

VNGOC Statement for CND Special Event

26 June 2023, Matej Košir (Chair)

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Thank you, Ambassador, for inviting me to speak today on behalf of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs. It's a great pleasure to have the opportunity to address this very important event, especially because it's my first official statement as the new chair.

For those of you who may not know us very well, the VNGOC exists to empower and support civil society groups from around the world, including our 374 members from 101 countries. Our mission is to support, promote and protect the engagement of civil society in international drug policy discussions and decision-making processes, including with CND, UNODC, INCB, WHO and many others. Many of our members are global networks themselves, so VNGOC's reach is much bigger, and this is especially important from the perspective of the spread of key messages and results of the World Drug Report 2023, launched today.

I want to start by thanking the chair and the Secretariat for giving NGOs space at today's event – and also for ensuring that the event is being webcast. I also want to echo others in congratulating Ms. Angela Me and her team for delivering this latest World Drug Report. It is a massive undertaking, and it remains the main tool that we have for understanding and analysing the world drug situation. The Vienna NGO Committee looks forward to co-hosting a webinar with UNODC next month (on July 19th), for NGOs to discuss the Report in more detail.

UNODC's theme this year – “People first: stop stigma and discrimination, strengthen prevention” – is a timely reminder of the importance of investments in evidence-based prevention programmes and interventions as early as possible in people's life and beyond drug use per se, while promoting the implementation of the UNODC/WHO International Standards on Drug Use Prevention in educational and family settings, workplaces, and communities. At some recent conferences, I witnessed presentations of research results, showing that, stigma and discrimination among professionals and service providers is one of the major barriers in addressing access to services by people who use or are addicted to drugs, so (I agree) we have to do better to address those challenges in the future.

The theme this year is also an important reminder that when we put people (and communities) first – there is no dichotomy between different approaches and services. Now more than ever before, strong partnerships between civil society and governments are not least to face the increased needs and challenges in the period of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. As stated in the report, the barriers to different services (not only to treatment, but also to prevention, harm reduction and recovery) still remain, especially for women and most vulnerable and marginalised groups, so the importance of strengthening collaboration with civil society organisations is even bigger. Later today you will hear from three of our member organisations about service innovations developed during COVID-19, but also about drug and crime related challenges that effected communities face.

Unfortunately, in many areas of drug policy, the situation has not improved or is even worse in recent years (compared to previous decades). I believe that the situation is not as unpromising as it may seem from the report, and that there are many positive, evidence-based, and effective practices in the world in the field of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery that should be highlighted in such reports as well. It may be worth considering to systematically include such information and research data in the following reports, and I believe that the report would sound differently - with at least some



added hope for a better future. Civil society organisations (together with Member States, academia, the private sector and UN agencies) can contribute a lot to this kind of data and research.

As always, civil society is able and willing to work with all of you, in sharing facts, exchanging information, data and best practices, and also saving lives at the end as the most important outcome of our joint efforts and investments. As the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs, we look forward to being part of the solution.

Thank you for your attention.

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