

UNGASS NEWS

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UNGASS NEWS

Welcome to the first edition of the IDPC UNGASS News. This brief update is intended to provide an overview of progress on the UNGASS review process, drawing attention to significant developments and keeping our network of colleagues around the world abreast of the rapidly changing situation.

CONTENTS

Introducing the UNGASS Drug Policy Review Process	2
The 5 Expert Working Groups	2
i: Composition & schedule	2
ii: The Discussion Papers For The Working Groups	3
Beyond 2008- The Global Forum	5
United Nations High Level Meeting On Hiv/Aids	6

THE UNGASS REVIEW PROCESS

The UN General Assembly's 20th Special Session on the World Drug Problem met in 1998, setting objectives centred on the achievement of significant and measurable reductions in the supply of and demand for illicit drugs over the ensuing 10 year period. The 2008 CND in Vienna began the process of reviewing the progress made toward these objectives, and will be followed by a period of reflection and analysis prior to deciding the future direction of the international drug control system.

The delegates to the 2008 CND confirmed that a 2 day, high-level, political meeting will be held in March 2009 in Vienna, which will agree the framework for the next phase of UN drug policy. The material and reports to be considered at that meeting will be generated through five intergovernmental working groups that will meet between June and September 2008, and present draft texts for consideration by governments. These working groups will, respectively, cover Demand Reduction, Supply Reduction, Money Laundering, Crop Eradication and Alternative Development, and Precursors and Amphetamine-Type Stimulants. The draft texts from the working groups will then be debated by member states in a series of 'intersessional' meetings (the first is scheduled for September 29th), and a prepared set of texts presented to the high-level meeting in March 2009.

THE EXPERT WORKING GROUPS

i: Composition & schedule

Expert Working Group	Date of Meeting
Supply reduction (manufacture and trafficking)	23-25 June 2008
Countering money-laundering and promoting judicial cooperation	30 June- 2 July 2008
International cooperation on the eradication of illicit drug crops and on alternative development	2-4 July 2008
Drug demand reduction	15-17 September 2008
Control of precursors and of amphetamine-type stimulants	17-19 September 2008

Each of the EWGs will meet in Vienna, and has been provided with discussion papers authored by the CND Secretariat, which lay out the broad parameters of their work. These discussion papers are available on the relevant pages of the UNODC website, or at IDPC's own website at the following URL: ([LINK TO UNGASS page on IDPC Website](#)).

ii. The Discussion Papers For The Working Groups

As described above, each of the working groups will base their discussions on a paper produced by officials of the CND secretariat, and published by the UNODC in early June. A short critique of each of the papers follows:

SUPPLY REDUCTION – The most disappointing of the papers. As has often been the case with the review of supply reduction activities at national and regional level, this paper does not engage with the strategic issues and options – are we pursuing the right objectives, what outcomes have we achieved, are we investing in the right activities and programmes – but assumes that the strategy is fixed, and therefore focuses simply on improved co-ordination and operational capacity. Even in this, the paper comes up with no new ideas, calling mainly for more resources to law enforcement agencies and tighter legislation. This is a shame, as the change of focus by the UNODC from the eradication of the market to its containment, provides the law enforcement community with an opportunity to rebalance its objectives, priorities and activities; it now falls to member states to promote this thinking.

MONEY LAUNDERING AND JUDICIAL CO-OPERATION – The IDPC has not produced an advocacy note on this working group, as it deals largely with the technical and legal challenges of improving international frameworks for tackling organised crime. The creation of an Action Plan on this subject in 1998 was based on the idea that successful action in these areas would significantly restrict the power and reach of organised crime. The paper clearly describes the progress achieved by member states in implementing the legal and operational priorities called for in 1998 – extensive progress in passing anti-money laundering legislation and operations, more modest progress in promoting judicial co-operation – but once again avoiding the strategic question of whether all this activity has reduced the scale of drug trafficking activities. The paper simply states, for example, that money laundering ‘remains a global threat to the integrity, reliability, and stability of financial and trade systems’

