

OPENING REMARKS FROM CSTF CO-CHAIR

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, a very warm welcome to this Civil Society Hearing. We hope that the discussions today can play a valuable role in the ongoing preparations for the Ministerial Segment of the 62nd Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs - as member states negotiate a new Ministerial Declaration that paves the way for the next decade of drug policies.

Today, we will hear opening remarks from the CND Chair, the UNODC Executive Director and our co-host, the Permanent Mission of Switzerland.

Then Dr Sheila Vakharia will present the full results of the global civil society consultation - in which more than 460 NGOs from around the world gave us their thoughts about the 2009 Political Declaration and its targets, the 2016 UNGASS outcomes, the 2019 Ministerial Segment, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

We will then hear from a panel of civil society speakers who will bring us their views on the road ahead beyond 2019. These panellists were selected by the Civil Society Task Force following a global open call. They come from a range of different regions and perspectives, reflecting the variety and diversity that remains a strength of the civil society sector in this area. Many have been able to travel here today from all over the world, with support from our donors Norway, Russia, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands. There will also be plenty of time today for questions

and answers from the floor - it is our hope that this will be a truly interactive discussion.

First, however, I would like to say a few words about the Civil Society Task Force, or CSTF. It is a joint initiative of the New York and Vienna NGO Committees on drugs, which themselves represent hundreds of NGOs from around the world. The Task Force comprises 35 civil society members - each representing a region, community or key issue. It is our role to advocate for civil society engagement in the UN processes, and to ensure that opportunities are made available to the widest possible range of NGOs. Civil society has an important part to play - in these debates, in the development and evaluation of drug policies, and at the front line in terms of advocacy, research and service delivery. We work with, and represent, the people affected by drug policies on the ground.

Over the past year, the Civil Society Task Force has worked hard to ensure that NGO speakers have been represented throughout the lead-up to the Ministerial Segment - including the autumn intersessionals, which were a great success from our perspective. In addition to speaker selection, we have conducted the global survey, as well as organising Hearings here today and in New York last week. Furthermore, as mandated by CND resolution 61/10, the Civil Society Task Force has selected two panellists for the roundtable debates at the Ministerial Segment itself. Finally, we have released our final report, which I am delighted to have available for you all here today.

It remains important that we are able to bring these perspectives to the table at the UN - here in Vienna but also at fora such as the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, and the World Health Assembly. Here at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, civil society participation is as strong as it has ever been, and this needs to be reinforced and reflected in the Ministerial Declaration that is currently being negotiated in Vienna.

One final comment from me - I would just quickly like to acknowledge our co-hosts Switzerland for their support, as well as to Dr Vakharia for all of her help developing and analysing the consultation, Sarah Pirker and the Board from the VNGOC, Samantha Singh from IDPC for supporting the logistics of this meeting today, and Heather Haase, Benjamin Phillips and colleagues from the New York NGO Committee for their hard work and support throughout the past year.

I would now like to hand over to His Excellency Ambassador Mirghani Bakhet, the CND Chair, for his opening remarks. Thank you, Ambassador, for being with us here today.