

59th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

Joint NGO Statement

by

Active - Sobriety, Friendship and Peace, World Federation Against Drugs, IOGT International, Ungdomens Nykterhetsförbund (UNF), San Patrignano, Proslavi Oporavak - Celebrate Recovery, Stijena, EURAD, Swedish National Association for a Drug-Free Society, Preporod, Restart, Turkish Green Crescent, Smart Approaches to Marijuana, Uganda Youth Development Link, Forut, ECAD Soberlife Mentorship Society, People Against Drug Dependence and Ignorance

Together, we are representing more than 300 NGOs working on grass-roots, national, regional and global level in various activities, projects and advocacy initiatives connected to prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.

We would like to use this opportunity to deliver feedback and recommendations for the final outcome document and specifically address youth and prevention.

We welcome that the Member States put focus on prevention and reaffirm the dedication to prevent the abuse of drugs. We strongly support the vision of a society free of drug abuse as the desired outcome for drug policies and interventions. We need to have high ambitions, as with the recently adopted Agenda 2030, uniting member states with a vision of a better world and aim at ending poverty in all its forms, everywhere. Similar ambitions can be found in areas such as traffic deaths, HIV/AIDS, and over the past years also around tobacco.

The Conventions should be the cornerstones of the international drug control system, in full conformity with human rights. *We want to stress that neither the legalization of cannabis nor the militarization of law enforcement as well as policies that disregard human rights and disproportional use of punishment, or other inhumane approaches in treatment are in line with the Conventions.* All these matters should be addressed by UNGASS.

In this regard, *one of our concerns in the current debate are the developments with regards to the legalization of cannabis.* This is done in opposition to the conventions and we see this as threatening the international cooperation.

We call on Member States to make sure that the use of cannabis for medical use is done according to national regulatory framework on approval of new medicines, based on scientific review. We also request Member States to reiterate their commitment to the conventions, also in connection with the debate about the legal status of cannabis.

We would also like to remind the state parties about the consequences that this current trend of legalizing drugs will have on less developed countries. Rich countries are failing to find resources to address their drug problem and care for their children and their poor - we cannot expect that less developed countries will find the resources. The world's poorest communities are the most vulnerable to the harms of drug use and trade, they will not be able to regulate the marketing or collect taxes from drug sales, simply because there are no taxes to collect.

We want to emphasize prevention, early intervention, treatment, and recovery as the way forward. To deny the addictive potential of cannabis or negative mental health effects is to deny the overwhelming scientific evidence available today. Our experience tells us that we should not

welcome with open arms a new industry – like Big Tobacco – which will focus on commercializing and increasing the use of a drug far more potent today than it has ever been.

We need to prevent drug use, not promote it.

We would also like to share some of the best practices, challenges and recommendations identified by some of our members, in their capacity as members of the Civil Society Task Force, in the spheres of prevention and youth. We hope they can serve as an input for the Member States' important deliberations towards the UNGASS preparations.

With regards to the youth consultation in the CSTF, coordinated by Active, we would like to emphasize that young people call for policies with public health and youth and children's rights at its core.

The online youth survey reached 71 organizations and 269 individuals from all over the world. *As one of the outcomes, youth organizations' preferred policy approach in these consultations was supporting civil society in creating free, safe and inclusive environments for young people, facilitating mobility, well-being and non-formal learning.*

In the experience of the grass-root organization Ungdomens Nykterhetsförbund from Sweden, *prevention work through offering quality leisure time activities that are free of charge and conducted in safe and drug-free environments*, have proven to result in fewer young people trying drugs, using drugs and getting addicted. These activities help children and young people in developing life skills, gaining motivation and empower them to active participation in society. Such protective social factors, as well as the social and economic empowerment, have proven to prevent initiation of drug use among children and young people.

With regards to the consultation on prevention, after a challenging and extensive process of obtaining the views of different actors from the civil society, the final outcome showed that *prevention is identified as one of the most important aspects to prioritize in order to solve the world drug problem*. There is a strong opinion that prevention needs to be discussed more. More importantly, we also need to move beyond words and implement the best practices we are praising at the local level. *The use of illicit drugs is a health problem that can and should be prevented, for many reasons; one being that it is cost effective.*

The most common best practices, that would allow for easier implementation of prevention policies are:

- ✓ Knowing the local conditions: “doing good” is simply not enough, we need to know the local preconditions and do activities that are relevant and based on evidence or best practices.
- ✓ Importance of family and community: We need to work with both the community and the family in prevention work. Many organizations are working with strengthening the capacity of parents, both in the west and in the global south.
- ✓ Involving youth: The need to involve youth both in the planning and implementation of the prevention activities is stressed. They are the experts in the area and have important information and input on how we can better reach them and adapt our message, both where they want to be reached and how the message could be formulated.
- ✓ Cooperation: There was a stressed need for, and the possibility of, increased cooperation and coordination between actors and sectors. This would enable better use of existing resources and could be part of the solution of the scarce resources that are seen as a challenge.

Some of the main challenges in the implementation of prevention policies :

- ✓ Lack of data: Best practices should include knowing the local conditions when planning a prevention activity. However, in many areas of the world data is lacking, which is a challenge for organizations planning prevention activities. There is a need for quantitative and qualitative data on the use of drugs and the dynamics behind initiation of drug use. This is especially stressed from responses from the global south.
- ✓ Negative influence of media and culture: The influence of media and culture with a more positive attitude towards drugs is mentioned as a way of normalizing drugs and a challenge.
- ✓ Prevention activities towards marginalized groups: One issue of concern is the special needs of children growing up in marginalized areas, such as the slum areas or other areas affected by poverty and social exclusion. The need to connect the World Drug Problem to poverty is being raised. There is also a sense of neglect in this area of the world. Organizations are asking for answers on how we can better support children growing up in slums, with high rate of addiction among the adults, to break the vicious circle and its future consequences.
- ✓ Availability of treatment: Another important challenge is to close the gap between the need and the availability of treatment, especially in poor areas.
- ✓ Selected interventions: It was highlighted that we need to develop our capability to identify risks and our answers to intervene early to interrupt drug use. Civil Society has different ways of reaching young people of risk, some use the Criminal Justice System and others see it as a hinder.

We will conclude with the most important point, raised from people working at the grass-root level. *The Global Drug Policy needs to be implemented, a policy will not make any difference without a plan for implementation and resources.* The importance is not the outcome paper as such, but what happens afterwards. The question is if this will be an academic and diplomatic exercise, or lead to real improvements for people.

We therefore urge you to take the necessary steps, in Vienna and in your home country, and to *write the outcome document specific enough* so that we from the civil society can demand and push you to take action. I ensure you that we are willing and ready to do so.

We look forward to working with civil society partners and governments in improving the realities in drug policies on all levels.