This report summarises the discussions and conclusions of the meeting, but does not reflect the institutional positions of the co-hosting parties.

4TH BRANDENBURG FORUM IN GENEVA

"TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED DRUG POLICY"

MEETING REPORT

The 4th Brandenburg Forum in Geneva took place on 10th and 11th June 2024 at the historic retreat of the Château de Bossey, approximately 30 minutes outside of Geneva, Switzerland. The Forum was once again organised by the Swiss Confederation, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Office of the Commissioner of the German Federal Government for Drug and Addiction Policy, the Government of the Netherlands, the Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services, the Transnational Institute (TNI), and the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC).

The meeting is part of a long-running series of events and deliverables under the framework of the Global Partnership on Drug Policies and Development (GPDPD) – which is implemented by GIZ on behalf of BMZ.[1] The main Brandenburg Forums have been held in Germany on an annual basis since 2016,[2] with additional Geneva events held since 2021. These Forums seek to provide a unique opportunity for invited government and United Nations (UN) officials to convene alongside academic, civil society and community experts. In order to create a safe space for participants to discuss complex ideas and strategies, the Forums are held under the 'Chatham House Rule', which states that anyone can use the information received, but the identity of those making interventions should not be revealed.[3]

The 4th Brandenburg Forum in Geneva was attended by 43 participants, and brought together government representatives from Australia, Bolivia, Colombia, Czechia, Germany, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the USA – as well as officials from the European Union, the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), the World Health Organization (WHO), and several representatives from civil society organisations and academia.

[1] https://www.gpdpd.org/
[2] https://www.gpdpd.org/en/drug-policy/international-drug-policies-with-perspective/brandenburg-forum-on-drugs-and-development-policies
[3] https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule

OPENING SESSION

The Forum opened with welcoming remarks from two of the co-hosts, Switzerland and Germany, who acknowledged the Forum's partners and participants. The Swiss representative reflected on a year of important milestones across the UN, and urged that the Brandenburg Forums continue to provide ground for further bold ideas and developments. The German representative thanked Switzerland for hosting this much-needed global dialogue, and outlined some of the main arguments for transformational change in drug policies – from environmental harms and drug-related deforestation to human right abuses and public health crises. They recapped Germany's long history of promoting alternative development approaches, and the importance of bridging across silos of different UN bodies and discussions in Vienna, New York and Geneva. Since 2016, the Brandenburg Forums have helped promote several key milestones in international drug policy, such as the development of the International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy,[4] and the recent Human Rights Council resolution which mandated OHCHR to develop a ground-breaking report in 2023 that was presented to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in the context of the mid-term review of the 2019 Ministerial Declaration.[5]

The first of three keynote opening interventions came from a senior UN representative, who shared that the evidence points to the failure of current, punitive drug policies that harm human rights. They indicated that the pathway going forward needs to change, in line with the recommendations of the aforementioned OHCHR report, and highlighted three key issues for discussion: 1) the importance of harm reduction, and the need to reverse the downward trend in resources for this life-saving approach; 2) the upcoming critical review of the coca leaf, which could be a turning point for Indigenous Peoples and traditional medicines; and 3) the global challenge of prisons and overcrowding. They noted that the 10th anniversary of the 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs could be a moment to amplify the calls for change, and to centre drug policies on the affected individuals.

The second speaker, a representative of Colombia, highlighted how the 67th Session of the CND in March 2024 demonstrated the success that can be achieved through coordination: a group of 62 countries came together to deliver a powerful joint statement,[6] and the first-ever CND resolution was adopted by vote with explicit inclusion of the term 'harm reduction',[7] overcoming a decades-long taboo around the term.

The final high-level welcome remarks came from the Global Commission on Drug Policy, whose distinguished representative noted the momentum for human rights-based drug policies, which are taking roots in very different parts of the world – with Geneva becoming an important hub for progressive approaches. They identified the Brandenburg Forums as key spaces when seeking answers to the challenges of drugs. They also discussed the importance of harm reduction approaches which create stigma-free spaces and provide essential health and social support. The emergence of new substances and drug use patterns creates new challenges, but the axiom of the harm reduction response remains the same. They also told participants that current drug policies sustain challenges

[4] https://www.undp.org/publications/international-guidelines-human-rights-and-drug-policy
[5] https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2023/call-inputs-ohchrs-report-human-rights-challenges-addressing-and-countering
[6] https://estatements.unmeetings.org/estatements/31.0365/20240314094500000/FyTLVsbdkc5L/I5dtwxgu49yK_en.pdf
[7] https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/Drug_Resolutions/2020-2029/2024/Res_67_4.pdf

such as criminalisation and corruption which even harm reduction cannot fix, and called for a new UN human rights special procedure to address the issues.

