

Norwegian statement at
The General debate of the 63rd session of the CND
Monday 2 March 2020
By Minister of Health and Care Services
Mr. Bent Høie

Chair,
Excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen,
distinguished delegates;

Four years ago, from this floor, I expressed hope that the upcoming UNGASS would become a success and that its outcome would make a difference.

Today we ask – has it made a difference?

I cannot offer a final verdict, but when studying the state of the world drug problems as reflected in several relevant reports, I conclude that we still have a way to go.

Not only regarding quantitative results, but also regarding values, the range of political instruments we choose as well as our capability to agree upon a united way forward.

In my view, we need and more forward looking responses and actions. And we have several relevant agreements to build action upon in addition to the Ministerial Declaration.

A broader engagement of the wider UN family can bring greater system-wide coherence between the different goals of drug control, human rights, public health and sustainable development.

Norway advocates a comprehensive approach to the World Drug Problem, recognizing The Drug Conventions as cornerstones. However, as the roots of the problem are complex, the way we address the challenges must be similar. Thus, we need strong cooperation with the Human Rights Council, the World Health Assembly – and the UN entities in New York to supplement the activities of the CND. Not least to achieve the health related Sustainable Development Goals which are of utmost relevance in this context.

As a global society, we should agree on the basic assumption that drug policy is about human beings, about reducing harm to the world society, to nations, to regions, to communities and to the many million individuals affected by drugs and drug trade. Hence, we should recognize public health and human rights as essential to limiting the drug related problems.

I want to emphasize the need for drug control efforts to focus mainly on those who most of all benefit from illegal drug trade. Namely those running the criminal organizations, and not the users who are harmed the most. And as a paradox, those negative consequences are only partly caused by the drug use itself, as some effects are negative consequences of the drug control policies.

Norway is opposed to the use of death penalty. We strongly argue that death penalty is incompatible with human rights and human dignity and violates the right to life.

Our ambition is to build inclusive societies and to leave no one behind. To get

there and to meet the health needs and ensure access to essential health care services for all citizens, strong health systems are required. Unfortunately, we are not there yet.

In my country for example, people suffering from severe mental health problems and substance use disorder in average live 20 years shorter than the general population. The main reason is that they do not receive the same health care for diseases like cancer, diabetes and heart problems as the rest of the population.

When the General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, we decided to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all, by delivering on the 2023 Agenda.

One of the promises made was to achieve Universal Health Coverage, all people – including people suffering from substance use disorder - should have access to, and afford to use, essential health services. It is our joint responsibility to ensure that this right can be enjoyed by all.

Chair,

Sanctions for drug-related offences should be proportionate to the severity of the crime. For that reason, but also to reduce stigma and discrimination and to lower the threshold for asking for help, I have initiated a drug reform.

For more in-depth information on that subject, I advise you to join us at our Special Event in room C3 at a quarter past one today.

At UNGASS in 2016 I promised that Norway intended to be a clear voice for a more progressive approach up to 2019 and beyond. I have kept that promise, and now we have to maintain what we have achieved and to take further steps towards a non-stigmatizing, humane and public health oriented drug policy.

I thank you.