

Statement to the High Level Review of the 2009 Plan of Action

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates and fellow representatives of the Non Government Organizations.

I am speaking in my capacity as Chair of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs.

We represent over 150 organizations that have millions of members around the world. Citizens who at local, national and international levels seek to implement the ideals and ambitions contained in United Nations international instruments.

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We represent a substantial resource in terms of complementing efforts to implement humane and evidence based policies and interventions in the area of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery.

In consulting our members to identify achievements since 2009, we have noted some gains and some challenges especially with the systematic implementation and support for demand reduction programs.

We also noted that national Plans have been adopted by many countries and, in several instances; NGOs and affected populations have been involved or consulted in their development. And we thank you for that.

However, as UNODC has reported, too few plans have been financed, meaningfully implemented or remain as concepts on paper.

Mr. Chairman, many distinguished speakers who have preceded me – have underscored the challenge of addressing the world drug problem.

Indeed, it must be acknowledged that this complex challenge cannot be addressed by governments alone.

In that context we have seen some progress in civil society involvement since 2009. You yourselves have noted this and we have reported the experience of NGOs in the background document we prepared in response to Resolution 56/12 and in the written statement we have submitted. And for this we are also thankful.

It is undeniable however that despite significant efforts expended in the past five years we remain faced with a significant impact gap towards the Priorities identified in 2009.

In some regions, we have made progress in the last 5 years against our objective of reducing the demand and supply of illicit drugs; in other areas, we have made little progress, or the problem is getting worse.

In addition, the emergence of several new legislative models in the Americas and elsewhere require a critical review and as they relate to the international drug control system. We also must note that in many parts of the world, structural issues related to institution strengthening and security are lacking.

As we identified at the 3rd informal Civil Society Hearing and reported at our High Level Briefing, we would like to bring to your attention to the following key priorities, which we believe can make significant gains in bridging this impact gap.

First, we believe that we need to build a collective understanding of what a health based approach should be in the context of drug control. And in this instance we suggest using the WHO definition of health as an appropriate guide for our work.

Second, there needs to be greater system wide coherence in implementing a health based approach to drug policy – and especially so as to achieve targets of the Millennium Development Goals, the Political Declaration and Plan of

Action of 2009 and those of the UN General Assembly Special Sessions on HIV/AIDS.

We heard clearly from the co-chairs of the Scientific Advisory Committee yesterday on the need to scale up harm reduction services – as consistent with the drug control conventions and in line with the UNODC/WHO/UNAIDS Technical guide.

Yet, we note that the CND has not yet found common ground on the term harm reduction. We strongly encourage you to do so – and underscore that the VNGOC has done just that in a manner acceptable to our entire breadth of our members.

Another area around system coherence is with regard to the use of the death penalty which has been denounced by

many speakers and representatives of the United Nations and INCB. We urge the CND to also find a means to resolve this apparent impasse as we go forward.

We also have to urgently eliminate the barriers that deny access to treatment and pain relief to millions of citizens. It cannot be acceptable to anyone that over 75% of the world's population has no or very limited access to strong analgesic pain relief.

And finally, we need to ensure that our focus is balanced and takes into account key, relevant UN treaties. The Universal Declaration of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child are extremely important commitments, that we must keep at the forefront of our collective efforts.

Mr. Chairman, while there are significant challenges that need to be addressed going forward, I think we can also focus on the tremendous opportunities before us.

These past two days have given much greater insight on these which include,

- clear, unbiased and compelling scientific recommendations for Member States, the CND and others to guide investments and priorities.
- flexibility in both the interpretation and implementation of the Conventions which maintains the spirit of these important instruments.

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- a convergence of views and priorities by many Member States on addressing the drug problem as a health issue and with the active participation of NGOs;
 - the need to clearly define language, goals, and objectives; and
 - that the upcoming 2016 UNGASS has instilled a sense of urgency to deal with the challenges before us in an innovative manner.

The VNGOC and its members are ready and willing to work with you.

We sincerely appreciate the very active participation of representatives here at our High Level Briefing which discussed many of the points I have touched on here.

Our membership shares your desire to prevent drug misuse and care for those who experience drug problems.

Let us build on our strengthening partnership nationally and internationally so that in 2016 we can advance even further our efforts and by 2019, have many real successes to celebrate.

Thank you for your attention.