



Statement VNGOC Chair on the Occasion of the Opening of the 60th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

13 March 2017, Vienna

Your Royal Highness,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

I welcome the opportunity to address you today as Chairperson of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs (VNGOC), as we begin the 60th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND). Ever since 1983, our global network of membership organisations has worked hard to ensure meaningful participation of civil society in the international drug policy debate, including here, at the CND. We are grateful for the constructive partnerships we have built together with Member States, the CND Chairs and the Secretariat to the Governing Bodies, as well as the heads of other UN bodies in Vienna, New York and Geneva.

Mahatma Gandhi's words "Be the change you wish to see in the world" is a call to action familiar to many. As members of civil society, through our committed work, we seek to bring about meaningful and lasting change in our communities affected by the many facets of the world drug problem. Through the delivery of services and our advocacy at local, national, regional and international levels, including here, at the CND, we are agents of the change we wish to see.

Most recently, this commitment was illustrated through the Civil Society Task Force (CSTF) for UNGASS 2016, a joint initiative of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs and the New York NGO Committee on Drugs. enabled grass roots organisations to report on what is working and what can be improved during the UNGASS process and its immediate aftermath.

As we move forward, partnerships will be key to a successful implementation of the UNGASS Outcome Document within the framework of Agenda 2030. The advances made by agreeing on the necessity for a public health approach to drug related issues, the necessity to ensure appropriate access to controlled medicines for pain relief, and the need to safeguard and promote human rights are significant.

However, as with any complex task, some challenges persist and others seem to arise. Such is the case with policy changes in some countries which heavily impact on the human rights of those affected by drugs, be they people who use drugs users and / or the communities in which they live. It is our strong belief that effective drug policies and respect for human rights are central pieces of the same complex puzzle – the world drug problem. For its part, the VNGOC will work to ensure that no piece of the puzzle, nor anyone affected by it, is left behind.

We intend to make good on our commitment by contributing to a culture of respectful and constructive engagement within the civil society community, as well as with government counterparts, in order to optimally respond to realities on the ground. It is our belief that such a culture of mutual respect constitutes the basis for sustainable responses to drug related problems.

Also, most recently, the VNGOC signed a new Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which will constitute the foundation for our collaboration during the implementation of the UNGASS Outcome Document and up to the 2019 review. To enable a wide as possible participation of civil society in these processes, the VNGOC continues to rely on your faithful financial support. An example in this regard is Marketplace, - a communications interface to enhance participation of grass roots organisations, which over time will also become an important resource for Member States.

To conclude, the VNGOC remains committed to a respectful and constructive dialogue with Member States at all levels. It is our belief that this dialogue will go a long way in ensuring an effective implementation of international drug policy commitments in the framework of the Sustainable Development Agenda and Human Rights, and thus in achieving the changes we wish to see in the world.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you successful deliberations this week.



Esbjörn Hörnberg
Chairperson of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs