

IDPC ADVOCACY NOTE

THE UNITED NATIONS DRUG POLICY REVIEW, DEMAND REDUCTION WORKING GROUP

The International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) is a global network of NGOs and professional networks that specialise in issues related to illegal drugs. The Consortium aims to promote objective and open debate on the effectiveness, direction and content of drug policies at national and international level, and supports evidence-based policies that are effective in reducing drug-related harm and take a development-oriented and rights-based approach. It produces occasional briefing papers, disseminates the reports of its member organizations about particular drug-related matters, and offers expert consultancy services to policymakers and officials around the world.

BACKGROUND

In 1998, the world community gathered in New York for a United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) to review and strengthen the global drug control system. The outcome of that meeting, attended by political leaders from over 180 countries, was a political declaration that committed member states to work together towards “eliminating or reducing significantly the illicit cultivation of the coca bush, the cannabis plant and the opium poppy by the year 2008,” as well as “eliminating or significantly reducing the illicit manufacture, marketing and trafficking of psychotropic substances, including synthetic drugs, and the diversion of precursors,” and “achieving significant and measurable results in the field of demand reduction.” The UNGASS also agreed a series of action plans designed to meet those objectives, and agreed to conduct a high-level review of progress and achievements after 10 years. It is this 10-year review that is currently being conducted by member states and the lead UN agency, the Vienna-based United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

When member states gathered in March at the 2008 Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), they held a two-day thematic debate on the extent to which the objectives set in 1998 had been met, and the challenges that remain. While this debate fell some way short of a comprehensive review of the experience of the last 10 years, many of the government and UN speeches recognised that the hoped-for significant reductions in the supply of, and demand for, controlled drugs had not been achieved, and that new challenges had emerged that should be given more prominence within international agreements and action plans. At the 2008 CND, a process for completing the review, and for mapping out a way forward for the global drug control system, was agreed – culminating in a high-level political meeting to be held in Vienna in March 2009.

THE PROCESS

Member States have agreed that five working groups will be established, that will consider progress related to each of the action plans agreed in 1998. These working groups will cover, respectively:

- Supply reduction (manufacturing and trafficking); 23-25 June 2008 (3 days)
- Countering money-laundering and promoting judicial cooperation; 30 June-2 July 2008 (2 ½ days)
- International cooperation on the eradication of illicit crops and on alternative development; 2-4 July 2008 (2 ½ days)
- Drug demand reduction; 15-17 September 2008 (2 ½ days)
- Control of precursors and Amphetamine-Type Stimulants; 17-19 September 2008 (2 ½ days)

These groups will meet just once, and are open to all UN member state governments. NGOs cannot attend the working groups, but non-governmental experts can be included in any member state’s delegation to the meetings. Each working group will debate the contents of a discussion document produced by the UNODC, and will seek to bring forward proposed text on their specialist area by October 2008 for discussion at a series of intersessional meetings of the CND. In turn, these intersessional meetings will aim to bring forward materials for agreement at

the political meeting in March 2009. While the final format of the outcome of that meeting is yet to be decided, it is likely that the focus will be on a political declaration. The outcome of the working groups is therefore crucial, and NGOs can influence this process by bringing forward ideas for the groups that cover their area of interest, and encouraging government delegates to introduce (and fight for) humane and effective policies and programmes to be incorporated into the forward programme. This note concentrates on the proceedings of the working group on Demand Reduction, which will meet in Vienna on 15th to 17th September 2008.

WHAT TO ADVOCATE FOR

The Demand Reduction working group will be considering progress over the last 10 years in reducing the global demand for controlled drugs, and will be attempting to build on progress in the implementation of the guiding principles for demand reduction that were agreed at the 1998 UNGASS. While good quality demand reduction programmes have developed and expanded in many parts of the world over the last 10 years, several problems remain – the quality of data on drug use and problems, and of responses to it, is still unreliable in many parts of the world; the coverage of effective prevention and treatment programmes remains inadequate in most countries and regions; many prevention methods are ineffective in reducing demand, and/or serve to entrench the stigmatisation of drug users; many treatment methods are ineffective in tackling problem drug use and can involve inhumane or coercive practices that breach fundamental human rights; and the entire system has yet to adequately incorporate the need to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use, such as HIV infection or overdose deaths. IDPC members and supporters should therefore take any opportunity to encourage government delegates to the Demand Reduction working group to:

1. Call for the creation of a clear plan to improve the collection and analysis of data on the nature and extent of drug use, problems and responses around the world.
2. Call for the principles of humane and effective prevention and treatment (including the protection of human rights, and the need to avoid stigmatising or discriminatory practices) to be included in the political declaration, and for the relevant UN agencies to be tasked with identifying and challenging governments who breach these principles.
3. Call for the creation of a UN system-wide plan to support the development and expansion of humane, evidence-based and effective prevention and treatment programmes around the world.
4. Call for the prevention of negative health consequences to be clearly included in the objectives of the UN drug control system, and to be given higher priority in funding and delivery programmes.
5. Call for the UN to unequivocally support the scaling up of needle exchange, opiate substitution treatment, and overdose prevention measures (including medication-assisted OD prevention with Naloxone).
6. Call for clear statements in the political declaration that recognise the importance of efforts to prevent HIV infection amongst drug users, that endorse the prevention approaches articulated in the UNAIDS Prevention Strategy, and that call on the UNODC to provide clear leadership in rising to the challenge of scaling up these approaches in affected countries.

Further details, and relevant reports and analysis, on the 10-year review can be found on a special section of the IDPC website (www.idpc.info) or on a website created by TNI (www.ungassondrugs.org). If you have any questions or comments on this advocacy note, send them to IDPC at mt@internationaldrugpolicy.net.