

VOLUNTARY CODE OF CONDUCT FOR NGOS AT THE CND

NGO engagement at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (and related meetings) has improved dramatically over the past decade – including in terms of the numbers attending, the opportunities to interact and participate, and the levels of experience and professionalism of the NGOs themselves. However, the heightened presence of civil society brings greater scrutiny and expectations of our conduct, and a continuing need to justify and demonstrate the role that NGOs can and should play in the response to the world drug problem.

This draft document has been designed to support the effective and productive engagement of NGOs at the CND and other related meetings. It is intended to provide guidance, rather than attempt to censor NGO representatives. This Code of Conduct will also be discussed further at the VNGOC General Meeting, scheduled for Tuesday 19th March 2019.

» Respect

The NGOs that engage at the Commission come from a broad range of viewpoints, beliefs and perspectives. The VNGOC considers this to be a strength of our sector, and something to embrace alongside the aspects that unite us. But it also presents challenges. The Commission is an opportunity to liaise with others, discuss views in a professional manner, and learn about the work that others are doing. Attend other NGOs' side events, read other NGOs' materials, listen to other NGOs' statements. But, crucially, please treat everyone with respect and courtesy throughout the Commission meeting – even if their views run counter to your own. Confrontation, abuse or conflict only serves to undermine civil society engagement at large.

» Professionalism

The Commission is the workplace for the diplomats serving their governments during negotiations, and NGOs – as observers to the meeting – must respect their work and recognise that negotiations require compromises and diplomacy, especially as the Commission continues to adopt a consensus-based decision-making model. Positions taken by government delegations may be dictated by authorities in the capital or may reflect broader geopolitical concerns and contexts beyond the drug policy debates. NGOs have a great deal to offer to the discussions in Vienna, but should be polite and professional in all interactions with governments. The same applies for all UN representatives, security staff and other officials. Please also make it clear in all interactions that you are representing an NGO.

» *Avoid ‘Naming and Shaming’*

NGOs help to bridge the gap between international and national debates, and often bring the reality from the ground into the discussions. Often, this means providing a critique of drug policies at the local level, and informing the Commission of some of the challenges that remain. This is entirely appropriate, and part of the unique added value that civil society offers.

However, it is important to be diplomatic in the messages that we deliver at a multilateral setting such as the Commission. All government delegations reflect negatively on interventions which ‘name and shame’ governments or agencies, and especially when interventions make accusations and defamatory statements, or are off-topic for the Commission. For the NGO, this ultimately means that such interventions are less impactful than if the same message had been delivered in a more measured way.

Linked to this, side events may not focus specifically on one Member State without their engagement, and should avoid naming countries in the titles¹. Furthermore, NGO materials which focus critically on just one government should not be disseminated at the Commission. When claims and statements are made about drug policies at the local level – such as in oral or written statements or printed materials – these must be backed by reputable and credible evidence.

» *Bringing Materials*

Space for documents and materials is limited and tightly controlled at the Commission. Every year, the VNGOC secures a large exhibition space for NGOs to display their materials, reports and flyers. In addition for the need for diplomacy (see above), NGOs are asked to be mindful of the space available, and the high demand for this space – with in excess of 90 NGOs now attending the Commission every March. Please be selective and pragmatic when deciding which publications to bring, and how many copies – especially for bulkier documents. When finding space on the NGO tables in the M Building, please do not remove or cover other NGOs’ documents. If there are any problems, please notify the VNGOC.

» *‘Use’ the VNGOC*

The Vienna NGO Committee is in place to support NGO participation, and as such we can help to resolve any problems that arise during the Commission meetings. As such, we encourage all NGOs – whether members of the VNGOC or not – to maintain open communication with the Committee, and to ask for advice or information whenever needed. The VNGOC can help to work with UNODC and Member States to resolve any

¹ This is a requirement in the side event guidelines issued by the Secretariat to the Governing Bodies:
https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND_CCPCJ_joint/Side_Events/2019/Guidelines_Side_Events_2019.pdf



difficulties that arise. The VNGOC can be reached at info@vngoc.org, or you can speak to any of the elected [VNGOC Officers](#).

Thank you for your consideration of the guidance and code above, and the VNGOC looks forward to seeing you all in Vienna.