

# **UNGASS NEWS**

## **ISSUE 3**

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Welcome to the third 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 UNGASS REVIEW PROCESS**

The UN General Assembly's 20<sup>th</sup> Special Session on the World Drug Problem met in 1998, setting objectives centred on the achievement of significant and measurable reductions in the supply of and demand for illicit drugs over the ensuing 10 year period. The 2008 CND in Vienna began the process of reviewing the progress made toward these objectives, and will be followed by a period of reflection and analysis prior to deciding the future direction of the international drug control system.

The delegates to the 2008 CND confirmed that a 2 day, high-level, political meeting will be held in March 2009 in Vienna, which will agree the framework for the next phase of UN drug policy. The material and reports to be considered at that meeting are being generated through five intergovernmental working groups meeting between June and September 2008, and will present draft texts for consideration by governments. These working groups are, respectively, covering Supply Reduction, Money Laundering, Crop Eradication & Alternative Development, Demand Reduction and Precursors & Amphetamine-Type Stimulants. The draft texts from the working groups will then be debated by member states in a series of 'intersessional' meetings (the first is scheduled for September 29<sup>th</sup>), and a prepared set of texts presented to the high-level meeting in March 2009.

### **EXPERT WORKING GROUP ON DEMAND REDUCTION**

The fourth of the five intergovernmental expert working groups, on demand reduction, took place from 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> September in Vienna. Like the other working groups, this one was charged with reviewing progress against the relevant action plan agreed in 1998, and agreeing conclusions and proposals to be submitted to the CND intersessional process of preparing the political declaration for the March 2009 meeting.

The working group was well attended, with around 100 countries represented, many of whom had included NGO experts in their delegations. There was lively discussion within a general consensus that demand reduction needed to be given more prominence in a balanced drug control system. The main challenge to a good outcome was the time restriction, with a wide range of issues to be resolved by the third day, and many delegations wasting time on pointless procedural or semantic issues.

However, there was a decent mood of compromise and co-operation on most issues, and the conclusions are broadly positive. IDPC and like-minded countries have generally focussed on 6 issues in the run-up to the meeting – the outcome and remaining challenges on each are summarised below:

**DATA QUALITY** – We wanted a clear recognition that the current system for collating and analysing data through the UNODC needed improvement, and a plan for a more sophisticated approach to be drawn up. There was no problem in the meeting on this point, but at this stage there is no specific proposal on what an improved system may look like, so the detail will have to be negotiated through the CND.

**CONTAINMENT** – The EU, in particular, wanted to challenge the UNODC view that containment of the global drug market was being achieved, warning about complacency. While recognising containment as a useful concept, the working group agreed with wording that accepted that containment has not been achieved over the last 10 years.

**NGO INVOLVEMENT** – This was possibly the most disappointing aspect of the meeting. Delegations listened politely to the presentation of the 'Beyond 2008' conclusions, and many recorded their appreciation and support for that process, and civil society involvement in general. However, the conclusions of the meeting have only a weak reference to the importance of engagement with civil society, and even that had to be

fought for by a few supportive delegations. Furthermore, no proposals emerged for how Civil Society will be included next March – the Vienna NGO committee are now considering how best to re-present this issue in the next phase of the process.

The issue of user advocacy organisations also caused some dispute – inclusion of the phrase in a list of types of civil society organisation stimulated a reaction from some delegations, and the reference was negotiated down simply to organisations that represent target populations.

**HARM REDUCTION** – The usual debate was held, with the usual suspects taking the usual positions. There was a general (and very welcome) consensus that the concept of demand reduction should be broadened to include activities to reduce the negative health and social consequences of drug use and markets. However, when the suggestion was made that the specific phrase ‘harm reduction’ was added to the list of activities included in a comprehensive demand reduction policy, a small number of countries objected and refused to move on it, despite it being pointed out that the phrase is established language in many other UN documents, including two General Assembly declarations. Consensus was therefore not achieved on this point, and the battle now moves on to the next phase.

Some delegations raised the possibility of creating a ‘third pillar’ of drug control, that covers reducing the social and health consequences of drug use and markets, and that is given equal importance to supply reduction and demand reduction. While this was not picked up with any consensus, it is an interesting idea that could be explored further.

