

UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs must reaffirm commitment to human rights

Oral statement to the 59th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (14– 22 March 2016)

Thank you Mr. President.

This statement is presented on behalf of Amnesty International, Harm Reduction International, IDPC, Penal Reform International and Reprieve.

We welcome the opportunity to address the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the special segment in preparation for the UN General Assembly Special Session on drugs.

Our organizations note with concern that crucial references to human rights are still absent from the current draft of the UNGASS Outcome Document, while certain recommendations fall below international human rights law and standards.

The Special Session on drugs presents a unique opportunity for States to reaffirm their commitment to the protection of human dignity and ensure that human rights violations committed in the name of drug control are halted.

We particularly regret that the prohibition of the death penalty for drug-related offences has so far been excluded from the draft Outcome Document despite continuous calls from several States, UN agencies and civil society organizations.

Hundreds of executions are carried out each year for drug-related offences, despite the fact that such offences do not meet the threshold of the "most serious crimes" to which the use of the death penalty must be restricted in accordance with international law and standards. Amnesty International recorded death sentences and executions for drug-related offences in 11 countries in 2014 and in 2015.¹ Drug-related offences are still punished or punishable by death in more than 30 countries.

In the last year international agencies have announced millions of dollars' worth of funding for counter-narcotics operations in countries which apply the death penalty for drug offences. We call for such agencies and their donors to heed the warnings of the UN Special Rapporteurs on Torture and on Summary Executions, who stated in October 2015 that "international cooperation to combat drug crime could, in certain circumstances, inadvertently be contributing to unlawful executions"; and that "International agencies, as well as States providing bilateral technical assistance to combat drug crime, must ensure that the programmes to which they contribute do not ultimately result in violations of the right to life".

There is still time to ensure that the final Outcome Document is aligned with international

¹ China, Indonesia, Iran, Kuwait, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Viet Nam. See also Amnesty International, *Death sentences and executions in 2014* (ACT 50/001/2015), 31 March 2015, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/0001/2015/en/>

human rights law and standards, and in particular that includes a call to respect the right to life of persons convicted of drug-related offences in accordance with article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the jurisprudence of the Human Rights Committee.

Mr. President,

Widespread human rights abuses and violations that arise and are driven by the implementation of current drug policies and counter-narcotic operations around the world have been long documented. In this context, civil society organizations have urged States to ensure that drug policies and related programmes do not result in human rights violations, including through international cooperation

The high-level panel held on September last year by the Human Rights Council on the "impact of the world drug problem on the enjoyment of human rights" presented an important opportunity to give visibility to the human rights violations that are committed in the name of drug control.²

We therefore call on all Member States to ensure that the study presented by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Council is acknowledged in the Outcome Document and, in particular, that they commit to take immediate steps to implement the recommendations contained therein.

I thank you Mr. President.

² *Study on the impact of the world drug problem on the enjoyment of human rights*, UN doc. A/HRC/30/65, 4 September 2015.