

FAQ on the Commission on Narcotic Drugs & High Level Segment

A guide for the media

What is the Commission on Narcotic Drugs?

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) was created in 1946, and is the principal policy-making body of the UN system on drug control. The Commission is composed of 53 member states, and supervises the implementation of the UN drug conventions.

On the basis of advice from the World Health Organization, the CND can add, remove or move drugs from the schedules established by the drug conventions. On the advice of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), the CND can also bring under international control chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of controlled substances. It is also the governing body of the Drug Programme of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The CND meets annually in March, usually for five days, at the Vienna International Centre. Each meeting includes roundtables and plenary sessions to debate thematically on key drug control issues, as well as a “Committee of the Whole” where member state delegations negotiate a series of resolutions that are adopted by consensus.

This year, the CND will have a High Level Segment (taking place on 13th and 14th March) as well as a regular session (from 17th to 21st March).

What is the High Level Segment?

Goal: The High Level Segment (HLS) will conduct a mid-term review of progress and challenges since the agreement of a [Political Declaration and Action Plan on drugs in 2009](#).

Who: Ministers will take part in the HLS to exchange views on the challenges and priorities relating to drugs, and to sign-off on a Joint Ministerial Statement.

What: The Joint Ministerial Statement is to be adopted by consensus and launched at the High Level Segment. It has so far gone through numerous rounds of negotiations, which in a way largely reflected how governments defined their own success and priorities. Expectedly, this has led to open conflicts and disagreements with some governments failing to do an honest appraisal of current policies, while others are now standing strong in defence of public health-centred policies. In many ways, this disagreement is healthy and reflects on honest debate. But the consensus-based process can also lead to a very weak statement, and the possibility of no statement at all.

Topics discussed: The HLS will include three roundtable sessions: on demand reduction, supply reduction and money laundering. These discussions will cover the whole spectrum of drug policy, including law enforcement, harm reduction, crop eradication, and access to essential medicines. Some countries have very divergent views on many of these issues.

Why is the High Level Segment important, and why now?

The [Political Declaration and Action Plan on drugs](#) was agreed in 2009, and set a number of ambitious targets for 2019 – making 2014 the mid-term review of progress and challenges. Crucially, however, the HLS and the Joint Ministerial Statement will set out the tone for a forthcoming UN General Assembly Special Session on

Drugs (UNGASS) in 2016 – an opportunity for an honest, open discussion about what is, and what is not, working in international drug policy.

The 2016 UNGASS, which was due to take place in 2019, was brought forward due to calls from the Presidents of Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico to hold the conference as a matter of urgency to discuss the way forward in drug policy reform.

The HLS – and the UNGASS on drugs – come at a time when there are increasing calls for drug policy reform in Latin America and other parts of the world. For the first time, sitting Presidents are questioning the premises of UN drug control and are calling for a debate on alternative approaches. In parallel, more and more States and jurisdictions are breaking the international and idealist consensus on achieving a “drug-free world” through prohibition by adopting health-based policies, including harm reduction interventions and decriminalisation – and even regulated markets for cannabis in Uruguay and the US states of Colorado and Washington.

The HLS discussions will reflect the debates and developments in international drug policy – highlighting the growing gap between countries that continue to promote a zero-tolerance “war on drugs” approach (among them China, Russia, Pakistan and Egypt – the Chair for this year’s CND), and countries that have (and wish to promote) more humane and effective drug policies (particularly those from Europe and Latin America).

How can media representatives attend CND and the High Level Segment?

To attend the HLS and the CND, you will need to obtain media accreditation. Please fill in the online accreditation form¹ and send an email to press@unvienna.org which includes the following required documents:

- A letter of assignment on official letterhead of a media organisation
- A scanned image of a valid press card (national or international)
- A scanned image of your passport/national ID card

Once at the Vienna International Centre, before picking up your badge you will be requested to make an appointment with the accreditation office (Veronica Crowe-Mayerhofer: press@unvienna.org, tel: + 43 (1) 260 60 3342, Room G0578). You will receive an email confirming that your request for accreditation has been approved. You will then be able to retrieve your press pass at: Security Pass Office, Checkpoint One, Vienna International Centre. The office hours are 8:00 to 16:00. For more information, please click [here](#).

If you cannot attend the meeting itself, you can follow the discussions and developments live through the “CND Blog” (www.cndblog.org) and via Skype (http://www.unvienna.org/unov/en/conferences_skype.html).

What activities will IDPC organise during the CND and the High Level Segment?

