

IOGT International Official Statement

Special Event of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

26.06.18

Dear Chair, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Today is the United Nations International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. We echo what UN Secretary-General Guterres expressed in his message:

“Drug challenges are among the most complex problems we face, with wide-ranging impacts on health and well-being, families and communities, security and sustainable development.”

Addressing the world drug problem as a sustainable development issue requires a comprehensive and integrated approach and needs urgency. People, communities and societies around the world need a holistic and multi-faceted response – as outlined in the outcome document unanimously adopted by the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the world drug problem.

As UNODC launches the 2018 World Drug Report today, the occasion is a crucial opportunity to commit to evidence-based action and discourse.

The level and severity of social, economic and health harm, including loss of productivity, disease and accidents, as well as political and security threats correspond to the level of availability of illicit drugs in any given society. Clearly, drug use is neither exclusively a public health problem nor is it simply a criminal justice problem. That’s why, all affected sectors need to play a role in addressing the world drug problem.

In this context we would like to emphasize three key actions for governments to implement:

1) Make use of the full potential of the conventions

As we learned yesterday about some more details and in-depth information about the new Canadian Cannabis Act, we remain concerned about the breach of the UN drug control conventions.

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The current international drug control treaties establish an international framework to tackle drug-related harm by reducing both supply and demand. They are the result of a broad-based international consensus reaffirmed as recently as 2016 as "the cornerstone of the international drug control system" in the outcome document of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS).

Obviously, more can and must be done to address the world drug problem and to reduce any unintended consequences of the current regulatory regime.

The conventions themselves provide ample space and hold considerable potential.

At this moment in time, on this day today, it's important to say that the discourse about solutions to the world drug problem are (and have been for a long time) polarized and infected, often more focused on misrepresenting the positions and intentions of other stakeholders than advancing evidence-based, sustainable solutions. IOGT International is convinced that a polarized debate is counter-productive for the development of broad, balanced and humane drug policies, for three reasons:

- It dramatically shrinks the policy space between the portrayed extremes, limiting the discussion to only a few options and eliminating a range of useful alternative approaches, for example a Child Rights-centered approach.
- It constrains the many nuances normally present in policy discussions and promotes simplistic solutions; and thirdly
- It wrongly identifies many effective prevention interventions as part of the meaningless "war-on-drugs" policy argument.

There are, however, impressive and innovative solutions being implemented and advocated for in the vast middle ground between the extremes.

We call it the third way.

The third way offers a wide variety of effective policy options and community interventions. Their support or implementation requires no fundamental changes in UN Drug Conventions or in most national legislation. As a matter of fact, the global

community has not yet managed to live up to the potential of the policy space that the UN Conventions offer.

The approach adopted by the Conventions is health-centered. The Conventions repeatedly call for social cohesion and the reintegration of drug users, and do not treat drug users and people with drug use disorders as criminals to be marginalized.

2) Implement public health oriented, population level measures

Clearly, drug use is not only a health issue that affects the individual user; it is a public health issue. Drug use is neither only a Human Rights issue affecting the rights of drug users; it is also a Human Rights issue adversely affecting the rights of people around the drug users, like children, spouses, co-workers and relatives. Therefore, drug use is also a Child Rights, and Women's Rights issue.

That means that the overall health benefits of population-based approaches far exceed those that are available only from clinical interventions on individual level.

Therefore governments should implement an evidence-based approach that highlights public health-oriented policies serving both to define and understand structural causes of drug use within a society and helping to determine interventions that can prevent and reduce drug-related harm at population as well as individual level.

The UNGASS outcome document outlines concrete steps for taking such multi-level, comprehensive and integrated action. Both the international drug control treaties as well as the UNGASS outcome document provide flexibility to allow countries to pursue national drug policies according to their priorities and needs.

3) In the era of SDGs, pivot to prevention and health promotion

Preventing problems from occurring or expanding represents by far the best and humane approach to reducing drug-related harm – especially in the era of sustainable development.

A pivot to evidence-based prevention and health promotion benefits governments with regard to cost-effectiveness as well as sustainability of interventions and outcomes. It also helps to empower people and communities and promotes Human

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Rights, contributing significantly to positive engagement of children, youth and adults with their families, schools, workplaces and communities.

In IOGT International, we started our work more than 165 years ago. From the beginning, in the 1850s and onwards, our members worked from the conviction that equal voting rights for women can be achieved, that all human beings are equal, and that a world of peace among nations is possible. Today, we commit to the 2030 Agenda in the same spirit, because we are convinced that a world free from poverty, gender-based violence and violence against children is possible. Likewise, we stand firm in supporting goals of building and fostering drug free communities. A world where every human being is empowered and enabled to live up to their fullest potential is possible.

In IOGT, we are aware that these are tall tasks. But we are undaunted because growing scientific evidence shows the potential of a comprehensive and integrated approach to the world drug problem in helping us achieve our common goals.

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