

Excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

My name is Brun Gonzalez and I am Chair of the International Network of People who use Drugs, a peer-based global network working to protect the health and defend the human rights of people who use drugs.

I would like to thank the Chair and the CND for the opportunity to bring forward the voices and perspectives of the international community of people who use drugs to this space. Our voice has not been heard often enough here in Vienna, or in drug policy development overall. Drug policies cannot continue to be debated and developed, without the input of those most directly impacted by drug policies, that is, people who use drugs.

We celebrate the process that is being fostered and enabled through the new seven-themed structure delineated in the 2016 UNGASS Outcome Document. The Outcome Document, ratified by member states, reaffirms a commitment to the “comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centered set of universal and transformative Goals and targets” that is the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, signaling an unprecedented shift towards ensuring that public health, development and human rights concerns do not remain peripheral, but are prioritized and become central to all policy development, including drug policy.

We again welcome member states commitment in paragraph 4 of the outcome document to work towards drug policies that respect human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the inherent dignity of all individuals, including people who use drugs who are affected or negatively impacted by the current criminalizing and stigmatizing paradigm.

Developing proper monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for the implementation of the commitments made to jointly address and counter the world drug problem is fundamental. Following the principles described in the SDGs related to Prosperity, Peace and Partnership, and according to the simple logic of “Nothing About Us Without Us” which means that key affected populations should be involved and participate proactively in every stage of the design, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of any and every public policy that is supposed to address their needs and/or that directly affects or impacts them in a specific way; we are still as open and

willing as ever to cooperate with relevant UN agencies including those with mandates respectful of human rights and who are willing to collaborate with civil society to achieve these goals.

The international community should recognize that existing punitive drug policies fuel violence and unrest, and threaten democracies and individual freedom. Going forward, drug policies should seek primarily to reduce violence, strengthen governance, community systems and the rule of law, and promote the well being of society, in particular those most marginalized and vulnerable.

If we truly are now preparing to take stock of progress made and delineate the global drug strategy for the next decade, we firmly believe that simple common sense is enough to acknowledge the need of moving away from clearly ineffective and heavily harmful policies that rely on prohibition through criminalization.

Continuing the “war on drugs” means a continuation of militarization along with armed confrontation and disproportionate spending on security, enforcement and supply reduction strategies at the expense of, and completely diminishing capacity around, establishing and promoting peaceful and just communities and societies.

Under this new collective realization of the global issues we are all facing, which is the source and engine of the SDGs, we want to bring your attention to the fact that war-driven prohibitionist models and the unrealistic and undesired “drug-free” objectives actively undermine the SDG Agenda which is “determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence”. The SDG Agenda stresses inclusivity, that is “all human beings... can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment”, and have the right to pursue “prosperous and fulfilling lives” without severe impediment. We, as the international network of people who use drugs call for drug war peace.

“There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.”

Drug-free objectives are not only unrealistic, they are dangerous and harmful. They are used to justify widespread human rights violations, and an overly punitive approach that directly undermines health, development, peace and security. It is people who use drugs that are most directly and

severely impacted, as drug free objectives contradict and interfere with the rights of autonomy, self-determination and the free development of the individual.

We recognize that currently there is no consensus amongst member states on drug policy. With this in mind we would like to bring attention to the SDGs principle on Partnership, which clearly states that the efforts and guidelines should be “based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.” Currently, the prohibitionist system, that is the three drug control treaties, are showing significant cracks and challenges, and thus their continued existence needs to be questioned.

Current drug policies undermine SDG 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; SDG 10 Reduce inequality within and among countries and SDG 16; Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Paragraph 8 of the Declaration of the 2030 Agenda contains a strong reference to the common ground that hopefully we can all easily arrive to, using nothing more than clear-headed pragmatic reflection: “We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity. A world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation. A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed. A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met.” This should be used to guide decision making in drug policy development.

Right now, in many different countries around the planet, our communities are still subject to: compulsory drug detention that use torture and/or forced and unpaid labor in the name of treatment; death penalty for drug offences and open promotion of violence targeting people who use illegal substances; an epidemic of preventable drug overdose deaths, where globally over 200,000 people die each year and the number is growing due to NPS and the fentanyl family of compounds which are now present in pretty much every

kind of psychoactive substances.

Extreme examples of the harmful impacts of current policies are state sanctioned extrajudicial killings of people who use drugs, which have led to the loss hundreds of thousands of lives in just the last decade, and continue unabated, and led to the mass murder and disappearances amongst citizens, including youth in some countries.

Drug policy must align with the human development agenda. The loss of life and atrocities committed in the name of the war on drugs must end. Instead, the world must move to health and rights-based approaches. Member states should address the impact of repressive policies on communities, including forced crop eradication or mass incarceration of PWUD. As people who use drugs, we promote the incorporation of full spectrum harm reduction strategies and policies that acknowledge the realities surrounding psychoactive substances, opiates and injecting drug use; a few examples could be substance analysis services, harm reduction for non-injected substances along with stimulants and supply side harm reduction.

Drug policy needs to align with current world realities. Member states should acknowledge and reflect upon the realities of experimentation and innovation already going on, including cannabis regulation, medical cannabis systems, drug checking, decriminalization models and drug consumption rooms.

We, as the voice of people who use drugs strongly affirm and believe that the post-2019 strategy should focus on inclusion, participation and community involvement. Drug policy should not continue to be encapsulated in a “parallel universe” that is isolated from the broader global governance agenda. People who use drugs are a fundamental part of the world, we are citizens, we are human beings, we are community.