

**Remarks of the UNODC Executive Director
Special Segment of the 59th Session of the
Commission on Narcotic Drugs
14 March 2016**

**Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues,**

We meet just one month before the UN General Assembly special session on the world drug problem.

It has been a long road leading to the UNGASS. But the hard work is not over.

I hope that intensive negotiations on the draft outcome document for UNGASS will conclude successfully at this CND session.

The Commission will also consider a number of important resolutions, addressing the multifarious aspects of the world drug problem, from prevention and treatment of drug use disorders as well as addressing new psychoactive substances, to strengthening international and regional drug control partnerships, alternative development, cooperation with the scientific community and civil society organizations, and gender perspectives.

A demanding week lies ahead.

But I am confident that the Chair of the current session, Ambassador Galuška, and the Chair of the UNGASS Board, Ambassador Shamaa, will shoulder their considerable burdens capably and skillfully.

It has been an honour for UNODC to support the CND in its work leading inclusive and active preparations for UNGASS.

Participation has been broad and diverse, and the debate informed and frank.

By encompassing issues of drugs and health, drugs and crime, human rights, security and safety, emerging challenges and sustainable development, the UNGASS process has helped to promote a more comprehensive understanding of the problems we face and, I hope, encouraged a greater appreciation of the challenges faced by all countries and regions.

Our global approach to the world drug problem must be inspired by many local priorities. We are all in this together.

The UNGASS process has emphasized the shared responsibilities stemming from illicit drugs.

These include the dangers of opiate production and trafficking from Afghanistan; the fragility of regions including West and East Africa; deadly violence in Central America; the growing nexus of organized crime groups and violent extremists profiting from the illicit drug trade; and the never-ending proliferation of new psychoactive substances.

Crucially, the UNGASS process has put the focus on the lives lost and the needless suffering caused by the world drug problem.

Globally, some twenty-seven million people suffer from drug use disorders, including twelve million people who inject drugs.

Almost two hundred thousand people lose their lives each year as a result of overdose and other drug-related medical conditions.

Some thirteen per cent of the people who inject drugs are infected with HIV, compared with less than one per cent among the general population.

The incidence of hepatitis C among people who inject drugs exceeds fifty per cent.

However, evidence-based prevention, treatment and rehabilitation remain at very low levels of coverage in many parts of the world.

The ongoing debate has drawn much-needed attention to the need for the development and implementation of laws, policies and practices, rooted in health and human rights, that prioritize access to voluntary, evidence-based and accessible lifesaving prevention and treatment services, including for overdose, HIV and hepatitis.

Under the drug control conventions, State Parties have committed to ensuring that access to controlled narcotic and psychotropic substances to relieve pain and suffering is not unduly restricted, while recognizing the need to prevent abuse, misuse and diversion.

Yet three-quarters of the world's population have little or no access to such medicines.

Our partners at WHO estimate that each year, five-point-five million terminal cancer patients and one million end-stage AIDS patients suffer needlessly.

The UNGASS process has helped to raise awareness of this continuing global health problem, and the need to put people first when developing responses.

Moreover, it has helped to put the spotlight on considering, in appropriate drug-related cases of a minor nature, including possession for personal consumption, alternatives to conviction or punishment, using such measures as education, aftercare, rehabilitation and social reintegration.

This can further help to address prison congestion and prevent the recruitment of vulnerable individuals in detention by hardcore criminals and even terrorists.

The UNGASS discussions have also highlighted the issue of the death penalty. A number of General Assembly resolutions have called for the abolition of, or a moratorium on, the use of the death penalty. Its application for drug-related offences has never been in the letter or the spirit of the drug control conventions.

The UNGASS process has also served to underscore the importance of addressing development in drug policies, and vice versa.

This includes, but is certainly not limited to, initiatives to promote development-oriented drug control policies to improve the socio-economic situation of farmers, while at the same time reducing illicit crops in a sustainable manner.

The new 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda provides the basis for such comprehensive action by linking social and economic development to health, governance and the rule of law.

UNODC, as the lead entity in the UN system addressing all these challenges posed by the world drug problem, remains fully engaged in supporting Member States through balanced approaches, rooted in agreed frameworks and informed by UNODC's research, guidelines and extensive on-the-ground experience.

Through our field offices and programmes linking global, inter-regional, regional and country-level responses, we are working with you to tackle illicit drugs and organized crime.

This includes supporting cooperation at the regional, inter-regional and global levels, and developing a network of partnerships, as well as building national intelligence, law enforcement and criminal justice capacities to go after, dismantle and successfully prosecute criminal organizations.

I go into more detail about our efforts and the lessons learned in my report to UNGASS, which I hope will prove useful to you in your discussions.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Your deliberations here at the CND and towards the UNGASS can help to take further crucial steps forward to promote a healthier, safer and more prosperous future for all.

I wish you every success this week.

You know you can count on UNODC's support. Thank you.