

## VNGOC Statement for CND Special Event commemorating the United Nations International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

26th June 2019

Thank you Mr Chair, and thanks to UNODC for once again allowing the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs to make a formal intervention as we mark the UN Day Against Drug Abuse and Trafficking.

I want to start by congratulating Angela and her colleagues for the delivery of another rich and engaging World Drug Report. The Report is a huge undertaking, and one that makes an important contribution to the global response to the world drug situation. There are three areas, in particular, I want to focus on today.

Firstly, one number stood out when I first read the Report last week.  
**585,000 people died as a result of drug use in 2017.**

Regardless of whether you believe that the answer lies in treatment, or harm reduction, or law enforcement, or rehabilitation – 585,000 deaths is a staggering failure that we all have to face up to. **We simply have to bring this number down.** The SDGs seek to “leave no one behind”. But we are not doing that. We are leaving lots of people behind – and the Report’s data on deaths, prisons and the unmet treatment need show this to be the case.

My second point is about the alleviation of pain and suffering, which remains a global health imperative. The World Drug Report refers to a quote, “global paradox of too much and not enough”, unquote. It is an important reminder that we are facing more than one kind of opioid crisis. But the actions, narratives and strategies still do not reflect the necessary balance between rational access and control.

Ensuring access to controlled pain medication, including both scheduled and non-scheduled opiates, is essential to meet the SDGs. This cannot be an afterthought. And it cannot continue to be just collateral damage from the control of non-medical use.

My third point today is about the data themselves. The World Drug Report reflects the information harvested through the ARQs, yet the questionnaire is in need of modernisation to reflect the UNGASS, the 2019 Declaration and the UN System Common Position. I appreciate that this is an ongoing process, with a lot of hard work already underway – including through the new UN System Coordination Task Team on drug-related matters.

The Task Team, launched earlier this year by the UN Chief Executives Board, aims to promote cooperation and coordination in drug-related research, data collection and analysis across the UN system in the quest for better, more effective drug policies.

But I also want to highlight the role that civil society can play in this regard. NGOs on the ground often have access to knowledge, information and evidence which can complement the data being collected from governments and academia. This can help to formulate the most complete picture possible, while civil society can also help to supply the human stories which make the data real.

Many NGOs are experts in data collection, monitoring and evaluation – not least because we are constantly having to do it for our own donors! We can help to verify and critique data – as currently happens, for example, for the UNODC, WHO and UNAIDS estimates on injecting drug use each year. And we can also help to plug gaps where the ARQs are not submitted or are incomplete.

I encourage you all – member states, the UNODC, and the UN System Coordination Task Team – to better tap into, and nurture, the existing resources that NGOs have to offer.

Thank you very much for your attention.