expert meetings, such as for example on the review of the Annual Reports Questionnaire (otherwise known as ARQ). There is a pressing need for the ARQ to include existing health and human rights-related indicators, to record the human rights and public health impacts of drug policies and reflect these in official reports. The UNODC could, for example, include other data sets in the World Drug Report to reflect human rights issues. The technical knowledge and expertise of the human rights and global health mechanisms based in Geneva should be utilised to address and prevent human rights violations in drug control. Indicators could focus on incarceration rates and rates of non-custodial alternatives to see if the commitments to proportionate sentencing highlighted in the UNGASS outcome document are being put into practice. Moreover, WHO, INCB, UNODC, and the OHCHR have all drawn attention to the fact that more than 75 percent of the world's population has no access to internationally controlled essential medicines, largely because of unduly restrictive regulations that derive from the supply control paradigm and this is another point that must be addressed. Health and human rights apply to all drug policy issues, whether indigenous rights, proportionate sentencing and alternatives to punishment for low-level drug offences; the need to abolish the death penalty for drug offences; to put an end to repressive punitive drug policies; and the increasing call for decriminalisation in many States around the world.

The International Narcotics Control Board has called on “all States to implement international drug control conventions in accordance with their commitments to human rights treaties and the rule of law”,³ while the High Commissioner for Human Rights has urged “all States to examine the effectiveness and human rights impact of their current approaches to

³ <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/en/pressrels/2018/unisnar1343.html>

the so-called “War on Drugs”.⁴ It is only through working with the Geneva-based mandates and civil society that these commitments can be successfully realised.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today as a civil society platform. We hope that other such dialogues will always provide space to hear from civil society representatives, and that our key role in supporting coordination between Vienna- Geneva will continue to be valued. We welcome the positive developments of the past few years in Vienna towards the greater inclusion of civil society (exemplified not only during the CND but most recently in the INCB’s civil society hearing on the use of cannabis for medical and non-medical purposes); and hope this trend will continue to become the operational and procedural norm.

Today’s dialogue marks the beginning of a new chapter of inter-agency dialogue and cooperation on how to address the “world drug problem”; and we look forward to continuing to contribute meaningfully to these discussions, ensuring that drug policies prioritise the needs of individuals and are aligned with the principles of health, human rights and sustainable development contributing to inclusive and prosperous societies. Thank you very much for your attention.

On behalf of the following signatories:

- Acción Técnica Social (ATS)
- Asia Catalyst
- Association de Lutte Contre le Sida (ALCS)
- Canadian Drug Policy Coalition
- Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
- Centro de Estudios Legales (CELS)
- Conectas – Direitos Humanos
- For Alternative Approaches to Addiction Think and do tank (FAAAT)
- Global Health Centre, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
- Groupement Romand d’Etudes des Addictions (GREA)
- Harm Reduction International (HRI)

⁴ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22772>

- Human Rights Watch (HRW)
- International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC)
- Instituto RIA
- Intercambios Asociación Civil
- International AIDS Society (IAS)
- International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care (IAHPC)
- International Centre for Science in Drug Policy (ICSDP)
- International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC)
- New Zealand Drug Foundation
- Penal Reform International (PRI)
- Reduc - Brazilian Harm Reduction and Human Rights Network
- Swiss Society of Addiction Medicine (SSAM)
- Transform Drug Policy Foundation
- The Beckley Foundation
- University of Geneva
- Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)