



**Remarks Mr. Esbjörn Hörnberg, Chairperson Civil Society Task Force,  
at the UNGASS Segment**

59<sup>th</sup> annual session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs  
14-22 March 2016, Vienna, Austria

*Excellences,  
Ladies and gentlemen,*

On behalf of the Civil Society Task Force for UNGASS 2016, I would like to thank you for the support you have shown for our work in the preparatory process for the UNGASS, which illustrates the inclusive and participatory nature of this process. Those of you who were at the Civil Society Task Force Briefing have heard this already, but for those of you that had to be somewhere else, I would like to reiterate our message on this occasion.

These past weeks, most of you have been directly engaged in the negotiations on the draft UNGASS outcome document. Many arguments have been put forth and the debate continues. During this week, you will hear more coming from civil society organizations worldwide and it is our hope that you will consider these arguments in the negotiations which are yet to take place.

I would like to share a quote from a poem written in 1895 by Mary T. Lathrap, which might be known to you:

“Remember to walk a mile in his moccasins  
And remember the lessons of humanity taught to you by your elders.  
We will be known forever by the tracks we leave  
In other people's lives, our kindnesses and generosity.

Take the time to walk a mile in his moccasins.”<sup>1</sup>

I encourage you to use this approach in your efforts to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of humankind. Consider addressing the world drug problem from the perspective of ALL affected by drugs, from the children of parents using drugs, to the parents and friends of drug users, the drug users themselves, the doctors and nurses offering treatment, the terminally-ill cancer patients unable to get morphine to alleviate the pain, the incarcerated drug users living with HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis C, the drug mules on death row for drug trafficking, the farmers who can make a living only by growing illicit crops, their families and friends. The list can go on and on. Many are affected in various ways and it is in their shoes that we should try to walk when discussing evidence-based, tailored responses aimed at furthering their health and welfare.

And because many are affected, there is a common and shared responsibility to engage in the debate in good faith and work together. For its part, the Civil Society Task Force for the UNGASS, through regional and thematic consultations, the global civil society drug survey, the Interactive Informal Stakeholder Consultation and many other events, has honored this obligation. And we are grateful for the financial support received in order to do so.

Working together can be challenging, especially when strong views are held. Here I encourage you ALL to keep an open mind. Be open to ACTIVELY listening to all views, to inclusive and balanced processes, which are THE MOST likely to ensure optimal results. Remember, we are all here for the benefit of ALL affected populations and our communities at large.

Based on the work carried out by the Civil Society Task Force thus far, areas of strong consensus among civil society have emerged, such as the need for access to essential medicines and palliative care. Much concern has been voiced about the ongoing use of the death penalty for drug related offences, but not only.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://www.aaanativearts.com/native-american-poetry/walk-a-mile-in-his-moccasins> [Accessed 13 March 2016]

Among civil society, there is a keen interest in the need for a public health approach to drug policy, encompassing appropriate drug prevention strategies, access to essential medicines and palliative care, adequate harm reduction services and supplies to reduce harms and evidence-based and culturally appropriate treatment. The role civil society can play in adopting and implementing a public health approach has been highlighted again and again. Working directly on the ground with affected populations and communities, civil society organizations are a key resource in designing and implementing effective interventions.

The need for appropriate funding for evidence-based drug prevention initiatives, particularly for youth, was shared with those calling for harm reduction services to be made widely available and freely accessible to all people who use drugs, regardless of nationality, race/ethnicity, age, gender, class, or any other demographic characteristic.

There are also issues on which diverse opinions have been expressed, notably related to the international drug control conventions and recent decriminalization and regulation trends. While some civil society representatives advocate for the preservation of the drug conventions and making use of flexibility in interpreting and implementing them, others consider that the time has come to explore reinterpreting and revisiting these legal instruments. They also advocate for greater drug policy experimentation by UN Member States, maintaining that they should be able to choose which drug-related policies to implement based on their own individual circumstances, cultures, needs and priorities. Various views have also been expressed concerning the health and social costs of existing and/or potential drug regulation and decriminalization in some parts of the world.

Therefore, when negotiating the UNGASS outcome document and discussing the various dimensions of the world drug problem, please remember to walk in the moccasins of those whose health and welfare you are trying to promote, including those of your families, friends and the communities in which you live.

Thank you for your attention.