

VIENNA NGO COMMITTEE

30

Remarks of Michel Perron, Chair of Beyond 2008 Steering Committee to the 52nd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs – High Level Segment

March 2009 – Vienna, Austria

Madame Chair, Ministers, Excellencies, distinguished government and non governmental representatives. My name is Michel Perron and I am the Chair of Beyond 2008: a global NGO review on the 1998-2008 UNGASS on illicit drugs. I represent the sole NGO statement specifically provided for at this High Level Segment. I am both honored at this responsibility and acutely aware of the limitations to such a task.

THE LEAD UP TO THE HLS

Many of you heard Her Majesty Queen Silvia of Sweden introduce Beyond 2008 yesterday morning. Beyond 2008 sought the views of hundreds of NGO's from 145 countries involved at all levels from prevention and treatment experts, policy advocates, community leaders, youth groups, drug users, academics, HIV/AIDS experts and many more. These individuals represent the voice of your NGO's – your citizens.

Many of the people we met with had never heard of the CND, much less the three international drug control conventions and UNGASS was simply an unknown acronym. Yet, Beyond 2008 participants represent a rich, substantial and unique insight into the drug problem, how it affects individuals families and communities and what's working well – or not.

NGO's bring a demonstrated experience and knowledge in the provision of a broad range of services from primary prevention, early intervention, outreach, peer outreach and low threshold services for treatment, rehabilitation and recovery services and the development of the capacity of those engaged in these services.

Beyond 2008 set out to extract that 'on the ground' knowledge and apply it to recommendations for the future of drug control policy. We succeeded in bridging the predictable ideological, cultural and philosophical divides and adopted by consensus, a Declaration and three resolutions that have been circulated to you.

We acknowledged the drug control conventions, the flexibility afforded within these and the role and mandate of the CND and we were able to agree on a term that continues to challenge the Commission and which was notably absent from the Political Declaration - harm reduction. As defined by us it means efforts primarily to address and prevent the adverse health and social consequences of illicit/harmful drug use, including reducing HIV and other blood borne infections.

THE HLS

The NGO community put serious effort into this historic process as a demonstration and understanding of our shared responsibility towards addressing this issue. We did so also by responding to the call from the UN and CND for civil society to become more engaged and to contribute to the review of the UNGASS on illicit drugs.

While indeed Beyond 2008 has been afforded the opportunity to contribute to the HLS preparations and this meeting, this did not apply to NGO's more broadly and we are of the view that CND should focus on improving its relationship with civil society at the gatherings, the regular meetings of CND and its inter-sessional meetings.

That said, Beyond 2008 outlines practical, realistic and tangible actions for the future. We focused first on substance then words. And I am pleased to note that there are important similarities between our work and the Political Declaration.

Specifically, we sought to give those most affected a voice. And you have responded by underscoring the role of affected populations and civil society entities to play a participatory role in formulating drug policy.

We called on the CND to re-affirm its commitment to fulfill the obligations and commitments of international instruments such as human rights protection and you responded clearly supporting same.

We called on the CND to ensure that drug demand reduction activities be considered as challenges of equal importance to and as required as supply reduction activities. Again we found a point of commonality.

Finally we noted that while significant progress in specific instances have been achieved towards the UNGASS goals, generally results have been limited. Here again, we seem to find common ground.

THE CHALLENGE FOR THE FUTURE

The High Level Segment allows for you as the governing body for drug policy to ensure that your response is equal to the need.

And we know this need is as compelling as ever. Beyond 2008 participants underscored that greater attention should be given to the health and public health aspects of drug policy given the rapid spread of blood borne infections, including HIV and hepatitis, and the increasing evidence of co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.

Beyond 2008 has created a call for action - we do not see our work finishing here but starting. There remain many recommendations that we see as critical for you to consider and adopt if we are indeed to make a substantive gain towards targets.

These include improving how the CND conducts its work and where we believe it must develop a common standard against which demand, harm reduction and supply reduction activities can be measured in terms of their efficacy and outcomes.

We also believe that CND should evaluate its own work and policies and identify ways in which its effectiveness and impact might be improved.

We also recommend that CND review how other UN bodies of this type engage with civil society and affected populations and to embrace a new way of working together.

Finally we look to you to ensure that the voice of youth is present in your deliberations as they are all too often spoken of but not with.

Madam Chair, Beyond 2008 has created a connective tissue between global drug control conventions and the reality of daily life for people around the world. These people are your citizens. Simply put and with the greatest of respect – governments cannot do it alone. The CND cannot do it alone. Nor can civil society.

Civil society has, through Beyond 2008, shown itself to be a serious and important partner in this endeavor. We ask that you genuinely accept this relationship and work in concert with us for the betterment of all.

Thank you.

