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## Commission on Narcotic Drugs

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General debate

### **Statement submitted by the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs (VNGOC), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* [E/CN.7/2025/1](#).

\*\* Issued without formal editing.



## **Preserving and Expanding Civil Society Space in Drug Policy: A Call to Action**

As we approach the tenth anniversary of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the World Drug Problem, it is imperative to reflect on the progress made and the challenges that lie ahead in global drug policy. The 2016 UNGASS outcome document, “Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem”, emphasized the importance of a comprehensive, balanced, and inclusive approach, integrating public health, human rights, and development perspectives. Central to this approach is the active involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs), which play a crucial role in shaping effective and humane drug policies.

### **The Role of Civil Society in Drug Policy**

Civil society organizations serve as a bridge between affected communities and policymakers, ensuring that the voices of those most impacted by drug policies are heard. They contribute to policy development, implementation, and evaluation by providing on-the-ground insights, advocating for evidence-based interventions, and holding governments accountable to their commitments. The inclusion of CSOs fosters transparency, promotes human rights (including the rights of children and young people), and enhances the effectiveness of drug policies.

### **Challenges to Civil Society Engagement**

Despite the recognized importance of civil society participation, recent developments have raised concerns about the potential shrinking space for CSOs in the field of drug policy. Notably, changes in international funding priorities have led to reduced support for civil society initiatives, undermining their capacity to operate effectively. This contraction of support threatens to silence critical voices and diminish the diversity of perspectives essential for comprehensive policymaking.

### **The 2025 High-Level Political Forum and Sustainable Development Goals**

The upcoming High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, scheduled from 14 to 23 July 2025 and its theme “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind”, underscores the necessity of inclusive approaches in policy formulation and implementation. In-depth reviews of SDG 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) and SDG 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development) will be conducted, both of which are intrinsically linked to effective drug policies.

### **Civil Society’s Contribution to SDG 3 and SDG 17**

CSOs are instrumental in advancing SDG 3 by delivering prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery, and other health and social services, advocating for access to essential medicines, and promoting public health approaches to drug use. Their grassroots initiatives often reach marginalized populations that governmental programs may overlook, thereby enhancing the overall health outcomes of communities.

In the context of SDG 17, civil society fosters partnerships across sectors, mobilizes resources, and facilitates knowledge exchange. Their collaborative efforts with governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders are vital in building resilient and effective frameworks to address the multifaceted challenges of the world drug problem.

### **Looking Ahead: Civil Society Engagement Towards 2029**

As we look towards 2029, the target year for many international drug policy commitments, it is essential to prioritize the preservation and expansion of civil society space. To achieve this, we recommend the following actions:

1. **Enhanced Support and Funding:** International donors and governments should recognize the indispensable role of CSOs and ensure sustained financial support for their activities. This includes creating funding mechanisms that are accessible and responsive to the needs of affected communities and civil society.
2. **Inclusive Policy-Making Processes:** Governments and international bodies must continue to institutionalize the meaningful engagement of civil society in policy dialogues, ensuring that their insights and experiences inform decision-making at all levels.
3. **Protection of Civil Society Space:** It is crucial to safeguard the operational environment for CSOs, protecting them from legal and political pressures that may hinder their work. This includes upholding the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association.
4. **Capacity Building:** Investing in the capacity of civil society enhances their ability to contribute effectively. Training, technical assistance, and opportunities for organizational development are essential components of this support.
5. **Strengthening Partnerships:** Encouraging collaboration between CSOs, governments, and international organizations fosters a holistic approach to drug policy, leveraging the strengths of each sector to achieve common goals.

### **Conclusion**

The journey from the 2016 UNGASS to the present has demonstrated that inclusive, evidence-based, public health- and human rights-oriented drug policies are most effective in addressing the complexities of the world drug problem. Civil society stands at the forefront of this endeavour, offering invaluable contributions that enrich policy and practice. As we navigate the evolving landscape of international support and funding, it is imperative to reaffirm our commitment to preserving and expanding the space for civil society in drug policy. By doing so, we not only honour the principles set forth in international agreements but also ensure that our collective efforts are grounded in the realities and needs of the communities we serve.

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