



*Statement VNGOC Chair on the occasion of the International Conference  
“Combatting Drugs and Drug-Related Crimes. Interaction between State and Civil Society”,  
organized by the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation*

*12 April 2017, Moscow*

Excellences,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear colleagues,

ьблагодарю (Thank you) for the invitation to address you today as Chairperson of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs (VNGOC). 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. In this process, we have achieved constructive partnerships with government counterparts, including with the Russian Federation, and heads of UN bodies, around the world.

Partnerships between state and civil society are perhaps more than ever necessary in effectively dealing with drug related issues at all levels. While our work is mainly focused at the international level, most recently we are expanding our reach. It is our belief that through the expertise and commitment of our member organizations at local, national and regional levels, and the sharing of best practices, concrete steps can be made to effectively address drug related problems in our communities.

This being said, I am reminded of an old Russian proverb: “В чужой монастырь со своим уставом не ходят” (“No-one goes to another monastery with their own charter” (When in Rome, do as the Romans do).

At the VNGOC, while we work hard to bring about meaningful and lasting change in our communities affected by the many facets of the world drug problem, we are nonetheless aware that different things work in different contexts and that there is no such thing as a one size fits all when it comes to drug policies and their implementation.

By promoting a culture of respectful and constructive engagement within the civil society community, as well as with government counterparts, the VNGOC makes a solid contribution towards identifying what works and what can be improved 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 and the implementation of the Outcome Document of last year’s United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the world drug problem, as well as the Sustainable Development Agenda, whose ethical and political motto is to leave no one behind .

Within the framework of a comprehensive response, the advances made at the UNGASS 2016 by agreeing on the need for a public health approach to drug related issues, to ensure appropriate access to controlled medicines for pain relief, and the need to safeguard and promote human rights, are significant steps achieved in recognizing the need for a person-centred approach to drug related issues.

In our view a person-centred approach starts by ensuring the Human Rights of everyone affected by the world drug problem are protected and promoted. Such an approach includes people who use drugs, but also others affected by drug use such as children, families and workplaces, as well as treatment providers, terminally-ill patients in need of palliative care, people living with infections such as HIV, ... the list of people affected by the world drug problem is long.

The person-centred approach allows us to see how pervasive the world drug problem is. A comprehensive approach is needed to tackle drug-related issues and thus help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The VNGOC is thus mindful of the UNGASS 2016 commitment to increasing the availability, coverage and quality of scientific evidence-based prevention measures – as an investment in nurturing protective factors for the well-being of people and the resilience of communities.

At the VNGOC we believe that respect for human rights and inclusion are cornerstones of responses meant to achieve the health and welfare of humankind. The beauty of humankind rests in its diversity. Tailored measures across the continuum of care responding to this diversity have proven to be the most effective in meaningfully and sustainably addressing drug related issues.

“Близок локоток, да не укусишь” ([Your] elbow is close, yet [you] can't bite it. (“It only seems to be easy”)) illustrates very well the challenges of implementing this approach. However, where there is a will, there is always (at least) one way. And the VNGOC is here to support. Through our global membership and expertise base, technical assistance based on work on the ground is available to our partners.

The NGO Marketplace, an online platform for NGOs working on drug related issues, is one of the concrete tools through which the VNGOC is working towards achieving the above. A joint initiative of the VNGOC and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, this web site is kindly supported by the Russian Federation. Launched at the UNGASS 2016, the NGO Marketplace will become over time an important source of technical information for governments. We expect that it will make a significant contribution towards closing the gap between international commitments and policy implementation at the national and regional levels across the continuum of care. Translation in all languages, including Russian, is available on the web site, thus breaking down language barriers.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge our members from the Russian Federation and Central Asia, whose input to our work and participation in the annual sessions of the

Commission on Narcotic Drugs have contributed to a better understanding of realities on the ground and responses needed.

To conclude, the VNGOC remains committed to a respectful and constructive dialogue with governments 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 and, most importantly, achieving meaningful and lasting change in our communities.

Thank you for your kind attention.