

Youth Statement

66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

We are 34 youth from 28 countries, and we are honoured to stand before you today.

We realize that substance use is a multifactorial problem that affects young people in every region around the world. For every person that experiences substance use disorders, there are greater burdens placed on healthcare, the economy, and communities. As we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the world faces a new normal where people are still struggling to adjust to disruptions in their lives. With increased substance use during the isolation periods, we need to stay vigilant in addressing these issues to return to a normally functioning society.

The importance of preventing substance use cannot be understated, as prevention is a cost-effective, proactive solution to substance use. Raising awareness and passively disseminating information is not enough to stop the problem before it escalates. We should strive to achieve a healthy, equal, and sustainable society through commitment, perseverance, and strategic evidence-based programmes. By laying the foundations of prevention through education, social programmes, and policies, we can stop substance use before it starts. For example, more social and emotional skills learning that builds resilience at age-appropriate development stages could be implemented within the education system.

For our goal to be realised, urgent and conclusive action must be taken. This entails the improvement of health literacy on a global scale, the implementation of preventative policies, and the promotion of social support networks. The focus must

be on the person, not the substance. Cooperation between various stakeholders is necessary and research must be further developed to avail more evidence-based prevention programmes.

We call on Member States to consult with youth to understand our values and needs. Youth engagement is critical in making prevention effective. Young people offer unique insight into constantly evolving substance use issues, foster borderless interconnected awareness, and ensure long-term sustainability. Youth should be actively engaged in the implementation of existing platforms and projects because we have a better understanding of our generation. We can also help create new evidence-based strategies with a holistic and regional context and perspective. Reducing power dynamics between adult leaders and youth is an effective way to ensure that we feel safe to express our ideas and feel empowered to take initiative. Only through collaboration can we reach innovative and practical solutions.

The importance of investing in our generation must not be ignored. We have a responsibility to ensure a safer future for everyone. We know what needs to be addressed, and what our needs are. Youth are the present, not just the future.

Breaking the cycle of substance use tomorrow requires youth engagement in prevention today.