

Norwegian statement on UNGASS 2016
59th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
Vienna, 15 March 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson,

I am pleased to be given the opportunity speak on behalf of the Norwegian Government about this important issue, leading up to the General Assembly's special session on drugs. Norway has aligned ourselves with the statement by the European Union. I will add some few remarks of importance for us.

Firstly, let me thank the members of the UNGASS-board for their efforts to prepare the important session in New York in the best way. Our gratitude also goes to the CND Bureau and to the UNODC-Secretariat for their valuable support. It is our hope and ambition that the UNGASS will be a success and that it will make a difference.

A success is necessary. We have to admit that we, despite our efforts, are still far from sufficiently handling the World Drug Problem. The magnitude of the problem, the numbers and indicators, our inability in

addressing the problem properly – as well as new challenges from technological development and globalization – all tells us that we need political action and political will.

We need political will to critically examine our approach, and stress the need to include a health-oriented perspective.

We need political will to ensure forceful international cooperation, to counter the criminal networks behind drug trafficking, and to counter corruption and the involvement of corrupt authorities in making drug trafficking possible.

We need political will to secure access to legal medicines, to reduce the suffering of individuals, to fix governance challenges and we need political will to respect human rights and implement the rule of law.

As mentioned by Executive Director Fedotov at the outset of this session we need to address the nexus between organized crime, terrorism and the drug problem.

As a global society, we should agree on the basic assumption that drug policy is about human beings. Drug policies is about reducing harm to the world society, reducing harm to nations, to regions, to communities and to the many millions individuals affected by drugs and the drug trade.

The slogan used leading up the previous UNGASS on drugs in 1998 was "A Drug-Free World: We Can Do It". While not a part of any declaration, the special session resulted in agreement on several highly ambitious goals.

With the privilege of hindsight, we must question the realism of these goals, and - in our view - recognize that they perhaps were too ambitious.

The question is, are we about to repeat this?

Realism is not defeatism, and it is crucial to the legitimacy of our efforts to limit drug use and the drug trade, that they do not invite accusations of being based on wishful thinking.

UNGASS is meant to review what progress has been made, and to identify achievements, challenges and priorities for further action. This requires a thorough and honest assessment of where we have succeeded the past decades, and why - and where we have not.

Our general impression is that the UNGASS-process has yet to sufficiently take on this challenge. In this policy area, one can sense a tendency to do "more of the same" without critically questioning if one achieves the desired effects.

We recognize with satisfaction that a perspective grounded in health and public health is far more often included and paid attention to now than before. The same is true of a human rights-based approach.

While not satisfactory on all levels, we see the acceptance for and the inclusion of civil society is improving.

All these developments show us moving in a direction we appreciate. However, we still have a long way to go in reaching a sufficient balancing of health and control. We need a broader recognition that the perspective of public health and human rights is actually essential to limiting the problematic use of and demand for drugs. In that way we will also strengthen the efforts of the criminal justice sector in limiting the illegal trade in narcotic drugs -while approaching the issue in a more humane way. Those hit hardest by the problems created by the trade of narcotic drugs may benefit from that.

Norway does not question the drug control treaties as the framework for international drug policy, and thus the need for national drug policies to be in accordance with these. We do however believe there is room for a more flexible interpretation of the conventions, allowing for more variation and adaption to different national contexts and regional challenges. We also believe that this is necessary for the future preservation of the status of the conventions, and can prevent calls for the legalization of drugs.

We regret that some important issues essential to handling the problems caused by narcotic drugs, still seems to be insufficiently recognized by some parties. The use of harm reducing measures is one such issue. As part of a balanced approach, which we all support, harm reduction should be a matter of course – both to limit the harm from using illegal drugs, as a tool to help drug users achieve abstinence, and to prevent the spread of diseases – which can also affect the non-drug using population.

We therefore still hope and expect that harm reduction will be included as part of the UNGASS outcome.

Harm reduction is a tool and an approach, but not sufficient in itself. Helping drug users away from harmful substance abuse requires access to drug treatment, rehabilitation and support. Our investment in these areas is a key component of the Norwegian government's drug policy, helping those burdened by drug addiction achieve a better life without drug abuse and its harmful consequences.

We will also repeat what Executive Director Fedotov and the European Union stated regarding respect for human rights and the right to health. Norway oppose the death penalty in all circumstances and without exception. We call upon states that still maintain the death penalty to establish a moratorium on executions for drug offenses, as a first step towards the abolition of the death penalty.

As a general view, Norway calls for more proportionality in judicial responses to drug-related offenses, taking into consideration both mitigating and aggravating factors. Sanctions for drug-related offences should be in proportionate to the severity the severity of the crime.

We also want to highlight the need for drug control efforts to focus on those who benefit the most from the illegal drug trade, rather than those harmed most by it; those running the criminal organizations, rather than users who really have fallen victim to these.

Norway advocates a comprehensive approach to the World Drug Problem. The Drug Conventions is a core element in such a comprehensive approach. However, as the challenges are growing and as drug related organized crime, corruption and measures to counter it does have a serious impact on governance, development, health and security, we need to look for a wider set of tools also in those sectors.

That is why my Government advocates for higher attention to be paid to the Wold Drug Problem also in the implementation of the new Sustainable Development Goals., within the Human Rights Council, the World Health Assembly, the General Assembly in New York as well as the Security Council to supplement the activities of the CND. That is also the true spirit of the new Sustainable Development Goals.

All affected by the world drug problem have expectations to us to come up with solid and forward-looking responses to the serious problems we face. Let us not disappoint them.