

The 2019 Ministerial Segment: Key wins, remaining challenges, and next steps for advocacy

Context

2019 marked the expiry date for the targets set out in the 2009 UN Political Declaration and Plan of Action to ‘eliminate or reduce significantly and measurably’ illicit drug cultivation, trafficking, consumption and money laundering.¹ In 2017, UN member states agreed to ‘convene a ministerial segment open to all States Members of the United Nations and interested stakeholders...to take stock of the implementation of the commitments made to jointly address and counter the world drug problem, in particular in the light of the 2019 target date’.² Held on 14 and 15 March 2019, the event included a plenary thematic debate that featured more than 120 country statements, as well as two roundtables, one to ‘take stock’ of

the past decade, the other on ‘safeguarding the future’ of global drug policy.

Held only three years after the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs, the event was a critical moment for member states to define the next decade of UN drug policy. It was clear early on in this process that member states did not want to embark in lengthy negotiations for a new substantive policy document, and as a result most of the negotiations revolved around whether to focus the next 10 years of drug control on UNGASS implementation, or on a reaffirmation of the 2009 Political Declaration, or a mix of both. At the core of these discussions was a fundamental

IDPC ASKS FOR THE 2019 MINISTERIAL SEGMENT

ASK 1	ASK 2	ASK 3	ASK 4
<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">DRUG-FREE WORLD TARGETS</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">↓</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">HEALTH AND WELFARE, DEVELOPMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS, PEACE, MEANINGFUL TARGETS, ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL MEDICINES, REDUCTION OF DRUG DEATHS</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">REFLECT THE IMPACTS OF DRUG POLICIES ON:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="background-color: #f08080; padding: 2px 10px; margin: 2px;">HEALTH <li style="background-color: #f08080; padding: 2px 10px; margin: 2px;">HUMAN RIGHTS <li style="background-color: #f08080; padding: 2px 10px; margin: 2px;">DEVELOPMENT <li style="background-color: #f08080; padding: 2px 10px; margin: 2px;">PEACE & SECURITY 	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">REFLECT THE REALITIES ON THE GROUND <small>(BOTH POSITIVE & NEGATIVE)</small></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p style="font-size: 0.7em;">drug checking</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p style="font-size: 0.7em;">legal regulation</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p style="font-size: 0.7em;">mass incarceration</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p style="font-size: 0.7em;">decriminalisation</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p style="font-size: 0.7em;">mandatory minimums</p> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p style="font-size: 0.7em;">extrajudicial killings</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p style="font-size: 0.7em;">death penalty</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p style="font-size: 0.7em;">NPS</p> </div> </div>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">END PUNITIVE APPROACHES <small>PUT COMMUNITIES FIRST!</small></p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">meaningful participation civil society engagement gender sensitive</p> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0; text-align: center;"> <p style="font-size: 0.9em; margin: 0;">“Drugs have destroyed many lives, but wrong government policies have destroyed many more”</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">Kofi Annan</p> </div> <p style="font-size: 0.7em; margin: 0;">address vulnerabilities social justice</p>

International Drug Policy Consortium (2018) IDPC asks for the 2019 Ministerial Segment. June 2018. http://fileserver.idpc.net/library/IDPC-asks-2019_ENGLISH.pdf

disagreement over whether or not to extend the 2009 goals to ‘significantly reduce or eliminate’ the illicit drug market, given the clear lack of progress towards achieving any reduction in the global drug trade.³ A compromise was eventually reached in the form of the 2019 Ministerial Declaration on ‘strengthening our actions and the national, regional and international levels to accelerate the implementation of our joint commitments to address and counter the world drug problem’ – as will be further explained below. A new 10-year timeline running until 2029 was also agreed, with a mid-term review in 2024.⁴

The International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) saw the Ministerial Segment as a critical moment for advocacy, as the event – which would pave the way for the next 10 years of drug control – was an opportunity to consolidate and build upon the progress made at the UNGASS in 2016. As had been the case in 2016, the IDPC network came together early in the process to strategise and delineate ‘policy asks’ for the high-level event (see page 1).⁵

Now that the dust has settled on the Ministerial Segment and its resulting Declaration, this advocacy note evaluates the key wins and challenges from the Ministerial Segment against these four policy asks – and offers recommendations on next steps for civil society advocacy.