Participants at the 4th Brandenburg Forum in Geneva (Credit: GPDPD)

PANEL 1: WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED IN THE LAST YEAR?

Building on the opening remarks, the first panel on Day 1 sought to explore in more detail some of the recent milestones and developments across different settings. The first panellist, a UN representative, focused on the OHCHR report *'Human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem',* which was released in September 2023.[8] The report made a series of recommendations for a more human rights-affirming approach to drugs, including harm reduction, decriminalisation and the responsible regulation of drugs. Since the launch, OHCHR has worked hard on dissemination and outreach – including a series of seven side events at this year's CND, presentations to inter-governmental groups in Africa, Asia and Europe, as well as national presentations and meetings. Human Rights Council resolution 52/24, adopted in April 2023, mandates OHCHR to continue this work.[9] The representative explained that the priority now was to engage and bring together the relevant actors at the national level and advise governments on *how* to implement the report's recommendations.

The second panellist, from Switzerland, reflected more specifically on the developments at the CND in Vienna and highlighted three main lessons that emerged. Firstly, the need to consider drug-related issues in a holistic way throughout the UN system because national agencies and ministries do not naturally work in this way. They applauded the move by Colombia to appoint an 'Ambassador At Large' on drug policies to strengthen links across different UN settings, as the various resolutions and decisions on the topic are all connected. Secondly, they emphasised that "together we are stronger" – pointing to the gains made at the 67th CND to show the value of collaboration, building on connections and areas of agreement. The third lesson proposed was to "pick our battles": for example, it was recalled that more than 130 hours were spent negotiating smaller details of the 2024 CND Midterm Review Outcome Document.

[8] https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2023/call-inputs-ohchrs-report-human-rights-challenges-addressing-and-countering
[9] https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2FRES%2F52%2F24

The next speaker was a representative of Mexico, who reaffirmed the country's strong commitment to advocating for health and human rights-based approaches to drug policy in multilateral forums. Focusing on lessons learned from the Human Rights Council in Geneva, there have been numerous recent milestones such as resolution 52/24 (for which Mexico was part of a core group of Member States), the OHCHR report on drugs and human rights, and the subsequent launch and dissemination events including an intersessional panel in Geneva in February 2024.[10] The Council also adopted resolution 54/35 on the death penalty, with a proposed amendment to remove references to drug offences being defeated.[11] They stated that there remains a clear divergence of views between countries at the Council, with some maintaining that only the Vienna-based UN bodies should be working on drug issues. For this reason, having UNODC engaged at the February intersessional panel in Geneva was cited as a significant development. It was also suggested that mainstreaming drug discussions across human rights forums and also in New York remains a priority and a challenge.

Next, a UN representative took the floor to reflect on the work of the UN's inter-agency 'Task Team', which was founded in 2018 alongside the UN Common Position on drugs.[12] They stated that progress had been made in the last 12 months in promoting the Common Position, especially at the country and regional office levels. This followed a call from the UN Secretary-General to revitalise the Task Team, after a period of relative dormancy following the COVID-19 pandemic. UNODC, as the lead agency for this initiative, coordinated a mapping of the 23 UN agencies that have projects and activities related to drugs.[13] They also outlined some ongoing challenges: the need to manage expectations but also report on implementation; building trust between the relevant UN agencies; and delivering the necessary, coordinated technical assistance at the national level. Next steps include marking the 10th anniversary of the 2016 UNGASS on drugs.

The final panellist from civil society reflected on the achievements that had already been highlighted, many of which would have been considered almost impossible a decade ago, but also challenged participants to think about what a true 'paradigm shift' in drug policies looks like, and how it could be sustained. They described the UN human rights system as comprising the 'mainland' and 'archipelagos' – and the importance of ensuring the hard-fought narrative shifts in spaces such as the CND and the Human Rights Council were translated to the country and operational level. They proposed that it is at this local level that a paradigm shift must occur hand-in-hand with the multilateral level, and that this is already happening in many places (citing, as examples, the USA's recent shift in position on the topic of harm reduction, and Colombia's domestic and international positions on human rights-based drug policies).

The subsequent question and answer session included discussions about how to translate words into action at the local levels, and it was posited that UN human rights mechanisms can help in this regard through national-level reviews and country visits. It was also asked whether the decision to break from consensus and vote on the USA's overdose resolution at the CND in March (and its explicit reference to harm reduction) could be seen as a breakthrough or an exception in Vienna. A number of participants commented that the so-called 'Vienna spirit' remained, and that the desire for consensus-

[10] https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1b/k1bz8q5pmc
[11] https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2FRES%2F54%2F35
[12] https://unsceb.org/united-nations-system-common-position-supporting-implementation-international-drug-control-policy
[13] https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_67/Documents/ECN72024_CRP3_2403817E.pdf

based decision making should not stretch to allowing a small number of countries to effectively veto language and ideas. Others, however, warned of the potential backlash should voting become the new norm in Vienna and the changes this would entail.

PANEL 2: TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

The second panel of Day 1 began with a pre-recorded video intervention from the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, whose report on harm reduction was due to be launched a few weeks after the Forum[14] (with a second report on harm reduction scheduled for October 2024). She emphasised that repressive drug policies and the threat of punishment have failed to deter drug use, but have instead increased harms such as stigmatisation, criminalisation and unequal access to essential medicines. Furthermore, it was noted that these drug laws disproportionately impact persons in marginalized situations, women and girls, migrants and others. She called for a "decolonial approach to drug use, harm reduction and the right to health", which must also address wider needs such as housing, employment and education. She also highlighted the 95% funding gap for harm reduction in low- and middle-income countries,[15] urging that this gap must be filled. The intervention was closed with three key recommendations: 1) decriminalisation and moves towards alternative regulatory approaches that put health and rights at the centre; 2) a multilateral review of the international legal framework on drug control; and 3) the creation of a special procedure mandate on the human rights dimensions of drug policies.

The next speaker, a representative from the Netherlands, reflected on some key areas to explore whether Vienna is ready for a 'new paradigm'. With regards to the recent voting at the CND, participants were reminded that consensus remains the norm and the expectation for most countries. It was suggested that voting can be effective when isolating just one or two objecting Member States, but does not preclude the need for negotiation, compromise and the 'Vienna spirit'. It was also highlighted that the CND membership itself regularly changes, as do the political positions of many governments, so the longer-term outcome was more likely to be "evolution, not revolution". The speaker also reiterated the need for parallel work inside and outside of the UN system, striving for multilateral shifts but also national level reforms and change – using the latter to gather evidence that can inform the discussions at the UN. It was suggested that the term "evidence-based" is widely used as a catchphrase rather than a true commitment to exploring what does – and doesn't – work across all areas of the drug response. They also stated that paradigm shifts need funding shifts too, but this is often not the case and more strategic discussions around funding are needed (especially in light of financial pressures faced by many governments). Finally, they highlighted the successful coordination in Vienna around the last CND, and the opportunity to build on the coalition of 62 countries that formed around the joint statement. But there is also a need to connect and repeat this outside of Vienna.

The third panellist was from civil society and highlighted the ongoing and unprecedented public health and human rights crises that remain despite the momentum and progress that has been achieved.

[14] https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5652-drug-use-harm-reduction-and-right-health-report-special
[15] https://hri.global/flagship-research/funding-for-harm-reduction/cost-of-complacency/

Principle among these is the devastating overdose crisis, with at least 500 million drug-related deaths every year, including many preventable deaths resulting from a toxic and unpredictable drug supply caused by prohibition. They also lamented that the CND and UNODC continue to lag behind in promoting and anchoring a health, human rights and development-oriented approach to drug policy. Despite calls from governments for a review of the drug control regime, there is no clear process in place for this to happen in a robust and independent way. The panellist also described the responsible legal regulation of drugs as an "elephant in the drug policy room" – now recommended by OHCHR and others, and implemented to varying extents by jurisdictions around the world, but further demonstrating the need for reform and reconciliation of the drug control treaty system. It was suggested that potential ways forward across the UN include: the creation of a special procedure mandate on human rights and drug policy; a thorough evaluation of the UN drug control regime – which could take the form of a high-level panel or working group under the stewardship of the UN Secretary-General; and marking the 10th anniversary of the UNGASS on drugs with a new Human Rights Council resolution mandating OHCHR to produce periodic inputs on human rights and drug policy. Across all of these, it was also noted that civil society and affected communities need to be funded and empowered to fulfil their important roles.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Evaluation forms were received from 70% of the Forum participants, with extremely high levels of satisfaction with the meeting content, structure and organisation. Reassuringly, all but three respondents reported that the Forum helped them to identify potential new approaches in drug policy, and all agreed that it was relevant to their work. Key benefits included better understanding of some of the ongoing processes and actors, the opportunity to share views with various allies, and to share perspectives from across the UN. Possible areas for improvement were greater geographical representation and more time for discussions (including reflection on the recommendations from the 2023 Forum).

Crucially, a clear majority (84%) of the respondents agreed that the Brandenburg Forum in Geneva is an established platform for discussions, with one government representative commenting: "Absolutely, you are bringing together experts and diplomats to discuss and brainstorm to build on the recent developments on drugs and human rights".

Building on this last point, the next panellist was a representative of people who use drugs, and they referred back to an earlier presentation to explain that civil society and communities are the link between the human rights 'mainland' and the 'archipelago': ensuring connections, awareness, transparency and implementation on the ground. A new paradigm can only be secured if it means something to the communities that are most impacted – including people who use drugs. For example, how will the reference to harm reduction and the CND resolution on overdose translate into preventing people dying of overdoses, and how can the 'time lag' between words and action be reduced? These individuals and their unions and networks face the most risks in undertaking their work and are severely under-resourced. Both civil society and community organisations are struggling with shrinking spaces and unsustainable funding as aid and development budgets reduce and anti-rights movements gain prominence. The panellist highlighted the importance of defending the progress achieved to date, "holding the line in politically fraught environments", but also protecting against the substitution of one harmful paradigm (criminalisation) with another (pathologisation) – concluding that "a new paradigm will be hollow without communities and civil society".

The next speaker, a Mexican government representative, presented the ongoing work and discussions around a new 'omnibus resolution' on drugs to be presented at the UN General Assembly later in 2024. The last of these resolutions (77/238, from December 2022) represented a new approach to streamline the document and rebalance between the three pillars of public health, human rights and law enforcement.[16] But these changes brought resistance, and the resolution was adopted by a clear majority vote rather than consensus as in the past. This was described as the "foundation being laid" and work is underway on a new document in 2024 which will strengthen the focus on marginalised people and stigma. This will require coordination and outreach to mobilise the support of governments around the world.

The final speaker for Day 1 represented Bolivia, and reflected on the rights of Indigenous People affected by drug policies and the challenges faced in bringing the views of this group to the multilateral level. Bolivia identified the importance of developing their own policies relative to their unique cultural and historical context, which requires the inclusion of Indigenous People and recognition of the sacred connection with the coca leaf. The speaker emphasised Bolivia's conviction that human rights are central to improving drug policies, yet also noted a perceived imbalance between social, economic and cultural rights and individual rights, also taking into account collective rights. The historical decision to include the coca leaf in the drug control treaties has harmed Indigenous People, and it will be important to include their voices during the critical review process and the relevant debates across the UN.

BREAKOUT GROUPS: OPPORTUNITIES TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

The second day of the Forum opened with a brief recap of the previous discussions, before participants were invited to join two out of four working group discussions: opportunities in Vienna; opportunities in Geneva; opportunities for further contributions by human rights mechanisms; and opportunities for UN systemwide coherence. Each working group was assigned a moderator and notetaker, and was tasked with further exploring some of the key issues and recommendations from Day 1 and outlining a number of recommendations on how to secure further progress in the coming years. After engaging discussions, the recommendations from each of the working groups were presented to the plenary in the final session. All participants were then invited to 'vote' by placing stickers on the recommendations which they felt were the most important. As in previous years, the results of these 'votes' (below in square brackets) provide a useful indication of the group's sense of priorities over the coming years. The recommendations highlighted in green are the highest-voted from each group as well as other recommendations which secured 20 votes or more.

GROUP 1: OPPORTUNITIES IN VIENNA – MAINSTREAMING HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE CND

This working group built upon previous discussions on the recent voting at CND and the implications for the "Vienna spirit". Several participants reiterated that this "spirit" was about more than voting, while others felt that it was already being abused by those seeking to block progressive language. Nevertheless, it was agreed that consensus should always be the first intention at the CND. Looking forward, there were interesting discussions about which topics would be best for future CND

[16] https://www.undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FRES%2F77%2F238

resolutions – exploring strong and specific topics which had been historically vetoed but would receive support from a clear majority of CND members. It was also suggested that this would require a strong and politically influential resolution sponsor, close coordination, outreach to allies (especially those in the Global South), or even a coalition approach (as is used for the existing alternative development resolutions every year). In terms of harm reduction, some participants recalled that the lack of a universally agreed definition was often used to challenge its inclusion at CND. There was some discussion about the pros and cons of developing such a definition, but it was generally agreed that this was best done through an expert meeting (and outside of CND negotiations). Participants also spoke of the importance of engaging countries who implement harm reduction at the national level but do not promote it at the multilateral level, as well as engaging people most impacted by drug policies. The following recommendations were agreed and submitted for the plenary voting exercise:

1st [26 votes]: New CND resolution on human rights and drug policies, including a mandate for a standing agenda item on human rights at the CND

2nd [10 votes]: Awareness raising through various briefings throughout the year to sensitize missions on harm reduction and national best practices

3rd [9 votes]: Build on and expand the coalition of 62 countries that signed the March 2024 CND statement to improve geographical representation

4th [7 votes]: New CND resolution on harm reduction, building on progress in 2024

5th [6 votes]: Substantial event to mark the 10-year anniversary of UNGASS 2016 and inform/educate on the process and progress

6th [4 votes]: Use the International Harm Reduction Conference[17] (to be held in Bogota, Colombia in April 2025) as a strategic moment to further the discussion and momentum

GROUP 2: OPPORTUNITIES IN GENEVA – MAINSTREAMING DRUG POLICIES AT THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

This working group outlined several key opportunities in the coming months which can be used to promote further progressive drug policy discussions. These included the formal presentation to the Human Rights Council of the first report on harm reduction by the Special Rapporteur on the right to health (end-June 2024).[18] Several participants highlighted the importance of mobilising supportive statements that welcome the report, while others emphasised the need to focus on implementation of the report recommendations at the country level (alongside civil society and communities). Another identified opportunity was the tabling of a new Human Rights Council resolution on human rights and drug policies – building on resolution 52/24 from 2023 but seeking to create an ongoing mandate for OHCHR on the issue, and to become a periodic process rather than an ad-hoc one. Also discussed was the idea of a new drug policy special procedure mandate of the Human Rights Council. This could take the form of a Special Rapporteur, a working group or an international independent expert mechanism. Some participants expressed the need to begin laying the foundations to advocate for this in reports and statements, while also exploring the best format and the related costs. Other opportunities raised

[17] https://hr25.hri.global/
[18] https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5652-drug-use-harm-reduction-and-right-health-report-special

in the working group included: engagement to include drug policy language in other Council resolutions and debates, including those on the death penalty and Indigenous People; outreach to the existing human rights mechanisms related to Indigenous People (including to promote their engagement in the critical review of the coca leaf); and enhanced use of the Universal Periodic Review processes to highlight drug-related issues. Several participants also noted that much of the above requires a strong and active 'Core Group' of Member States in Geneva. The following recommendations were agreed and submitted for the plenary voting exercise:

1st [21 votes]: Promote the establishment of a dedicated mandate of the Human Rights Council on human rights and drug policy

2nd [20 votes]: Convene regular meetings of a "Group of Friends" on drug policy in Geneva, focusing across public health and human rights, and with civil society involvement, starting with a post-Brandenburg Forum debrief

3rd [16 votes]: Mobilize mechanisms related to Indigenous People to engage around the critical review of the coca leaf by the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD)

4th [13 votes]: Table a periodic resolution at the Human Rights Council on the human rights impacts of drug policy, linked with the 10-year anniversary of UNGASS 2016

5th [4 votes]: Work to increase references to drugs and drug policies in other relevant Human Rights Council resolutions

GROUP 3: OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER CONTRIBUTIONS BY HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACTS OF DRUG POLICY

This working group reflected that there are a lot of parallel processes underway, demonstrating the growing momentum around drug policies and human rights at the multilateral level. Echoing Group 2 (above), participants raised the opportunities for heightened engagement with the Universal Periodic Review processes to make specific recommendations to countries related to drug policies. In the past, civil society organisations have submitted 'shadow reports' but have struggled to secure recommendations – and it was suggested that proactive coordination from the 'Core Group' of Member States was needed. Another opportunity proposed in the working group was placing drugs on the agenda for country visits by a range of different Special Rapporteurs, and also strategic engagement around the militarisation of drug policies in some contexts (building on existing strong recommendations from OHCHR and others). Other proposed approaches included engagement with the Human Rights Committee, engagement around the Rights of the Child (the only human rights instrument to specifically mention drugs), and coordination around the launch of the forthcoming General Comment on drugs from the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR). For the latter, it was suggested that the launch and subsequent day of discussions could be used to engage Special Rapporteurs and other key actors. Finally, again echoing Group 2, this working group discussed the need for a new special procedure mandate on drug policies and human rights, and the need for closer interactions between those individuals coordinating and strategising in Vienna and Geneva. The following recommendations were agreed and submitted for the plenary voting exercise:

1st [18 votes]: Organize an inter-committee meeting among Treaty Bodies to discuss the human rights challenges of drug policies and issue a joint statement at the end, setting a coherent legal framework for analysis

2nd [5 votes]: Identify key countries (such as those in the 'Core Group') who can coordinate with civil society to identify priority Universal Periodic Review countries and windows for drug policy recommendations

=3rd [3 votes]: Build on strong recommendations on the militarisation of drug policies in the OHCHR report – finding a human rights mechanism that is open to taking up the issue, and/or finding a relevant thematic Human Rights Council resolution, and securing a request to OHCHR to produce a report on the issue to further advance legal framework and standards

=3rd [3 votes]: Maximise the opportunities to input into the CESCR General Comment on drug policy, including strong country submissions and coordinated engagement in the general day of discussion

5th [2 votes]: Coordinate a joint statement and/or promote the widest possible number of country statements for both of the harm reduction reports from the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health (in both Geneva and in Vienna)

6th [1 vote]: Connect the harm reduction reports from the Special Rapporteur on the right to health into the process for the development of the CESCR General Comment on drug policy, possibly through a briefing for the Committee

GROUP 4: UN SYSTEM COHERENCE ON DRUG POLICY AND HUMAN RIGHTS – HOW THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND SECRETARY-GENERAL CAN HELP CONNECT THE DOTS

This working group explored a wide range of opportunities and initiatives – including Mexico's 'omnibus resolution' on drugs later in the year – but several participants also noted lower levels of engagement and expertise on drug policy issues in New York. There was also felt to be a general lack of government coordination between UN hubs, with some ideas and mechanisms proposed to help overcome this and connect the key actors in a sustainable way. Examples included regular calls, communication groups or platforms, and Member State briefings in New York, Geneva and Vienna – all of which could be repeated to ensure coordination in all future negotiations relevant to drug policy. With regards to coherence within the UN system itself, some participants felt that there were still some forces resisting this idea and that much more could be done to better align (especially in emergency settings). Participants also reflected on other sectors in terms of the need for a review mechanism to monitor and evaluate inter-agency cooperation – with the existing Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) mentioned as an example from the development sector. In terms of a serious high-level review of the UN drug control system, the group discussed the idea of calling on the Secretary-General to convene this. Other upcoming opportunities identified at the cross-UN level included: more regular briefings and updates from the existing Task Team to improve transparency; the forthcoming UN Summit of the Future (September 2024, New York); ongoing high-level discussions around the Sustainable Development Goals; and the Secretary-General's new special envoy on youth. The 10th anniversary of the 2016 UNGASS on drugs was also seen as an important opportunity for reflection on progress in policy implementation as well as on systemwide coherence. The following recommendations were agreed and submitted for the plenary voting exercise:

1st [25 votes]: Call for a review mechanism of UN system coherence on drug policy, led by the UN Secretary-General

2nd [21 votes]: Improve coordination and communication for the upcoming omnibus resolution between Vienna, New York, Geneva and capitals – such as through briefings and the development of common messaging

3rd [19 votes]: Informal system to exchange information quickly between diplomats online, between Geneva, New York and Vienna

4th [10 votes]: Allied Member States to urgently write to the Co-Chairs of the UN Summit of the Future, to ensure inclusion of drug policy in the final documents

5th [2 votes]: The Task Team to hold periodic briefings with member states and develop a new report, leading up to 2026 and the 10-year anniversary of UNGASS 2016

CLOSING SESSION

After the voting exercise, the 'results' were quickly tallied and shared with the participants, focusing on the six highest priorities (highlighted above in green). There was then time for some final reflections from participants, and the immediate next steps were clarified. Closing the Forum, representatives from IDPC and GPDPD thanked all of the participants for their engagement, ideas and enthusiasm over the two days, as well as commending Switzerland as the Forum hosts, and the other Brandenburg Forum partners for their hard work to make the event possible.

The Château de Bossey, Switzerland (Credit: GPDPD)