



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on Narcotic Drugs

#### Fifty-seventh session

Vienna, 13-21 March 2014

Item 4 of the provisional agenda\*

**General debate of the high-level segment: progress  
achieved and challenges in implementing the Political  
Declaration and Plan of Action on International  
Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy  
to Counter the World Drug Problem**

### Statement submitted by the Academic Council on the United Nations System\*\*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* E/CN.7/2014/1.

\*\* The present statement is reproduced in the form in which it was received.



## Statement submitted by the Academic Council on the United Nations System

We note with satisfaction that the contribution of the Executive Director (UNODC/ED/2014/1) touches upon many elements of concern to the Academic Council on the United Nations System.

- Evidence-based *programmes to reduce the adverse effects of injecting drugs — needle and syringe programmes and opioid substitution therapy* — have resulted in the decline of unsafe drug use and the spread of HIV.
- Treatment based on scientific evidence and respectful of human rights is an alternative to criminal justice sanctions and *detention centres*.

The Executive Director pointed out that compulsory treatment and punitive measures in the name of treatment are still common practice in some countries. Stigmatization, discrimination and human rights violations are common problems faced by people who illicitly use drugs and people who are dependent on drugs and are living with HIV/AIDS, discouraging them from seeking the health and social services they need.

- Controlled substances continue to cause less harm at the global level than uncontrolled substances such as tobacco or alcohol.
- The Conventions are *not about waging a “war on drugs”*. They cannot be interpreted as a justification for a prohibitionist regime. The high-level review could be used to reconfigure and balance the drug control system focusing on health and respect for human rights, emphasizing evidence-based prevention and treatment and giving consideration to the needs of drug dependents.
- *The application of the death penalty* for drug related offences has never been in the spirit of the Conventions. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) advocates the abolition of the death penalty. General Assembly resolutions call upon Member States to restrict the death penalty to “most serious crimes” which are generally not understood to include drug-related crimes.
- *Alternatives to punishment for drug use* can be an effective way to alleviate the congestion of jails, to reallocate resources to treatment and to facilitate the eventual reskilling and reintegration of drug users. Imprisonment of people for drug use increases their vulnerability to drug use disorders and diseases.
- *Understanding of the root causes of violence and the links between drug trafficking and other criminal activities such as corruption is important*. The relationship is complex and it cannot be assumed that the use of drugs automatically leads to violence.
- *Open dialogue with civil society*, creative and proactive exchange of ideas and lessons learned in combating organized crime and drugs is important. The Commission has established a set of formal and informal consultation opportunities and rules for engaging with civil society organizations.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) appreciate the opening of many areas of UNODC to civil society, but remain discouraged about the lack of access to the

working groups of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and those of the United Nations Convention against Corruption. We appreciate the improved cooperation with the substantive programmes and the civil society unit of UNODC.

NGOs also believe that there should be a greater openness to an evaluation of the new drug control regimes in various countries. As the Conventions do not require the punishment of possession, purchase or cultivation for personal use, the legislation and jurisdiction of some countries should be examined on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis regarding the use of public funds and health and social costs.

The Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Crime Prevention and the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs believe that *UNODC should anchor itself more firmly in the 2015 Development Agenda* in relation to poverty, economic and social development, health, women, environment and peace and security.

The United Nations system might benefit from sharing experiences of UNODC's evidence-based multi-sectoral approach, for example in its alternative development projects and health-driven harm reduction schemes.

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