

Statement delivered by Ms. Fionnuala Murphy, Head of Advocacy, Harm Reduction International, on the occasion of the Fourth Intersessional Meeting of the 59th Commission on Narcotic Drugs

10 October 2016, Vienna, Austria

*Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,*

I am making this intervention on behalf of Harm Reduction International.

I would like to thank the Chair and the Commission for this opportunity.

Harm Reduction International is a non-governmental organisation working to reduce the negative health, social and human rights impacts of drug use and drug policy. Ahead of this year's UNGASS on Drugs and High Level Meeting on HIV, we launched a declaration calling for a new approach to drug use rooted in science, public health, human rights and dignity – for a harm reduction decade. Our call was endorsed by over 1100 organisations and individuals.

The UNGASS did not deliver a harm reduction decade, but it did secure the strongest ever endorsement of harm reduction in a UN document on drug control. Paragraph 1 specifically mentions “medication assisted therapy”, “injecting equipment programmes”, “antiretroviral therapy” and “opioid receptor antagonists” for the treatment of overdose. The Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS again commits to scale up these interventions, noting the lack of progress in reducing HIV among people who use drugs and the impact of restrictive laws in hampering access to services. Both documents urge States to provide harm reduction in prisons.

Now, it is time to turn this language into real progress. It will not be enough come 2019 to measure what countries say - we need to measure what they do. We need progress targets which will measure coverage of the four harm reduction interventions which the UNGASS document names, including coverage in prisons; which will examine whether States are removing restrictive laws, including those which criminalise people who use drugs; and vitally, which will look at harm reduction funding.

Research by Harm Reduction International and the Burnet Institute has shown that by redirecting \$7.5 billion from drug enforcement to harm reduction – equivalent to just 7.5% of the estimated \$100 billion spent each year – we could end AIDS among people who inject drugs. Harm Reduction International's 10 by 20 campaign calls on governments to go a little further and redirect 10% - enabling us to pay for prevention and treatment of viral hepatitis, life-saving naloxone and support for networks of people who use drugs to be directly involved in policy-making. The UNGASS has signaled a more balanced approach to drug policy. We must now redirect funds accordingly.

Finally, we must also ensure that this brave new approach, and not the now outdated 2009 Political Declaration on Drugs, is the starting point for the next Political Declaration on Drugs. If now is the time for progress, 2019 must be the moment to go further and to secure a decade of drug policy with harm reduction as a guiding principle.