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Paper submitted by the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs**

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Summary of discussions at the second informal Civil Society Hearing hosted by the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs

Introduction

The second informal Civil Society Hearing during the annual session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs was held on Monday, 11 March 2013. A civil society hearing is seen as one mechanism for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to contribute substantively to the work of the UN. Following the first Hearing at the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, input was sought from Member States in order that the Hearing might be of direct relevance and assistance to the work of the Commission. We benefited greatly from the guidance which we received as well as from the input from NGOs, reflecting on the first Hearing.

The second Hearing was focused on the work of NGOs and civil society to support implementation of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action adopted in 2009 and on how they might contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of achievement at the mid-term review in 2014 and beyond. It was organized with an opening and closing session and four substantive sections.

Opening and Closing Sessions

The hearing was opened by H.E. Antonio García Revilla of Peru, Chair of the fifty-sixth session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs and Mr. Sandeep Chawla, Deputy Director of UNODC, representing the Executive Director. Both stressed their commitment to continued development of work with NGOs in order that views and experience might be shared and the ability to respond effectively to a global problem might be enhanced. The closing session was addressed by Mr Mark Rutgers van der Loeff of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Rapporteur of the fifty-sixth session of Commission on Narcotic Drugs. In his remarks he also noted the important contribution of NGOs both nationally and internationally and looked forward to their continued input.

NGO Contributions to implementation of the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action

The first substantive section was focused on the work of NGOs in support of implementation of the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action and of resolutions adopted by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. A presentation of the work of NGOs from around the world¹ was able to show their contribution to the provision of advocacy, prevention, treatment and care and recovery services ranging from small and local projects to national and international organizations with large numbers of volunteers or a mass membership. Together they represented a huge asset in terms of knowledge, resources and commitment working day in and day out to assist and support those affected by drug problems. A second presentation²

¹ The full presentation can be viewed at http://www.vngoc.org/details.php?id_cat=7&id_cnt=23

² The full presentation can be viewed at http://www.vngoc.org/details.php?id_cat=7&id_cnt=23

looked at NGO contributions to implementation of Resolution 55/7 “Promoting measures to prevent drug overdose, in particular opioid overdose”. Overdose represented an avoidable cause of death³ and the Resolution adopted by the Commission was an important step in identifying this and calling for specific action. In many countries NGOs had taken the lead in promoting effective actions to reduce overdose deaths and had been able to work with governmental organizations to develop overdose prevention initiatives. The final presentation⁴ was concerned with the work of UNODC, in cooperation with NGOs, to implement Resolution 54/13 “Achieving zero new infections of HIV among injecting and other drug users”. UNODC was committed to following through this resolution and related commitments made by Member States in other United Nations fora. To meet these targets they needed to mobilize domestic resources and for this they had to engage fully with NGOs and civil society organizations. This was agreed in the informal meeting between UNODC and CSOs in February 2013. Such engagement was necessary to achieve better assessment, planning, field delivery, monitoring and evaluation. NGOs were essential because they could sometimes achieve what governments could not. Working with UNODC the NGO partners were trying to improve the delivery of effective interventions. They had been able to identify 15 priority issues, including the implementation of all of the nine core HIV interventions for people who inject drugs, which needed to be addressed urgently. Greater engagement with government stakeholders and better synergy between drug control and public health policies and practice, as well as the meaningful involvement of people who use drugs could increase capacity to reach the internationally established targets to prevent new HIV infections and advance public health, human rights and gender equality in the HIV response.

