



Update Report

November 2008

On the 13 November, 2008, Michel Perron and David Turner had meetings with the Chair of the 52nd Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the Executive Director of UNODC and the President of the International Narcotics Control Board. The purpose of the meetings was to follow-up the Declaration and Resolutions adopted by consensus at the Vienna Forum and to review arrangements for NGO participation in the High Level Segment (HLS) and the ordinary session of the 52nd CND. The High Level Segment would be on 11 and 12 March, 2009 and the ordinary session of CND on the 16 – 20 March, 2009.

52nd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

An interesting discovery was that the exact location of the HLS had not been finalised. The original expectation was to use the new building at the Vienna International Centre (VIC), but this would not be ready in time. The second choice of the Austria centre, which adjoins the VIC, was dependent on costs and it was likely that the smallest amount of space necessary would be taken. The fall back position of using the VIC would be very limiting for participation by NGOs. It seemed that, although consultative status NGOs can attend the HLS, the space available in the plenary and the round tables would be so limited that if there was a high attendance the majority would be excluded through lack of space. In these circumstances, ensuring that NGOs were more visible and active during the ordinary session of CND the following week was important.

In a letter to the Chair of CND we had made a number of specific requests:

- an opportunity to showcase the historic work and share key policy priorities from “Beyond 2008” with member states attending the HLS at a civil society hearing;
- a brief summary of the Beyond 2008 conclusions and recommendations to be included as one of the official papers for the HLS and distributed to all delegations prior to the meeting;
- that the Secretariat afford any and all appropriate logistical support, advice and information for constructive NGO participation at the HLS;
- an NGO presentation to be made to the plenary of the HLS;
- an appropriate allocation of slots for NGO participation at the round table sessions themselves;
- that in identifying speakers for the round tables, NGO experts be included appropriate to the subject matter.

Our letter was discussed with the Bureau¹ of CND. The recommendations would have to be confirmed by the Extended Bureau². In terms of a civil society hearing, the Chair was open to this, drew attention to the space limitations, and would not likely be able to attend the entire event if it did go ahead given her duties at the HLS. She has asked the Secretariat to work out details of venue etc. Its early days on this especially, since the actual location of the HLS still remains up in the air. She indicated that the Bureau would support a brief presentation on Beyond 2008 to the plenary and circulation of the Declaration and Resolutions. She also agreed to work through the VNGOC and the Beyond 2008 RLO's as prospective NGO reps for the round tables. Space for these was extremely limited with a minimum of 5 places (which could be increased to a maximum of 10) for Inter-governmental Organisations, UN entities and NGOs. This means that only 2 NGOs may be able to participate in any one round table. In terms of space for side events and meeting

¹ The Bureau consists of the Chair, the First Vice-Chair, the Second Vice-Chair, the Third Vice-Chair and the Rapporteur

² The Extended Bureau consists of the Bureau plus the chairs of the regional groups, the Chair of the Group of 77 and China and the representative of or observer for the State holding the Presidency of the European Union

space for civil society, she said that the secretariat had been asked to facilitate this as much as possible.

Finally, she indicated that the Chair would be issuing version 1 of the political declaration in mid December with the intention that negotiation on the contents should begin in January.

Meeting with UNODC

The Executive Director of UNODC was very complimentary about the Beyond 2008 process, consensus and richness of recommendations. UNODC is working through a detailed response to the recommendations directed at UNODC. He picked up on the request for the civil society hearing, thought it would be good but also indicated that he was going to check with UN Headquarters in New York on the opportunity of having this hearing prior to a relevant General Assembly or ECOSOC meeting. This was very welcome news but still embryonic. We also asked Mr Costa to ensure that the Secretariat was receptive to NGO requests for space etc., as their past interpretation of allowable rules had been overly narrow and unhelpful. The Director in charge of the Secretariat was in attendance and they both agreed to look at this. This will be useful in terms of satellite meetings etc – but again, there is no clarity as to what room will be available right now.

Meeting with INCB

The President of INCB, Professor Ghodse was also receptive to the Beyond 2008 recommendations. He described the extent to which they try to engage with NGO's when conducting country missions. We were encouraged by this. He did acknowledge that many did not necessarily understand the manner in which INCB must do its work to maintain the trust and cooperation of both governments and the relevant industries – including individual private companies. That said he agreed to meet annually with the VNGOC and to solicit the VNGOC's views on NGO's the Board could meet when undertaking their country missions. We also discussed the Annual Report of the Board and the thematic chapter where the Board discussed some specific aspect of drug policy or practice in relation to the drug control treaties. Professor Ghodse was interested to receive ideas through the VNGOC on possible themes. He did emphasise, however, that the Board could not endorse any particular strategy or practice as this was beyond its remit. It was only in a position to comment where a situation was, in its opinion, in contravention to the treaties. Also INCB has created a newsletter and we agreed to feature Beyond 2008 and these discussions in it.

In separate discussions with the Civil Society Team of UNODC we were advised of a project proposal which has been developed to enhance its capacity. This is entirely in line with one of the recommendations to UNODC. Funding from member states and other bodies is now being sought for this project. We agreed that we would inform NGOs of this proposal and encourage them to request their governments to provide financial support for the project either.

Conclusions

This was a very useful set of meetings which confirmed that Beyond 2008 was appreciated as a means of bringing together the NGO community around areas of consensus and in the full understanding that whilst there were important areas of difference, there was also much agreement.

It is clear that the opportunity for direct NGO involvement with the HLS will be minimal, more because of logistics and limited space than anything else but will continue to work on this and to ensure that the space for NGOS is better during the ordinary CND session. We will seek to arrange both briefings and an open NGO meeting during that part of the 2009 CND.

The discussions with UNODC and with INCB demonstrated a definite interest in building improved collaborative mechanisms and we will continue to work with both organizations to take forward the agreements reached at the Beyond 2008 Forum.

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