ERADICATION AND ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT – This paper is much more successful in engaging with the issues and learning of the last 10 years. It gives an objective description of the changes in cultivation of crops used in the manufacture of controlled drugs over this period, while acknowledging some of the data limitations. There is also a relatively straightforward analysis of the ongoing challenges in this area – particularly increasing coca yields, lack of coverage of meaningful alternative development assistance, poor linkages between eradication programmes and alternative development, inappropriate legal frameworks in some countries, and continuing trade barriers. It does, however, avoid the sensitive issue of the negative impact of forced eradication campaigns, in terms of livelihoods, human rights and the environment. The recommendations section is well written, with specific calls to action, including the refocusing of objectives away from production estimates towards indicators of social and economic impact; the mainstreaming of alternative development programmes into the broader development agenda; and a call for eradication programmes not to proceed unless sustainable alternative livelihoods are in place. The paper stops short of calling for an end to forced eradication targeted at small farmers, but this is something that progressive member states may wish to push for in the discussions.

DEMAND REDUCTION – This paper reviews progress over the last 10 years in implementing the guiding principles on demand reduction that were agreed at the 1998 UNGASS. It is a little shy in acknowledging that global demand has not significantly reduced over this period – recognising stability and containment of demand as ‘modest progress’. It correctly emphasises that the range, quality and coverage of demand reduction interventions has massively increased in most regions, but acknowledges that the mechanisms for reporting on prevalence, trends, and responses remains weak. In terms of the way forward, the paper correctly draws attention to the need for the health and social consequences of drug use to be given greater global priority, in the same way as other major health challenges, and that there is no inherent contradiction between reducing the demand for drugs, and tackling the health consequences such as HIV infection. The paper then sets out general principles for future prevention, treatment and HIV prevention and care. These principles are broadly

positive, but the section on HIV needs to be broadened to incorporate other health consequences, and there needs to be more attention to the development of enforceable minimum standards for demand reduction activities – to ensure they comply with human rights and evidence of effectiveness.

PRECURSORS AND AMPHETAMINE-TYPE STIMULANTS – Once again, this paper is very coy about the fact that its key objective set in 1998 – elimination or significant reduction of illicit manufacture, marketing and trafficking of psychotropic substances, synthetic drugs, and precursors by 2008 – has not been met. It states that clear progress has been made by member states in developing policy, tightening legislation, increasing compliance with regulations, and stabilising the market in some regions, but acknowledges that, while the market is shifting geographically, the best that can be claimed globally is stabilisation or containment. It identifies the difficulties of tackling the synthetic market – limited data on the nature of clandestine production and distribution, the easy mobility of production facilities, the wide range of chemicals that can be used in production, and the limits of international co-operation and expertise – and comes up with some suggestions for tackling these problems. While proposals for better data collection and operational co-operation are sensible, it is hard to see how this, plus the call for more funding to agencies dealing with the issue, has any potential to successfully tackle the market in the future.

BEYOND 2008: THE GLOBAL NGO FORUM

Having completed a series of nine regional consultations, which took place between September 2007 and February 2008, the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs is poised to embark upon the final phase of its “Beyond 2008” initiative. The “Beyond 2008” NGO Global Forum will take place 7 – 9 July at the UN Vienna International Centre and aims to build upon the data and recommendations generated by the consultation process. Focusing upon the three objectives of the initiative and the responses to the specific question posed at each regional consultation ([http://www.vngoc.org/images/uploads/file/The%20Consultation%20Working%20Papers%20and%20Questions\(1\).pdf](http://www.vngoc.org/images/uploads/file/The%20Consultation%20Working%20Papers%20and%20Questions(1).pdf)), the Forum will develop and adopt a declaration and three resolutions. It is envisaged that the operative text of these documents will be available and sufficiently developed for the CND to take them into consideration as part of its preparations for its 2009 High Level Segment to review the UNGASS process.

The Programme for the Global Forum is currently as follows:

DAY 1

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| 10:00 - 10:45 | Welcome from Chair of the NGO Committee
Opening Remarks from: The Executive Director of UNODC,
Special Guest, Chair Beyond 2008 Steering Committee |
| 10:45 - 13:00 | Presentation of Regional Reports: <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Australia / New Zealand· Eastern Europe and Central Asia· Latin America and the Caribbean· North Africa and the Middle East· North America· South Asia· South East Asia, East Asia and the Pacific· Sub- Saharan Africa· Western Europe |
| 14:30 - 15:00 | Outline of Global Summary
Objective 1 Objective 2 Objective 3 |
| 15:00 - 17:30 | Plenary discussion on Objective 1 |

