

18 April 2016

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
At the opening of the Civil Society Forum in preparation for
the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the world drug
problem**

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good morning to you all.

Before we begin, allow me to extend my sincere condolences and the solidarity of the General Assembly to the Ecuadorian and Japanese governments and people, who have been deeply affected by deadly earthquakes over the weekend.

Our thoughts are with all those who lost loved ones and indeed, all those who are working hard at the relief efforts.

You are most welcome to this civil society forum in preparation for the Special Session which will begin tomorrow.

I would like to thank the Vienna and New York NGO committees on Drugs for inviting me to be here with you today.

I would also like to give a warm welcome to Ambassador Shamaa from the Commission on Narcotic Drugs who was tasked with leading the preparations for this special session, as well as to UNODC's Executive Director Mr Yury Fedotov.

As I have expressed previously, as the only Special Session of the 70th session, UNGASS is a major event on the 2016 General Assembly calendar.

Over the coming days civil society groups will participate actively in the plenary, in the interactive multi stakeholder roundtables and indeed in the more than 70 side events.

My office has worked closely with the Civil Society Task Force to select a wide pool of stakeholders to participate in these discussions, representing many different regions and perspectives.

This diversity is key.

As you know better than most, the world drug problem is the epitome of a twenty-first century global problem.

It touches on a series of issues such as human rights, social cohesion, sustainable development, criminal justice and international law and diplomacy, and it demands a response that addresses these issues in a comprehensive, integrated and balanced manner.

The different dimensions of such a response were outlined very clearly in the informal interactive stakeholder consultation on UNGASS held on 10 February, of which my office issued a summary report.

Over the course of that day, there were many interventions made by the over 300 civil society groups and others.

Many representatives highlighted the need for greater access to essential medicines and palliative care.

Much concern was also voiced about the ongoing use of the death penalty for drug related offences, and among civil society, there is a keen interest in the need for a public health approach to drug policy, encompassing appropriate drug prevention strategies, adequate harm reduction services and supplies to reduce harms and evidence-based and culturally appropriate treatment.

Civil society and other stakeholders can play an important role in adopting and implementing a public health approach.

Working on the ground directly with affected populations and communities, civil society organizations are a key resource in designing and implementing effective interventions.

We must never forget that women, children and youth especially those who come from marginalized communities often suffer the most at the hands of illicit drug traffickers who use violence and exploitation to lure them into a life of drugs.

We must work together to bring these families and communities hit hardest by drug use, back together again.

There also needs to be a reinforced commitment to reduce HIV transmission among people who inject drugs.

And we must work together to end the stigma and discrimination against drug users and to promote reintegration for drug user health and well-being.

As world leaders work to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, we must recognize that these Goals cannot be achieved without significant progress on the world drug problem, which must include the prevention and treatment of drug dependence and the availability of controlled medicines.

We must also acknowledge the social, economic and others harm to people who use drugs and understand that they too deserve to be treated with respect and care, especially those from the world's most vulnerable populations.

Finally, as we gear up for tomorrow, we must remember that our collective approach to addressing this complex problem is one which has evolved over the years.

Over the coming days, as we look to 2019, member states, civil society and others have an opportunity to further elaborate on how they feel that our approach should continue to evolve.

To conclude allow me to thank you for your engagement in the preparatory process and at the Session itself over the coming days.

I wish you all successful day of discussions and I look forward to seeing you all tomorrow as we open the Special Session.

Thank you.