

ECOSOC High Level Panel Discussion
Sustainable Development and the World Drug Problem
New York, 15 July 2014

Statement of the President of ECOSOC

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to give some opening remarks for this important panel discussion of the Council on sustainable development and the world drug problem. Let me thank my colleague and friend the Ambassador of Korea for making time available in the Coordination and Management Segment of the Council; and also UNODC for its outstanding work and for organizing this discussion.

The Economic and Social Council has a long and established relationship with the topic of our discussion today, especially since one of the Council's key functional commissions is the Vienna-based Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), the only body within the UN system that deals holistically with drug matters. You will also recall that the Council held a similar panel discussion in July last year, focussing on the work of its Vienna-based Functional Commissions in the context of the Post-2015 development agenda.

In 2009 the Commission on Narcotic Drugs adopted the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to counter the World Drug Problem. The Political Declaration of 2009 refers to the importance of development issues in countering the world drug problem, particularly those related to alternative development.

Significantly, paragraph 40 of the Political Declaration calls on the Council to devote a session to the world drug problem and, in doing so, to contribute to the preparations for the 2016 GA Special Session on Drugs. As the central policymaking body within the United Nations system dealing with drug-related matters, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs has the leading role in the preparations for the special session. Our discussion today on drugs and sustainable development is intended to link our debates on the world drug problem to the MDG's and the post-2015 development agenda and thereby to support the preparations of the GA Special Session on drugs to be held in 2016.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we move towards the post-2015 development agenda as well as to the UNGASS in 2016 I would like to highlight some key points:

- First, drug-related health effects: Drug addiction is a health problem and many states have achieved significant success in reducing drug demand by adopting national drug strategies which include primary prevention, early intervention, treatment, care, rehabilitation, recovery and social reintegration measures, as well as measures aimed at minimizing the public health and social consequences of drug abuse. We must further strengthen effective national drug control strategies based on scientific evidence, taking into account the specific challenges faced by vulnerable groups and socially marginalized individuals.

In this regard, I would like to draw attention to ongoing discussions on how to address the world drug problem in light of the current situation and policies. I cannot emphasize enough how important a broad, transparent, inclusive and scientific evidence-based discussion is in order to further implement the commitments and targets set out in the Political Declaration and Plan of Action.

- Second, alternative development: A touchstone issue in all efforts to counter the world drug problem is alternative development, which draws together sustainable development and the challenge of illicit drugs and organized crime. I would like to commend UNODC for its important work on alternative development - in Afghanistan, in Colombia, in Myanmar, and in many other places around the world, these programmes are lifting people out of poverty and helping them to escape the criminal networks that profit so much from illicit drugs.

In my national capacity I might add that Austria itself has been supporting UNODC projects in the field of alternative development for a number of years now, and currently supports three UNODC programmes in Latin America (including in Colombia).

- Third, human rights: Both the persistent and the new challenges in countering the world drug problem should continue to be addressed in an integrated and balanced manner. All our efforts in tackling the world drug problem must respect human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, solidarity, the rule of law and human rights.
- Fourth, cooperation: Tackling the world drug problem requires international cooperation among all actors. I would like to highlight the important role played by civil society, including scientific community, non-governmental organisations as well as young people, in addressing the world drug problem. Moreover, cooperation between relevant UN bodies and entities are essential for promoting sustainable development and for effective and efficient action against illicit drugs and organized crime.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Throughout the world illicit drugs and organized crime weaken democratic institutions, undermine peace, and hinder sustainable development, particularly our ongoing efforts to rid the world of poverty, conflict and inequality. This highlights the need for us to deal with development and illicit drugs as a single holistic issue. As an issue that draws the UN together in partnership and in cooperation, but also founded on key skills and core mandates.

I look forward to an interesting discussion!

Thank you.