**HUMAN RIGHTS** – There were no objections to language that accepted that all demand reduction interventions should be implemented with full respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, and the dignity of all citizens, but a specific reference to the UN Charter was not included. It is unclear whether most delegates had really thought through the implications of this statement, but the likely inclusion of this language in the political declaration will open up the opportunity to strengthen adherence to human rights in the coming years.

**DEMAND REDUCTION BEST PRACTICES** – Agreement was reached that the UNODC and WHO should be much more active in collating, defining, and disseminating best practices in prevention, treatment, and harm reduction. The conclusions included a call for them to bring forward a comprehensive plan for this work.

Overall, a good meeting, with many concepts accepted without controversy, that were unthinkable a few years ago. However, some divisions still remain, particularly on harm reduction, and these will be discussed again in the intersessional meetings, the first of which is scheduled for 29<sup>th</sup> September.

## **THE UNODC’S 2008 GLOBAL AMPHETAMINE TYPE STIMULANTS ASSESSMENT REPORT**

The 17-19<sup>th</sup> September saw the last of the five intergovernmental expert working groups, on Precursors and Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS), meet in Vienna. A full account of the meeting, which proved to be both productive and uncontroversial, will be included in the next edition of UNGASS News. It is important to note here that the use of ATS, a term denoting a group of synthetic drugs including MDMA or Ecstasy, Amphetamine and Methamphetamine, has been a growing component of illicit drug consumption over the past two decades. Indeed, an initial assessment of the worldwide production and consumption of ATS was undertaken by UNODC in 1996, and a first published report prepared to coincide with the UNGASS mid-term review in 2003. Fortuitously, in the week prior to this month’s expert working group on precursor chemicals and ATS, a second report was published by the *Office*, entitled *Amphetamine and Ecstasy: 2008 Global ATS Assessment*. The report provides a detailed account of UNODC’s appraisal of the present position with respect to these synthetic

drugs. In brief, it concludes that while use has stabilized at high levels in the developed countries, a pattern of increased consumption is clearly visible in a number of developing and transitional economies, particularly in East and South-East Asia and in the Middle East. ATS production is stated to be following a similar pattern; while global production is estimated to be stable at about 500 MT, production is shifting away from EU states and the US into neighbouring regions. The rise in consumption in Asia appears to be linked with growing affluence and the cultural signification of ATS as modern, 'lifestyle' drugs which can be used both to provide extra stamina at work and to prolong and intensify leisure and pleasure. In addition, their synthetic status and customary appearance in tablet form helps to distinguish them from plant based drugs that require smoking and injection.

The growth in the ATS market brings with it a number of highly significant new challenges for the drug control regime and for policy-makers. The fact that these substances can be manufactured from a variety of legally available precursors, by a selection of methods and in spaces in immediate proximity to consumers means that monitoring systems are unable to rely upon traditional sources of knowledge, such as surveillance of numbers of hectares of plants grown or seizures made at points along an extensive and relatively vulnerable global supply chain. In fact, seizure data does provide a primary information resource for the Report, but the methodological section acknowledges the epistemological limitations imposed by the ATS production cycle. These difficulties mirror those deriving from the cannabis market's increasing reliance on locally-produced indoor varieties, which are discussed in IDPC's response to the 2008 World Drug Report. These characteristics are likely to present a growing problem for drug control as new synthetic drugs appear, alongside new ways of producing familiar drugs (like hydroponics) and new methods of accessing them (such as the internet).

## **1<sup>ST</sup> INTERSESSIONAL MEETING**

On 29<sup>th</sup> September 2008 the first intersessional meeting of the Commission is due to take place. On the basis of the discussions of the Expert Working Groups and their conclusions, the secretariat will produce a consolidated document. This will provide the material upon which the intersessional meetings will begin their work of producing a draft political declaration and, as appropriate, additional declarations and measures for adoption at the High Level Segment of the 52<sup>nd</sup> CND in March 2009.

We hope that you have found the third edition of UNGASS News to be both informative and helpful to your work in various parts of the world. The next issue is due to appear in October, and will include reports on both the Expert Working Group on ATS and the First Intersessional Meeting.

THE INTERNATIONAL DRUG POLICY CONSORTIUM