

Meeting of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs

Thursday, 23 June 2016

3:30 – 5:00 p.m. CET, UNIS Press Briefing Room (G0541); 5th floor, G-Building of the VIC,
Vienna, Austria

DRAFT MINUTES

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

The agenda was adopted.

2. Approval of the minutes of the last meeting

The committee approved the minutes of the last meeting.

3. Apologies for absence, Attendance

The following organizations sent apologies:

Association Proyecto Hombre, Spain
CUDRAS, Iran
Elternkreis, Austria
IMAECSD, India
Int. Federation of Social Workers
MOPOTAC Africa
Nepal NGO Society, Nepal
RUWODI, Tanzania
StopTheDrugWar.Org, USA
Washington Office on Latin America, USA
Wellbeing Foundation, India

The following organisations were present at the meeting:

Present on Skype:

CELS, Argentina
Dianova International
Harm Reduction International

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International Drug Policy Consortium
San Patrignano Foundation, Italy

Present in Person:

ACUNS

African Action on AIDS

Centros de Integracion Juvenil, Mexico

CONGO

Drug Policy Futures

EURAD

FORUT, Norway

IAHPC

Int. Association for Applied Psychology

International Council of Women

International Inner Wheel

IOGT International

IOGT-NTO

Society for the Advancement of Global Understanding, Austria

Soroptimist International

World Federation against Drugs

Zonta International

4. Financial Report

Daniel Quittan presented an overview of the financial report on behalf of the Treasury, whose members could not participate in the meeting. Additional information on the funding of the Civil Society Task Force (CSTF) for the UNGASS 2016 was provided by the Chair. The VNGOC managed the budget of the CSTF throughout the implementation of its activities. All in all, about USD 300,000 were fundraised to facilitate civil society participation in the UNGASS process. Because of this, it was argued that the results of the CSTF work should be disseminated widely.

It was hard to give clear budgetary indications to CSTF regional and thematic representatives at the outset of the process, when no funds were available. Initially, they were only asked to conduct online consultations until funding became available. Large in-person consultations were then held in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Central Asia and Latin America. Funding from

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Norway, the US and the New Zealand Drug Foundation was used for civil society participation in the UNGASS.

From the outset, soft-earmarked financial contributions were sought, to allow the CSTF flexibility in fulfilling its mission. There was a division of funding between the VNGOC and the NYNGOC. The part of funds which went to the VNGOC was used for staffing and funding civil society participation in the UNGASS process. The grants from Norway and the US were sent to UNODC to support the work of the CSTF. Given the transition to a new administrative system in the UN Secretariat – UMOJA (October-November 2015) and the impossibility to sign a MoU with UNODC, there were significant delays in getting some of these funds (one third) transferred from UNODC to the VNGOC. The rest was used by UNODC to fund civil society participation in regional consultations and in the UNGASS and for staffing. This is a lesson learnt - there is a need to have a concrete agreement in place with UNODC. In addition, part of the consultations were held with in-kind support from national governments (such as in Turkey and Iran) and UNODC Field Offices (Western and Eastern Africa, South Asia and Colombia).

Also, the current financial situation of the VNGOC has been audited by an independent financial auditor at our donors' request, which will make reporting at the end of the fiscal year easier.

5. Membership report

5 new member organisation were accepted by the board. These are:

United in Health and Agriculture Improvement (UHAI Centre), Kenya
Norsk organisasjon for reform av marihuanalovgivning (NORML), Norway
SUIT (Service User Involvement Team), UK
Uganda Harm Reduction Network (UHRN), Uganda
Groupement romand d'études des addictions, Switzerland

An update on the results of the membership review will be provided at the next meeting. The Secretariat need more time for this.

6. Report back from UNGASS

The Chair opened the discussion by providing an overview of the CSTF's involvement in the UNGASS process, with the VNGOC serving as de facto Secretariat to the CSTF.

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In order to have meaningful civil society participation in the UNGASS process, negotiations were carried out with the Office of the President of the General Assembly (OPGA) and the CND. Having a civil society gathering before the UNGASS – IISC – to present civil society expectations and recommendations for the UNGASS was agreed upon, but it had to be under UN terms (a certain composition of the speakers’ list). The same applied for the UNGASS civil society speakers. Although the shortlisting process was carried out by the CSTF, the final say rested with the OPGA. Also, the CSTF had to fund all these speakers. The UN had no funding of its own for this purpose. As such, the CSTF could not fund the participation of other civil society representatives in the UNGASS process.

