

**Civil Society Task Force Statement**  
**As delivered at the Launch of the World Drug Report**  
**June 26, 2015, New York, NY**

Thank you, Madame Chair, for giving me the opportunity to speak, and thanks also to UNODC for inviting civil society to participate in this important event.

I am speaking in my capacity as Co-Chair of the Civil Society Task Force on Drugs, along with my colleague Elisa Rubini, from the Vienna NGO Committee.

The Civil Society Task Force looks forward to reviewing the World Drug Report in the coming days and we appreciate the effort to provide what we expect will be a comprehensive and balanced report about the world drug problem that will inform all discussions in the lead up to CND and the UNGASS.

The CSTF is designed to secure civil society engagement and coordination in order to effectively include NGO voices in the UNGASS. The Vienna NGO Committee and the New York NGO Committee have overseen the composition of the CSTF, aiming for an overall balance in terms of both geography and approaches to drug policies and interventions.

The CSTF is not ultimately looking to come to consensus on all issues, but rather is tasked with and committed to providing a channel for civil society to share views and expertise in a comprehensive way – a platform where all the voices are heard.

We can also work toward identifying key priority issues and/or areas that deserve the utmost attention, and highlight these areas with one voice. It is critical that the collective voices of civil society be engaged and we call on Member States to consider our contribution to developing the priorities in the drugs field, based on significant expertise and experience at the community level.

Based on our past experience and the Declaration that civil society agreed to in Beyond 2008, a number of priorities have emerged that we believe should be given priority by Member States. We expect a more comprehensive list will follow as we work together as a Task Force. These are:

- Abolition of the Death Penalty and support for the principle of proportionality for drug related offences;
- The adoption of a public health approach to the world drug problem based on the WHO definition, “*Public Health refers to all organized measures (whether public or private) to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life among the population as a whole*”;
- Development of prevention strategies, in particular those that protect the rights of children;
- A renewed commitment to the availability and financial sustainability of equally important and mutually reinforcing evidence-based harm reduction, voluntary

drug treatment, recovery, and rehabilitation measures, which are under threat in many parts of the world due to economic constraints;

- Urgent, focused action led by WHO to address the global problem of lack of access to essential controlled medicines for pain relief, palliative care, and opioid dependence treatment;
- Sustainable development opportunities for those currently involved in the cultivation of crops used to produce illicit drugs, and putting an end to conditioning their inclusion in alternative development projects on prior eradication of these crops; and
- Engagement of all of civil society, including people who use drugs, people in recovery, families and communities, will provide an added value to the UNGASS.

There are of course other areas where civil society holds differing viewpoints. The diversity of the CSTF fosters dialogue and can serve as a platform to encourage respectful exchange, share evidence-informed best practices, and provide constructive criticism of policies and programs that work or could be improved.

In order to create this platform, and bring in the diversity and richness of the voices of all members of civil society around the world, we will need the support of Member States. Financial support by Member States is critical. Just as important is facilitation of civil society participation through inclusion in meetings and discussions leading up to UNGASS as well as the UNGASS itself.

Specifically, we are asking that Member States support a one-day interactive civil society hearing to be held in New York at least three months prior to the UNGASS (similar to those held in connection with recent high level meetings on HIV/AIDS, migration, Non-communicable diseases, and the post-2015 development agenda), with a President's Summary to be circulated to Member States and other stakeholders in preparation for UNGASS.

We also call on Member States to support civil society representation on discussion panels at UNGASS and their invitation to make interventions from the floor during interactive discussions at UNGASS and during its leadup.

We are counting on you, the Member States, to make meaningful and effective participation in UNASS 2016 possible for all of civil society.