DAY 2

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| 09:00 - 12:00 | Plenary discussion of Objective 2 |
| 15:00 - 18:00 | Plenary discussion of Objective 3 |

DAY 3

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| 09:30- 12:30 | Final plenary discussion |
| 16:00 - 17:30 | Final adoption of resolution and declaration |

UNITED NATIONS HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON HIV/AIDS

From 9th to 11th June, the international community gathered at the United Nations Headquarters in New York for the latest (general assembly level) review of progress in tackling the global AIDS pandemic. This gathering of over 4,000 delegates, including 1,700 NGOs, came together to discuss progress and remaining challenges in implementing the 2001 declaration of commitment on AIDS, and the overall objective of universal access to effective prevention and treatment services by 2010.

Clearly, the meeting had to acknowledge that the vision of universal access by 2010 is unlikely to be realised – effective prevention measures are available to only a small proportion of at-risk populations, and anti-retroviral treatments are currently only being provided to around a third of all people living with HIV. However, while there is still much to do, there was a sense of real achievement, particularly in the rapid expansion of effective treatments.

Reports presented to the meeting – by UNAIDS, WHO, and the UN Secretary General – all acknowledged that the continuing high rates of transmission were becoming more focused on specific and marginalised populations – what are referred to as ‘concentrated epidemics’. The most important of these groups were migrants, men who have sex with men, sex workers, and injecting drug users. This brought to centre stage the concept that effective prevention strategies must go hand-in-hand with strategies that reduce the stigmatisation, marginalisation, and criminalisation of these groups.

Guided by an advocacy note produced in late May (<http://www.idpc.info/php-bin/documents.pl?ID=1000156>), the IDPC and partners worked before and during the meeting to give prominence to the issue of prevention and treatment amongst injecting drug users, emphasising the importance of scaling up proven effective HIV prevention measures, and encouraging delegates to achieve better cohesion between drug control and HIV prevention policies. To a large extent, we must be satisfied with the outcome:

- While the references remained carefully worded, the speeches of both Ban Ki Moon (UN Secretary General) and Peter Piot (UNAIDS Director General) mentioned the need to upscale proven prevention measures in countries with drug-related epidemics. Piot mentioning needle exchange specifically.
- The Civil Society speaker in the opening plenary (Ratri Suksma from Indonesia) gave an impassioned and eloquent speech that included a clear call for better prevention for IDUs.
- The academic speaker in the plenary (Dr Anthony S. Fauci, a member of the US delegation) included in his speech a clear acknowledgment of the proven value of harm reduction measures, including needle exchange – His exact words were: ‘Scientifically proven prevention approaches such as behavioral modification; condom distribution; prevention of HIV transmission from mother to baby; and the provision of clean needles and syringes to drug users have been successfully deployed in many countries.’
- Antonio Costa, Executive Director of the UNODC, used his speech to draw attention to the need for scaling up prevention amongst IDUs, and acknowledged that comprehensive prevention programmes, including substitution treatment and needle exchange, are required in affected areas.
- Several civil society speakers, (our thanks to, amongst others, Sonal Mehta, Vitaly Djuma, Caitlin Padgett) in the plenary, panel discussions, and the civil society hearing, giving prominence to the drugs issue, and promoting our proposals.
- Similarly, a large number of country delegations (including the Ukraine, Australia, Indonesia, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Brazil, Portugal and the European Union) also mentioned the drugs issue in a progressive way, in their formal statements.

While the meeting was broadly positive, the final report has no binding status on member states. Also, the challenge remains that most of the (health focused) delegations present in New York have little or no interaction with their (mostly enforcement focused) colleagues who attend the drugs control meetings in Vienna, so we need to continue to work to ensure better cohesion between the ‘two worlds’.

To this end, a group of NGOs present at the New York meeting have initiated a sign-on letter that calls on the leaders of the relevant UN agencies to ensure that drug control policies and activities are implemented in a way that doesn’t undermine global commitments to tackle AIDS. The letter has been supported by over 500 organisations around the world, and will be presented to the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, on the occasion of the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, June 26th. A copy of this letter can be seen at <http://www.idpc.info>.

We hope that you have found this first edition of UNGASS News to be both informative and helpful to your work in various parts of the world. The next issue is due to appear in late July, and will include reports from the early UNGASS Working Group sessions and a report back from the Vienna Global NGO Forum.

THE INTERNATIONAL DRUG POLICY CONSORTIUM