The OSF requested to balance the work of the CSTF between the VNGOC and the NYNGOC. All logistical details (visas, travel, accommodation, reimbursements, and support before, during and after the events) related to the IISC on 10 February 2016 and the selected civil society speakers for the UNGASS plenary and roundtables were taken care of from Vienna. Without the ground work done in Vienna, sending these civil society speakers to NY would not have happened. A lesson learnt.

The UNGASS outcome document is recognised as quite good by civil society across the board, in terms of progress made in promoting a public health approach to the world drug problem, respecting human rights and access to controlled medicines for pain relief and palliative care. Nonetheless, serious concerns still remain about the lack of any reference to the universal abolition of the death penalty. There is also criticism at the fact that civil society was not allowed to participate in informal negotiations on the UNGASS outcome document. This aside, through informal meetings with Member States representatives, side events, campaigns, publications, etc., many civil society representatives made a significant contributions to the UNGASS process. The UNGASS outcome document also recognises civil society as a partner in the implementation of the UNGASS outcome document.

The CSTF is currently undergoing an evaluation (DL end of June 2016) to understand its impact on civil society participation in the UNGASS process and charter the road ahead up to the final review of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action in 2019.

A number of comments were made from the floor, some of which highlighted the role of the CSTF, which ensured that civil society had a seat at the table in the process for which funding was made available - not something to be taken for granted. Through the CSTF’s work, a lot

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has been gained in terms of networking and sharing experience on different areas of the world drug problem.

While the UNGASS outcome document was recognised as a good one, action is the crucial things and NGOs can help monitor its implementation. NGOs on the ground need to inform their government counterparts of what happened in NY and help them translate that into action (where there is political will for this). While the UNGASS outcome document contains great language, people have to know about it and operationalise it.

Attention was drawn to the need to have a feedback loop from NGOs on the ground – what is happening on the ground? Some may not have the resources/not know how to communicate. If there are no funds to bring people to meetings in Vienna/Geneva/NY, perhaps short films portraying the situation on the ground could be funded. This would go a long way in showing the face of the world drug problem to Member States representatives, who often do not know what happens on the ground. Ministerial representatives, drug regulators, office staff should be taken out in the field. All in all, civil society representativeness and communication efforts need to be increased. Technical briefings to Member States between CNDs and intersessionals were suggested.

It was argued that, this time around, the CSTF – a body of 31 members – missed the opportunity for an open and meaningful dialogue within itself. This could be a way of moving ahead on what we agree and don't agree. Furthermore, there were too many Western representatives on the CSTF (including the entire Steering Committee), which directed the CSTF process. Others need to be involved more.

It was stated that there was still a lot to learn on how an umbrella organisation needed to work. For some, the CSTF was an immature creature in terms of balance, consensus and representativeness. Another culture of collaboration needs to be set up. How do we relate to one another, how do we respect one another and what can we agree upon so that an umbrella organisation can work are things not to be taken for granted. These need to be discussed and agreed upon by all to achieve an effective and productive collaboration. This ethos of participation could be added to the VNGOC membership form: this is what we commit to and what we expect from you.

Logistical details related to civil society participation in events in NY were brought up again with the request to investigate what had happened. The CSTF had inquired early on into how

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many seats would be available for civil society participants and that number kept on changing, with incoming information that part of the seats at the gallery would be needed for additional Member States delegates and that security arrangements will be very tight, given high-level participation in the events of the UNGASS week. However, no one took responsibility for the challenges faced by civil society in NY. It was indicated that there are severe problems with NGO access to UNHQ premises in general, so what happened at the UNGASS was just one instance. Lack of space at the UNHQ and a very high number of civil society representatives wishing to participate in the meetings were also noted as contributing factors. The same lack of space seems to be evident at other events, such as the annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women.

7. “Marketplace” Platform

Marketplace (www.mp.vngoc.org) has been launched and is fully operational. It contains some 80 NGO profiles, most of them involved in the development phase. The technical development team is finalising some of the internal workload, reason for which the platform is not being advertised widely just yet. A proper roll-out is expected this summer.

This platform is a way to reach out to local NGOs who cannot afford to travel to Vienna, assisting them to develop skills (advocacy and project writing), solve problems, establish connections to funders and give the funding community the possibility to see NGOs in action around the world. The platform can also be used for obtaining quicker feedback from NGOs and could serve as a tool for 2019 preparations. Some countries may have individuals in government who are very reluctant to civil society. Marketplace could be a tool to reach out to difficult areas. A pilot training on the added value of Marketplace and proposal writing is expected to take place end of July 2016 in Tehran.

Meetings with CND, UNODC and Member States to inform them about this possibility were called for, along with dissemination of information on Marketplace.

8. Dates of next meetings

To agree on a date for the next meeting to be held during the next reconvened session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in December).

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