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## **CCSTF Statement for Opening Session of the Ministerial Segment, 14 March 2019**

**JAMIE BRIDGE, Chair of the Vienna NGO Committee & Co-Chair of the Civil Society Task Force**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Mr. Chair, distinguished delegates, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today on behalf of the Civil Society Task Force.

The Task Force is a collaboration between the Vienna and New York NGO Committees on Drugs, with the goal of ensuring the strongest possible civil society engagement for this Ministerial Segment.

Over the last year, we've worked extremely hard to achieve this goal. We have conducted a global consultation with NGOs from 100 countries and territories around the world. To showcase the voices of NGOs, we also hosted two Civil Society Hearings last month in New York and here in Vienna.

Through open calls, we have selected panellists and speakers for the thematic intersessionals and the round tables today and tomorrow. We received around 200 applications from NGOs to

speak, which demonstrates the commitment and the demand to be a part of these discussions.

These achievements and outcomes are captured in Conference Room Paper Seven, which I invite you all to read.

As the UNGASS Outcome Document recognises, civil society and affected populations play an important role in addressing and countering the world drug problem, and should be enabled to participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of drug policies.

Civil society engagement at the CND has made significant progress in recent years, and this is important to acknowledge as well as to build upon. The expertise, experience and unique perspectives that civil society can bring to these debates is now widely recognised and appreciated. And we are thankful that the new Ministerial Declaration further commits to involve civil society for the coming decade as well.

Civil society itself is a broad church, and we do not need to feign consensus where there is none. But there are many areas in which we can agree. Taking stock, our consultation showed that most NGO respondents had seen regression, rather than progress, over the past ten years.

Looking forward, most NGOs regard the UNGASS Outcome Document as the most comprehensive consensus.

Nearly all see their work as addressing the Sustainable Development Goals.

We call for drug policies that align with public health and human rights, and that ensure access to essential medicines. We are against the use of the death penalty for drug offences, and we continue to advocate for more evidence-based prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, social reintegration, recovery and harm reduction services. Finally – and most predictably – we believe that civil society should continue to be engaged in a meaningful way.

There are hundreds of civil society representatives here at the CND, including those from affected populations. We have organised and co-hosted side events, we have brought our publications and our research, and we have important stories to tell. Please take the time to hear us, speak to us, support us, and engage with us.

Together, we are facing complex challenges that we simply cannot solve in isolation. Working in close partnership and collaboration over the next ten years will benefit us all, but crucially will also benefit the people most affected by drugs and drug policies.

Thank you for your kind attention.