

**Remarks at the UNGASS Briefing of the UN Deputy
Secretary-General
20 November 2015**

**Deputy Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Colleagues,**

**Thank you for joining us at this briefing on the
UN General Assembly Special Session on the world
drug problem 2016.**

**With less than six months to go UNGASS is
quite literally around the corner.**

**I am pleased that the preparatory process led by
the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, as the central
policymaking body within the UN dealing with drug-
related matters, is well underway.**

**The CND is interacting, in an open-ended
format, with all Member States.**

**Just as importantly, the CND promotes the
active involvement of all relevant UN bodies,
scientific community, and civil society.**

To support this process, the UNGASS website offers written contributions from numerous stakeholders.

There are also a number of activities that are enhancing this process, including:

- The June presentation of UNODC's flagship publication, the World Drug Report 2015, held simultaneously in New York, Vienna and Geneva;**
- Numerous meetings and briefings on UNGASS preparations held in the same three UN hubs, including the last briefing in New York on 2 October with the participation of the President of the General Assembly and the Chair of the UNGASS Board;**
- The President of the General Assembly will be in Vienna on 1 December to address the CND; and**
- A reconvened session of the CND in December will again discuss the UNGASS preparations.**

These all-inclusive discussions cover a broad range of diverse perspectives, including health, safety, justice, human rights, the rule of law and sustainable development, as they relate to the world drug problem.

This debate also has a long-term strategic importance, as UNGASS is a milestone on the way to 2019 and the review of the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action on the world drug problem.

In a broader context, UNGASS takes place just six months after the adoption of the 2030 agenda. Goals 3 and 16 are particularly significant in addressing the world drug problem, as well as enhancing efforts to achieve sustainable development.

As a follow up to the adoption of the SDGs, UNGASS provides an excellent opportunity to examine the interconnections between the challenges of illicit drugs, health and sustainable development.

One such challenge is that we cannot allow 200,000 men and women to die every year as a result of overdoses and other drug related conditions.

Another is to ensure that those who suffer from drug use disorders receive support, social cohesion, health care and recovery opportunities. They must not face punishment, but treatment.

Women are especially vulnerable. They must be supported.

And we face numerous other challenges. Only one out of every six drug users receives treatment; heroin use is on the rise in some regions; while elsewhere there is the spread of new psychoactive substances.

In Afghanistan, despite a decrease in opium poppy cultivation and production this year, drug trafficking continues to cause misery and death, while threatening peace and security in West and Central Asia and beyond.

Violence continues in Central America; West and East Africa remain a crucial drug trafficking route, and there are concerns about growing drug consumption in these regions.

Criminal groups and violent extremists are involved in drug trafficking in Africa and the Middle East. Their cooperation offers further worrying proof of the nexus between transnational organized crime and terrorism.

It is against this background that UNODC's own experience of building capacity and providing technical advice to Member States can offer insights into the world drug problem.

UNODC is the only body within the UN Secretariat empowered with a clear mandate across both health and the rule of law, as well as supply and demand.

Over many years, we have developed a worldwide network of field offices, projects and assistance programmes at national and regional levels.

Based on this practical experience, allow me to share with you some observations:

1) The international drug control conventions exist to protect the health and welfare of human kind. They are, indeed, helping to contain drug use, which remains more or less stable.

However, so far, we have been unable to reduce the size and scope of the global drug problem.

2) The Conventions are flexible enough to deliver a balanced and comprehensive approach based on human rights and focused on health.

Controlled substances used for medical purposes under the Conventions are indispensable for alleviating suffering. Their legitimate availability must not be unduly restricted.

Another example is the consideration of alternatives to the incarceration of drug users for minor offences.

The Conventions encourage the use of alternatives to imprisonment. This could be useful to relieve prison congestion, as well as prevent the recruitment of vulnerable individuals by hardened criminals and terrorists.

3) UNODC's experience also shows that drug prevention can work. I urge every country to apply UNODC's International Standards on Drug Prevention through the delivery of programmes in the field.

4) Science-based voluntary treatment is more effective than compulsory treatment. Harm reduction, carried out in a professional manner and linked to the goal of recovery, can be effective too.

5) Alternative development is a reality. It works when supported by strong political commitment and sufficient funding. And, it provides a firm link between the SDGs and the UNGASS process.

6) Within the balanced approach, we must recognise the importance of the rule of law and building regional, inter-regional and international cooperation in bringing drug lords to justice.

UNODC's Container Control Programme, Maritime Crime Programme, as well as its "networking the networks" approach that builds connectivity among key actors, are just some of the programmes making a real impact.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome today's meeting, it offers the opportunity for a broad and open discussion driven by a willingness to hear the many voices of our colleagues.

In listening to those voices we can help build a common platform on which to tackle the world drug problem in all its manifestations, and by doing so, help in the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

Thank you.