

STATEMENT

CND Intersessional Meetings
21 – 22 September 2022

Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Ajeng Larasati. On behalf of Harm Reduction International, I will speak about opportunities and challenges in upholding human rights in the context of drug policy, with a focus on the right to life.

Despite some progress, UN agencies, human rights mechanisms and experts, and communities and civil society, continue reporting widespread violations of the right to life committed or enabled in the context of punitive drug policies. Today, I would like to drive our attention to three topics:

First, extrajudicial and arbitrary killings in the context of repressive, often militarised anti-drug campaigns have led to hundreds, if not thousands of people suspected of engaging in the drug market being arbitrarily deprived of life every year, often at the hands of law enforcement, with perpetrators almost invariably enjoying absolute impunity. Individuals living in poverty, or belonging to racially discriminated communities, are disproportionately impacted.

Second, Harm Reduction International's Global Overview on the Death Penalty for Drug Offences confirmed at least 4,500 executions for drug offences in the past decade, while at least 3000 people remain on death row for drug offences today. Due to lack of transparency in many countries, these figures are an underestimation of this barbaric phenomenon. This use of the death penalty is committed on prohibited grounds as drug offences are not 'most serious crimes' to which the death penalty must be restricted to pursuant to international standards. Until now, no clear stance in this regard has yet been taken by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

Third, overly punitive approaches and the criminalisation of drug use drives people who use drugs away from the health care they need – eventually affecting their right to life. Particularly problematic is the unreasonable refusal by some governments to implement life-saving harm reduction services, despite ever-growing evidence supporting such measures. Our Global State of Harm Reduction showed that as of 2021, only 87 countries provided needle and syringe programmes, and only 81 countries provided opioid agonist therapy. Only a fraction of these countries provides such services in prison.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Fully aligning drug policies with human rights remains a challenge, but it can be achieved with political will, leading to effective and sustainable drug control strategies. To this end, States must review and reform punitive drug policies in which context violations are committed, putting health and human rights at the centre, and with the meaningful engagement of people who use drugs. States must investigate all suspected cases of extrajudicial killings to hold perpetrators accountable, and take measures to protect the health and life of people who use drugs both in detention settings and in the community; including by providing accessible and quality harm reduction services.

Lastly, retentionist countries must halt all executions for drug offences and abolish the death penalty; while abolitionist countries must strongly advocate for abolition of the death penalty in all available fora, including CND, and refrain from providing assistance to retentionist countries that may lead to a death sentence being imposed.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak.