

Opening Remarks for INCB Civil Society Hearing

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*Honorable President,
Esteemed Board members,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

I would like to begin by thanking the International Narcotics Control Board for agreeing to this ground-breaking meeting during your 122nd Session. Greater cooperation between the Board and civil society serves to enhance all of our work, and to more effectively fulfil the health and welfare objectives of the international drug conventions.

It is my privilege to address you today as the new Chair of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs, or VNGOC. We were established in 1983 to empower NGOs to contribute to the policy discussions and processes here in Vienna. By providing information and facilitating participation within the UN system, we help our global membership of 224 NGOs to have their voices heard in a respectful and constructive way – and today is just one example of this in practice.

The VNGOC and INCB have already worked together successfully on numerous initiatives – including informal dialogues during the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, and also in proposing local NGOs for the Board to meet during their country visits. But this meeting today is an important development, and I hope that it is something that the Board members find useful and worth repeating in the future.

The next 12 months are of particular importance for civil society in relation to drug issues. In March 2019, member states will hold a high-level Ministerial Segment to review progress over the last decade, and to discuss the way forward for the coming 10 years. Building on the UNGASS outcomes, the Sustainable Development Goals and the wealth of scientific evidence, this is an unprecedented opportunity to ensure that the international response to the world drug problem is fit for purpose.

Civil society has an important role to play in this debate. The VNGOC and our sister New York NGO Committee have therefore reformed the Civil Society Task Force on drugs, or CSTF. This Task Force comprises 35 representatives from every region of the world, the most affected





populations and selected global issues. You can see the individuals [on the slide], and more information can be found on the [CSTF website](#). Through this Task Force, VNGOC is working on a range of activities between now and March 2019, and we count on the ongoing support of the Board, UNODC and member states to make this all possible.

Turning to today's discussions, the issue of cannabis use for medical and non-medical purposes is obviously a crucial one for VNGOC and our members. We issued an open call to our members and colleagues, and received nearly 40 applications to speak today. The VNGOC Board, committed to representing the full spectrum of viewpoints among civil society organisations, has selected 10 speakers. These speakers come from Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa. They will present a range of views and perspectives, and on a range of issues, for your consideration today. In order to ensure that all of our speakers have time, I politely remind all speakers stick to the time they have been provided.

Thank you for your kind attention, and thank you once again for this opportunity for NGOs to present directly to the Board.