

General impressions from CND

NGOs have never been so active and influential in supporting the meeting agenda. Several statements by NGOs were made at the thematic debates, including statements by EHRN, IDPC, AHRN, OSI and INPUD. All statements will be shortly available and posted on a web. Some highlights from CND thematic debated on demand reduction.

Germany:

- stressed the necessity of reliable data
- UNODC country reports/questionnaire is not effective, it's too formalistic
- not all countries complete it
- not all countries have the capacity to answer questions properly
- suggestion for better use of EMCDDA data/reports
- group of independent experts needed to make evaluation of UNGASS

David Turner from Vienna NGO Committee raised an interesting issue of the balance between human rights of community and individuals.

Chair:

- countries have made modest progress and implementation of demand reduction strategies is insufficient
- need for better data
- need for expanding and improving demand reduction programs
- only 9% of UNODC funding is allocated for drug demand reduction programs

Germany:

- harm reduction is one of the major pillars of demand reduction strategies
- New Zealand raised the issue of human rights protection

WHO:

- drug problem should be primarily viewed as public health problem
- Uruguay stressed that issue of human rights and harm reduction should be covered. Countries need to promote not only abstinence based approach, but to be more flexible

UNAIDS:

- many countries still fail to provide proven harm reduction programs
- need for human rights based legislation and non discriminatory approach
- respect and promote rights of people who use drugs
- allow them to participate in decision making and implementation of HIV prevention and treatment programs

NGO Forum at CND

The NGO Forum at CND was held on March 12 and summarized the results of regional consultation under the Beyond 2008 initiative by VNGOC. NGO meeting was opened with UNODC Executive Director's speech. Mr.Costa welcomed participants and highlighted the role of nongovernmental sector in drug demand reduction field. Interestingly, Mr.Costa spoke:

"Goal of harm reduction is noble! We see harm reduction as holistic approach: starting from primary prevention and through early detection, early intervention, and drug testing in militaries, schools and other" – the statement that would raise reasonable questions among harm reduction advocates.

The great majority of regional reports identified similar trends and problems in NGO development. The major findings were related to the increase in number of NGOs, growth in funding, introduction of new services by NGOs and others. With respect of NGO involvement in collaborative work with governments in the areas of drug policy development and implementation, several positive examples were presented. Namely NGO participation in different commission and consultative councils at state or city levels. Nevertheless the efficacy of such involvement was questioned. NGO participation lacks of real influence on decision making. More often nongovernmental organizations are involved in policy implementation.

Significant issues were identified in terms of NGO collaboration with UN institutions. NGOs lack information related to UN agencies and offices in respective countries. When it comes to projects funded by UN bodies priority is often given to proper financial reporting, rather than quality of work. UNAIDS and UNDP were named as agencies most actively collaborating with NGOs in our region.

The most interesting part of presentations was related to the implementation of UN Drug Conventions in practice and achievements in this respect. The overall consensus was reached that aims of Conventions and UNGASS 1998 (significant and measurable reduction, or eradication of drug production, trafficking and consumption by 2008) were not achieved. Drug use and related problems are growing through over the regions. Moreover, countries' adherence to drug Conventions lead to many unintended consequences, including those concerning human rights.

For example in the majority of countries alternative measures are not considered in national legislation. In some countries legislation allows for alternatives to punishment, but these measures are openly neglected by courts. Possession of controlled substances for personal use and for selling purposes is not differentiated in the overwhelming majorities of countries, possession of any amounts of drugs is considered as a criminal offence. As a result of such approach drug users are criminalized and prisons are full of people who were convicted for simple drug use or possession of drugs for personal use. In some countries governments refer to Conventions and refuse to introduce effective treatment programs (for example OST in Russia). As a result HIV and other blood borne infections are in rise.

In contrast with all other regional presentations the North American one (presented by Partnership for a Drug-Free America) was praising current state of art in drug demand reduction field. Ant-drug media campaigns, school and workplace random drug testing and drug courts were named as the most effective and proper interventions in drug demand reduction field. "Drug testing was extremely successful in preventing and treating drug addiction" – the presenter's statement which was questioned by the Chair of Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs Dr.Eva Tongue. "Please be careful in suggesting interventions like random school drug testing to others. This for example could lead to disaster for Europe" – said Dr.Tongue to presenters. This statement was followed by loud cheers.

As part of UNGASS review Beyond 2008 a Global NGO forum will be held in July in Vienna. Some 300 delegates will participate in this meeting and it will result in the adaptation of NGO statement (resolution) which will be presented to UNODC and probably to the high level segment of the Commission in March 2009. Some 150 representatives from NGOs will be invited for this meeting, including many of those who participated in regional consultations. We expect about 20 NGOs from Eastern Europe and Central Asia to be invited and as soon as the list of participants is finalized we will contact them.