

# **UNGASS NEWS**

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Welcome to the fourth 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.

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## THE DRAFT ANNEX OF THE POLITICAL DECLARATION

In the last edition of ‘UNGASS News’ (Version 3 – distributed at the end of September), we described how the conclusions and reports from the 5 intergovernmental expert working groups held over the summer would be incorporated into a document drafted by the secretariat of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, and distributed by the Chairwoman of this year’s CND, her Excellency Selma Ashipala Musavyi, the ambassador of Namibia in Vienna. The document that has come out is a draft of what are referred to as the Annex to the Political Declaration, and Ms Ashipala Musavyi is keen that inter-governmental negotiations for the rest of 2008 focus on the text of this Annex, and then move on to the body of the Political Declaration – there have been reports that the first draft of the body of the political declaration will be distributed on 12th December, but this may change with the procedural negotiations. The IDPC has produced an advocacy note (available on our website – [www.idpc.info](http://www.idpc.info)) that goes into more detail on the strengths and weaknesses of this draft, and the key issues that we believe should be addressed in the next round of negotiations.

## THE SERIES OF NEGOTIATING MEETINGS

The normal process for negotiating texts in preparation for a UN Commission is to hold what are called ‘intersessional’ meetings of the Commission. In this case, a decision has been taken to designate the next round of meetings as inter-governmental negotiating meetings. It is unclear why this has been decided, but one implication is that the meetings are clearly not now open to NGO observers. Any NGO experts who wish to be involved must therefore pass their ideas and suggestions through, or seek to be included as a delegate on, their own country delegation to these meetings.

To some extent, the restriction of attendance at these meetings to government representatives is understandable, as the meetings will be frequent and all in Vienna, and the discussions will focus on detailed drafting, and procedural issues. Most countries therefore rely on their mission representatives who are permanently based in Vienna to actually attend the meetings, working to positions agreed back at the national capitals. Some countries will be taking the negotiations sufficiently seriously to send delegations to the meetings from their capitals, and it is these delegations that you should request to join if you feel you can help.

Currently, the dates set for the series of negotiating meetings up until Christmas are as follows:

- 3rd and 4th November
- 24th, 25th and 26th November
- 10th, 11th and 12th December

The negotiating meetings will be the setting where the structure of the political declaration will be agreed, and the precise text of what it contains hammered out paragraph by paragraph. While it is possible for text to be changed up to the last minute, all parties will be working towards finalising the text as quickly as possible – probably by the end of January 2009. While it is likely that the first negotiating meeting (on 3rd/4th November) will be largely taken up with discussions on procedure and the status of documents, it is important that delegations are prepared for this meeting with clear ideas on the issues and text that they wish promote and fight for. In particular, if a delegation wishes to introduce new ideas or text that is not currently part of the draft, they should be seeking to do this at the first meeting.

The next edition of UNGASS News (due to be distributed at the end of November) will include an update on the proceedings of the negotiating meetings.

## BEYOND 2008 UPDATE

The global NGO Forum held in Vienna in July was a success, and produced a consensus statement that has been widely distributed around the world. Many of the ideas in this consensus document have been reflected in the draft annex to the political declaration. Although it is unclear how directly the work of the Beyond 2008 participants has directly affected the drafting process, it is safe to say that the general improvement in mechanisms for NGO experts to communicate and advocate with government representatives has led to better official text.

The Beyond 2008 conclusions were formally presented to governments by Michel Perron at the Demand Reduction Working Group, held in Vienna on 15-17 September. His presentation was received with respectful attention, and many delegations stated their support for the process, but the conclusions of that meeting only contained a small reference to the importance of civil society input to the next stages of the process.

Following these exchanges, Michel has written to Ms Ashipala Musavyi on behalf of the Beyond 2008 participants to recommend a number of mechanisms by which civil society could play a constructive role in the March 2009 CND and High-Level Meeting. The ideas put forward can be summarised as:

- The organisation of a 'civil society hearing' on the first morning of the high level segment, at which political representatives and government delegations can hear from a small number of civil society speakers, and discuss the issues they raise.
- The allocation of a speaking slot within the plenary session of the high-level segment for the presentation of the Beyond 2008 conclusions.
- The distribution of the Beyond 2008 conclusions as one of the official papers for the high level segment.
- The allocation of an adequate number of NGO places at the panel sessions of the high level segment, with full speaking rights and, where appropriate, the opportunity to make prepared presentations.
- The organisation of a space at the venue for NGO displays and stands, where delegates can interact with civil society organisations.
- Clarification of the access arrangements for NGOs at the CND and high level segment – how will ECOSOC registered NGOs be able to register delegates, and what parts of the venue will they be able to access.
- Clarification of the availability, and procedures for arranging, meeting rooms for the organisation of satellite meetings.
- Clarification of the proposed arrangements for administrative and communication facilities for NGOs during the meeting.

Decisions on the arrangements for the March meeting will be made by the 'Bureau' of the CND – basically a sub-committee consisting of a small number of member states representatives. It is to be hoped that they respond positively to the suggestions made in Michel's letter – the next version of 'UNGASS News' will include any updates on their response.

## PLANNING FOR THE MARCH MEETING

The dates of the meetings in March are already set – the high level segment will take place on 11th and 12th March, and the normal CND will run through the following week, 16th to 19th March. Not much else is settled at this stage – the agenda and programme for either session is not yet agreed, the exact venue is still uncertain (as there is refurbishment work ongoing in the Vienna International Centre, it is likely that the event will be held in the Austria Centre next door), and the rules governing participation and access are still unclear.

While most of the current focus is on the negotiation of the text of the political declaration, it is important to remember that there are many other ways that NGOs can use this global gathering of policy makers to promote their ideas:

MINISTERIAL SPEECHES – There will be space at the high level segment for member states to make national statements. If you have a good relationship with your government officials, it is possible to suggest that they incorporate reference to difficult issues, or progressive statements, in these presentations.

SATELLITE SESSIONS – Hopefully, there will be an opportunity for NGOs to hold satellite sessions within the venue of the CND or high level segment, but even if this is possible, space and time for these sessions will be extremely limited. For example, policy makers attending the high level segment will only potentially be free on the two lunch breaks, and these will be filled with bilateral meetings and government receptions. Any NGO event held on these days will therefore need to compete with these alternatives to attract participants. IDPC is planning to run a series of satellite sessions around the CND and high level segment, and is consulting with other NGOs to ensure that there are no timetable clashes or duplication of subject matter. If you are planning to run a session at the event, please contact us to discuss it.

DISPLAY MATERIAL – If the bureau agree to the request from the VNGOC for an NGO ‘marketplace’ at the high level segment, then it will be possible for NGOs to construct displays and poster presentations, and distribute written material, within the venue.

OFF-SITE ACTIVITIES – Of course, NGOs do not have to limit their advocacy activities to those approved or allowed by the CND organisers. There is likely to be a wide range of advocacy activities that take place around the March meeting – demonstrations, press conferences, publicity stunts, and workshops. One idea has been for NGOs to reserve space in a building near the CND venue that can function as a centre for advocacy activities.

The next edition of ‘UNGASS News’ will be distributed at the end of November.

THE INTERNATIONAL DRUG POLICY CONSORTIUM