

NORWAY

Statement by Mr. Bjarne Håkon Hanssen,
Minister of Health and Care Services

United Nations General Assembly
52th session of the Commission on Narcotics and Drugs

President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We all have a common vision, a shared dream: of a world without drug abuse. But it is just a dream. Our realistic goal is to reduce the production, supply and demand for drugs. And the harm that they do.

In the political declaration of 1998, we the UN member states committed ourselves to fighting the world drug problem. After years of hard efforts we have still not succeeded. The struggle goes on.

Illicit drugs are illegal. They should neither be legalised nor decriminalised. There should be no distinction between soft and hard drugs.

Drug addiction has many faces. We all know, or have met, people struggling with drug related problems. In my view everybody is entitled to a life with dignity. In this regard our public health system must play a central role in drug policies. Drug addiction should be treated as a disease.

Let me absolutely be clear; the primary goal is to reduce the negative consequences of drug use for individuals and society. Prevention should be at the very heart of our efforts. At the same time we need to realise that a number of people in our societies are drug addicts. It is my firm belief that we should assist and help these people to a life with dignity. Harm reduction measures aimed at injecting drug users may be an important contribution.

We have an ongoing debate on how we best can meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our society. In my view we need to ask ourselves: Is the cooperation between the police, social and health services good enough? Are the measures related to harm reduction good enough? Do we need to develop new and more targeted measures?

In addition, we need to consider drug related problems and HIV prevention and treatment challenges together. This is particularly important in countries where HIV transmission is largely a result of injecting drug practices. It is important to protect and promote the right to health for all vulnerable groups. Our health services should ensure adequate care to drug abusers. This includes addressing the abuse as such, but also other health problems that abusers face.

President,

Illicit drugs are the world's third largest illegal commodity. There are serious challenges posed to regions by illicit drug cultivation, trafficking and abuse. Strengthened international efforts are needed to combat the flow of drugs. Drug problems are international, and should therefore be handled as such. Norway considers international co-operation as one of the main pillars of our drug policy. International control of the production and trade with illicit drugs is a highly prioritised task for us all. We have a shared responsibility to fight this problem.

There is no quick or easy solution. But the UN conventions, including human rights are a robust and important platform for our work with drug prevention and treatment. A platform that we must build our policy upon.

Furthermore, Norway considers the death penalty to be wholly inconsistent with the dignity of the individual, as well as with the principle of humanity.

It is important to gather here in Vienna and to restate our commitments. Norway welcomes the 2009 political declaration. We fully support a continued strong cooperation by the international community. And above all, we firmly believe that a strict drug policy control must go hand in hand with a humanitarian approach.

Thank you.