

Honourable chairman!

Honourable colleagues!

On behalf of the NGO coalition for balanced drug policy in Ukraine "With respect to human dignity" and on behalf of the International Renaissance Foundation, let me thank The Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for the Outcome Document recommendations and also for the involvement of civil society in the process of its preparation and implementation. I was honored to be a member of the Ukraine delegation to CND last year, and to the UNGASS in April.

Speaking as a member of the official delegation, I have to note that the involvement of public health specialists and NGO representatives in the work of the delegation and in parallel sessions within the special session, made it possible to implement a balanced approach to access to controlled medicines in Ukraine. In particular, to look at the problem not only in terms of the fight against drugs, but also in terms of human rights.

The Ukrainian National Preventive Mechanism is an 'Ombudsman Plus' model, composed of staff from the NPM Department under the Office of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights and civil society representatives. There are more than 200 civil monitors regularly visiting places of detention as part of the NPM. The involvement of civil society in the NPM work has been crucial to be able to monitor the large number of places of detention in the country and to conduct research on specific thematic areas.

What does this have to do with controlled medicines, you might wonder? In 2015, the NPM also started to monitor hospices and palliative care departments within hospitals, which are considered to be places of deprivation of liberty as the majority of patients do not give their consent for hospitalisation and treatment. More than 50% of patients of these establishments do not have access to pain relief; patients are being kept in terrible material conditions, in agony without appropriate medication. Their report stated that such deprivation without appropriate treatment with controlled medicines is equivalent to torture and that palliative care and pain medicine restore liberty to persons whose pain has previously been uncontrolled.

Patients needing adequate pain relief at home also suffer, although Ukraine has one of the most liberal regulation of controlled medicines use in Eastern Europe. Testimonies, collected in 2016 in Ukraine, within our joint research with Human Rights Watch, are evidence of systemic problems with the prescription and use of controlled medicines in Ukraine.

We urge policymakers, patients, their relatives and lawyers, to speak out about the problem of access to pain relief. We would like to ask decisionmakers who maintain that the problem of lack of access to pain medicine is overstated - to get out of their offices and take off their rose-colored glasses. We turn to CND and colleagues from NGOs, asking to distribute WHO guidelines on treatment of cancer pain, to base their work on the principles of evidence-based medicine, and to heed the voices of seriously ill patients who need our support, access to pain relief and preservation of human dignity. Palliative care is not about someone else, it is about all of us and our families. We also recommend that you include public health experts on your delegations to CND so that they can help your countries develop a balanced approach to drug policy.

Thank you for your attention!