During the CND, IDPC will co-organise a series of side events, which you are welcome to attend:

Monday 17 th March		
9:00-9:50	Sentencing policies for drug offences: Best practices in the UK	Conference Room M2
13:10-14:00	A tool for debate: The OAS report on drug policy	Conference Room M2
Tuesday 18 th March		
13:10-14:00	Monitoring and evaluation of the Uruguayan cannabis legislative and regulation process	Conference Room M2

¹ Form available here:

<http://unvextn2.unvienna.org/production/unis/Registration.nsf/frmJournalistWeb?OpenForm&checktype=1&conf=YearlyRegistration>

Wednesday 19 th March		
9:00-9:50	Health: The cornerstone of future drug policy	Conference Room M3
9:00-9:50	Current drug policies: Evaluating indicators, examining future options	Conference Room M6
13:10-14:00	Modernising drug law enforcement	Conference Room M3
14:20-15:10	Drug trafficking and consumption in West Africa	Conference Room M3

Who can I contact if I would like more information on the High Level Segment?

For general information:

1. **Ines Gimenez**, Communications Officer, International Drug Policy Consortium, igimenez@idpc.net, tel: +44 (0) 79 5765 1395

For interviews:

1. **Ann Fordham**, Executive Director, International Drug Policy Consortium, afordham@idpc.net, tel: +44 (0) 79 7003 4810
2. **Joanne Csete**, Deputy Director, Open Society Global Drug Policy Program, joanne.csete@opensocietyfoundations.org, tel:
3. **Martin Jelsma**, Director, Drugs and Democracy Programme, Transnational Institute, mjelsma@tni.org, tel: +31 655 715 893
4. **David Dodge**, Spokesperson, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, tel: +43 (1) 26060 4237, mob: +43 699 1459 5629

Where can I find more information about the event?

1. IDPC webpage on the CND: <http://idpc.net/policy-advocacy/un-high-level-segment-on-drugs-march-2014>
2. IDPC webpage on the HLS: <http://idpc.net/policy-advocacy/un-high-level-segment-on-drugs-march-2014>
3. IDPC webpage on UNGASS: <http://idpc.net/policy-advocacy/the-un-general-assembly-special-session-on-drugs-ungass-2016>
4. CND Blog: <http://www.cndblog.org/> – a live record of key debates happening at the CND
5. UN Information Service Handbook for journalists: http://www.unis.unvienna.org/pdf/handbook_for_journalists/handbook_for_journalists.pdf
6. High-Level Segment official webpage for journalists: <http://www.unodc.org/hlr/en/media.html>
7. Listen to the meetings via Skype: http://www.unvienna.org/unov/en/conferences_skype.html

Terminology Guide

The International drug control regime

The global drug control system can be traced back by more than 100 years. However, three international treaties – which have been agreed by almost all UN member states – define the modern-day drug control system: the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. This system allows for the medical and scientific use of certain drugs, but prohibits any other use (i.e. recreational use).

War on drugs

This phrase, famously launched by US President Richard Nixon, refers to a particularly repressive interpretation of the international drug control system marked by mass incarceration and arrest, compulsory treatment, disproportionate criminal penalties (even capital and corporate punishment), crop eradication, and wide-scale human rights violations.

Depenalisation

This is where criminal penalties for drug offences (most commonly penalties for the possession of drugs for personal use) remain in place, but the scale of these penalties is meaningfully reduced and made more proportionate – either formally through changes in the law, or just in practice.

Decriminalisation

This is where criminal penalties for small-scale drug offences (most commonly penalties for the possession or cultivation of drugs for personal use) are removed, even though the act remains prohibited. Instead, there may be administrative sanctions (fines, etc.), or no sanction at all. Decriminalisation can be *de jure*, meaning that the laws are changed to reflect this drug policy change; or *de facto*, where no change is made within the law but in practice these drug offences will no longer be criminalised.

Legal regulation

This is where criminal sanctions are removed across the breadth of the drug market (i.e. production, supply and use). However, the market is strictly regulated through administrative laws, as is the case for tobacco, alcohol and prescription medicines. The design and depth of these regulations vary from country to country and from one drug to another, but will usually cover products (quantity, price, packaging, etc.), retailers and outlets (including advertising), access (age limits, etc.), and areas and circumstances in which the drugs may be used (no public use, restrictions when driving, etc.). This approach is also often referred to as “legalisation” although this term does not adequately acknowledge the regulatory system put in place. This policy approach is different from “free-market availability” in which no regulations are enforced (very few groups advocate for the latter approach).

Harm reduction

This refers to policies, programmes and practices that aim to reduce the health, social and economic harms associated with drug use among people unable or unwilling to stop using drugs. Harm reduction accepts people as they are and avoids being judgemental or stigmatising. Such programmes include needle and syringe programmes, opioid substitution therapy, overdose prevention, etc.

The International Drug Policy Consortium is a global network of non-government organisations and professional networks that specialise in issues related to illegal drug production and use. 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. It produces briefing papers, disseminates the reports of its member organisations, and offers expert consultancy services to policy makers and officials around the world.

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