

VNGOC Statement for CND Special Event

25th June 2021, Jamie Bridge (Chair)

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Thank you, Ambassador, for inviting me to speak today on behalf of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs.

For those who may not know us, the Vienna Committee comprises more than 300 non-governmental organisations from around 70 countries. Our mandate is to ensure and support civil society engagement in drug policy discussions here in Vienna – including with CND, UNODC and the INCB.

So I want to start by thanking the CND Secretariat and UNODC, especially the Civil Society Unit, for giving NGOs a space around the virtual table at today's event – and also for ensuring that the event is being webcast. As Angela Me mentioned, there is also a launch event taking place in New York later today, at which the New York NGO Committee on Drugs will be making a similar statement to this.

I also want to echo others in congratulating Angela and her team for delivering this latest World Drug Report. It is a massive undertaking, and it remains the main tool that we have for understanding and analysing the world drug situation. The Vienna Committee looks forward to co-hosting two webinars with UNODC next month, for NGOs to discuss the Report in more detail.

The World Drug Report has become even more comprehensive and robust since the revision of the Annual Report Questionnaires, or ARQs, in 2020. However, important gaps remain – not least because a significant number of countries are still not fully completing the ARQs. So we echo calls for governments to “Share facts on drugs” and to provide the most accurate and reliable data possible.

UNODC's theme this year – “Share facts on drugs, Save lives” – is also a timely reminder of the importance of combating misinformation. As you all know, we live in a world where misinformation can spread fast and wide. Scientific data are obscured by so-called ‘fake news’, and it's becoming perilously difficult for many people to disaggregate fact from fiction (perhaps even more so during the pandemic).

Not only must we ensure that we gather, use and communicate the best evidence – we also need to ensure that we are collecting all the available evidence, that we are asking the right questions, and that we are consistently basing our statements and discussions on facts here at the CND. Transparency is also key. For example, it has often not been possible to see the drugs data that has been submitted by governments, even when an ARQ has been cited as a reference in the Report.

Future World Drug Reports should be complemented by other research and analysis collected by academia, civil society, communities and UN agencies. This will help to provide an even fuller picture and greater context – especially when it comes to human rights and the realities on the ground. Several other UN entities, for example, already formally invite and reflect NGO inputs and shadow reports. So UNODC and the CND could consider similar mechanisms here in Vienna. And, of course, NGOs must also hold ourselves to the highest standards in terms of the quality and transparency of the evidence that we generate and use.

Finally, given today's theme of "Save lives", one of the key headlines that I take from the World Drug Report is that drug-related deaths have nearly doubled over the past decade. As we have heard already, in 2019 there were half a million deaths from hepatitis, overdoses, poisoned supplies and the like. We have to do better. We have to create environments where people can be informed, supported and protected.

As always, civil society is able and willing to work with all of you, in both sharing facts and saving lives. As the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs, we look forward to being part of the solution.

Thank you for your attention.