Supporting the mid-term review

The three remaining sections were concerned with consideration of how NGOs might play a participatory role in the formulation and implementation of drug demand and supply reduction policy⁵ how conditions might be created to optimize cooperation in implementation of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action and how NGOs might most effectively contribute to the review of achievement at the mid-term review in 2014 and beyond. At these sessions we benefited from the input of representatives of Ireland, Peru, Norway, Thailand, the Czech Republic, Finland and UNODC who acted as panelists sharing their perspective on the development of Member State and NGO relations within the context of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

³ World situation with regard to drug abuse, United Nations Economic and Social Council Report of the Secretariat, 12/12 and World Drug Report 2011

⁴ The full presentation can be viewed at http://www.vngoc.org/details.php?id_cat=7&id_cnt=23

⁵ E/2009/28 - E/CN.7/2009/12 “Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem” paragraph 10

It was recognised that in 2009 the Commission at its High Level Segment no longer considered the question “if” NGOs should be involved but “when” their involvement was appropriate. The focus was on a participatory role not a takeover challenging the functions properly assigned to the Commission and Member States. In practice at the national level, Member States were reliant on the participation and engagement of all stakeholders to achieve effective implementation of their policy objectives and in order that they might monitor and evaluate achievement and make essential adjustments. NGOs as significant providers of services and with field awareness, were a valuable contributors to developing and implementing policy and translating policy into practice. The time was right for this common national experience to be translated effectively to the international level. At the regional level this essential interchange of experience and knowledge was already occurring and it was timely for this to extend to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The principle of inclusion had been settled in 2009 and by resolutions adopted by the Commission. The practical process of achieving this remained unclear. A structured process was important which could be monitored and developed to increase its effectiveness. The models of the Beyond 2008 project⁶ and of the informal Civil Society Hearing had both offered possible structures for developing a constructive dialogue and input into the review process and the consideration of future actions.

It was appropriate to recognise that in 2014 it would be a review process only in which Member States at the Commission would be considering the extent to which the Political Declaration and Plan of Action of 2009 had been implemented and how the uptake of implementation might be increased. There was no intention or expectation of any change to the documents adopted in 2009. NGOs could be a valuable contributor to the range of information facilitating effective review. How this contribution might be provided in a timely and appropriate manner remained less clear. In the longer term, NGOs and civil society organizations should also be one of the stakeholders contributing to the monitoring and evaluation of the Political Declaration and Action Plan and assisting in revision of these documents for the period post-2019.

At one level there was a need to build the capacity of NGOs to engage with their governments so that there might be increased understanding between them, an increase in mutual trust and further improvement in the effectiveness of policy development and field practice. There was also the need for improved participation by representatives of NGOs from the different regions of the world and participation by NGOs in regional bodies. This was already occurring in some regions. Where Member States had a positive engagement with NGOs at the national and regional level they recognised more readily the contribution which NGOs could make at the international level. Whilst emphasising the important contribution of NGOs to the development and implementation of policy and practice, panellists also stressed the “critical friend” role of NGOs, acting as a watchdog to draw attention to gaps in the response to drug problems, unintended consequences of policy especially regarding

⁶ E/CN.7/2008/CRP.12 "BEYOND 2008" - Contribution of Non-Governmental Organizations to the implementation of the Political Declaration and Action Plans adopted by the twentieth special session of the General Assembly

human rights and public health. This was in line with the recommendations of the independent evaluation of Beyond 2008⁷ and was a positive rather than a negative contribution, assisting governments to achieve a more effective implementation of the commitments made in 2009.

In the near term and as a contribution to the mid-term review of achievement since adoption of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action in 2009, it may be timely to incorporate a Civil Society Hearing as one element in the agenda of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission of Narcotic Drugs. This would need to be set clearly within the framework of the process for the review of achievement as established by the Commission. It would be possible for the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs, which had successfully organised Beyond 2008 and the two informal Civil Society Hearings at the Commission, to work with the Bureau of the Commission and the Secretariat to develop a programme facilitating interactive exchange between NGOs and Member State delegations to the Commission. This could also then contribute a further perspective to the review.

Contributing to the final review and identifying actions post-2019

Looking to the second period, the final review and revision of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action in 2019, it would be beneficial and timely to explore how a structured consultation and reporting framework might be established to assist the Commission in its task. The model of Beyond 2008, developed to improve further the representation and regional input, would be one which could be built on further. Discussions with Member States, Regional Groups and the Bureau would be of assistance to identify an appropriate mechanism to achieve the common goal of improving our capacity to respond effectively to the global drug problem.

⁷ Independent Evaluation of Beyond 2008 (GLO / J37)

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Vienna, August 2009