

Beatrix Vas, Youth RISE

Thank you Mr Chair for giving me the floor.

Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues,

I'm speaking today on behalf of Youth RISE, a global network composed of, and led by, young people who use drugs.

While the international drug control conventions aim to protect the health and welfare of humankind, with much emphasis placed on protecting children and youth, young people are among the most affected by severe, systemic human rights violations as a consequence of overly punitive interpretations of these conventions.

Young people who use drugs are routinely subjected to the traumas of arbitrary detention, extortion, police violence, torture and ill-treatment in the name of drug control. These measures violate international juvenile justice standards, contained in, among others, the Beijing and Havana Rules, which stipulate the primary goal of juvenile justice should be to divert youth from the criminal justice system.

The consequences of a criminal record for young people range from discrimination and stigmatization to diminished access to education, reduced prospects for employment, limited access to housing and financial instability. Criminalization and incarceration isolates young people from their families and communities. While young people who use drugs can receive life-altering criminal sentences for their drug use, our ability to exercise our right to independent and informed decision-making on our health, free of coercion, violence and discrimination is limited by age of consent laws and the context of punitive drug measures.

Young people are often forced or coerced into treatment services they do not actually need, Harm reduction services tailored to the needs of the young people are severely lacking and access to up-to-date scientific information, evidence-based and human rights compliant education on substances and substance use is very limited.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child creates an obligation to take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children. Appropriate measures, in coherence with international law, . As interpreted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, appropriate measures must be rights-compliant, and effective, and include the development of accessible and child-sensitive harm reduction services and drug dependence treatment, information for children about drugs that is accurate and objective, as well as refraining from criminalizing children because of their drug use or possession of drugs for personal use.

Drug prevention based on creating fear, random drug checking in school settings, and expulsion from education for drug use are measures against the International Standards of Drug Prevention, and both the rights of the child and broader human rights standards.

As noted in this session, the number of women incarcerated for drug offences is increasing, while women access drug services at a very low rate. It's also important to highlight how young women who use drugs, including young trans women and gender non-conforming people, people of colour and members of ethnic and religious minorities, sex workers, and people experiencing homelessness are especially vulnerable in contexts where their identities are criminalized, oppressed and/or discriminated against.

In order to create a safer environment for all, intersectional factors related to gender, age, drug use and socioeconomic status, as well as racial, ethnic and religious identities should all be protected, and addressed through holistic and comprehensive harm reduction and health care service design, and accessible, age-appropriate, and evidence-based information alongside sexual and reproductive health services, including access to safe, affordable, timely and respectful abortion care.

Drug policies made in the name of the interest of young people need to be informed by those directly affected by these policies.

To forge an international drug policy approach which is effective in reducing drug-related harms and ensuring the health and well-being of young people in line with human rights obligations, it is critical that international bodies and Member States consult with and act on the input of youth. We welcome commitments made to provide for the meaningful participation of youth in the development, implementation and evaluation of drug policies and programmes in the UNGASS 2016 Outcome Document, the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, and the UN System Common Position.

We invite all member states who value their young people to include a youth member on any delegation to future sessions, meetings, and events regarding drug policy and look forward to opportunities for dialogue such as the upcoming Youth Consultation with UNODC.

We wish for a drug policy approach which seeks a better tomorrow not just FOR but **with** the world's youth.

Thank you for your attention.