Assessing key wins and remaining challenges against IDPC’s policy asks

Ask 1: Move away from drug-free world targets

IDPC has long argued that the ‘drug-free’ goals and targets promoted in the 2009 Political Declaration are not aspirational, but cause or exacerbate a number of health and social harms and fuel serious human rights violations. The IDPC network had previously called on member states in 2016 to move away from these harmful goals and ‘focus instead on how the international drug control regime contributes to broader UN objectives such as public health, human security, social and economic development, and human rights’.⁶

The network reiterated this ask for 2019, calling on member states to ‘leave behind the damaging targets that are narrowly focused on the elimination of the illegal drug market’. The damage and futility of pursuing these goals was clearly outlined in IDPC’s civil society shadow report ‘Taking stock: A decade of drug policy’. The report, which used available UN, government, academic and civil society data, demonstrated that despite ten years of intensive punitive drug control efforts, illicit drug cultivation, production, trafficking and consumption had reached record highs in 2018. In addition, the report detailed the many devastating human rights violations and negative consequences on both security and development caused by repressive policies.⁷ IDPC’s Asia-focused report ‘10 years of drug policy in Asia: How far have we come?’ echoed these conclusions.⁸

In 2016, the UNGASS Outcome Document reaffirmed the international community’s ‘determination... to actively promote a society free of drug abuse’. In addition, the Outcome Document reaffirmed the ‘commitment to implementing effectively the provisions set out in the Political Declaration and Plan of Action, mindful of the targets and goals set therein’, therefore implicitly restating the controversial eradication goals included in the 2009 Political Declaration.⁹ However, the new structure of the document granted greater visibility to issues associated with health, access to medicines, human rights and development than ever before.¹⁰

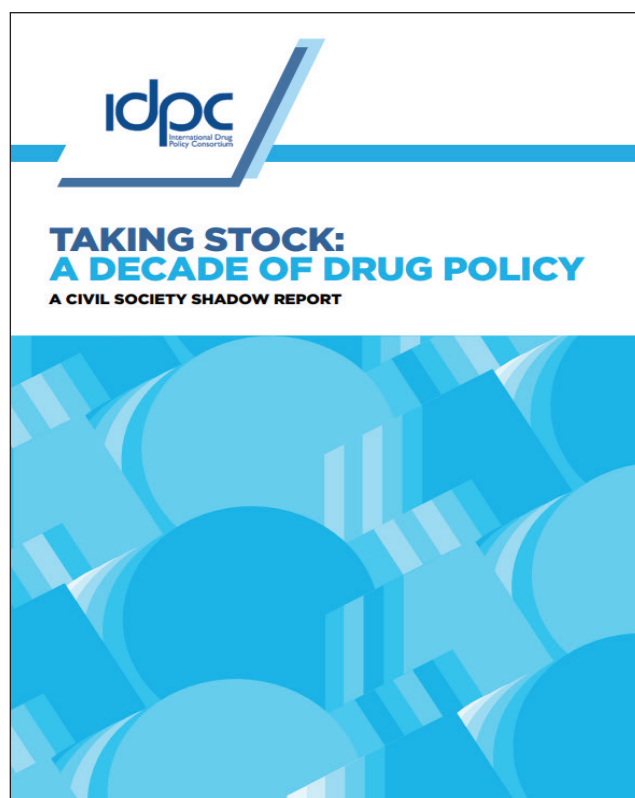
In the lead up to the 2019 Ministerial Segment, much of the negotiations revolved around these eradication goals and targets. While conservative member states fought hard to have an explicit mention or restatement of the eradication targets (or a renewal of the whole 2009 Political Declaration) in the 2019 declaration, more progressive member states promoted UNGASS implementation above all else and rejected the inclusion of the 2009 drug-free goals. This was perhaps one of the most intense points of contention in the process, which lingered until the very end of the negotiations.

Eventually, and as is generally the case in the protracted consensus-based negotiations in

Vienna, a compromise was reached. Despite the many efforts by progressive member states to counter drug-free language, the Ministerial Declaration reiterated the commitment to ‘actively promote a society free of drug abuse’, as well as to ‘prevent, significantly reduce and work towards the elimination of illicit crop cultivation and the production and manufacture of, trafficking in and abuse of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances...’. The Ministerial Declaration also includes a commitment to accelerate the achievement of ‘all aspirational goals’ included in the 2009, 2014¹¹ and 2016 high-level documents – meaning that once again the 2009 goals were, at least implicitly, restated.

While some member states saw the evolution of language from ‘eradication’ to ‘work towards the elimination of’ as a win, this result failed to satisfy many civil society advocates – including IDPC.¹² This was perhaps one of the main disappointments of the 2019 Ministerial Declaration. On a more positive note, this time the ‘elimination’ goals were accompanied by additional goals, which included ensuring availability of controlled medicines, ensuring better access to treatment and harm reduction services on a non-discriminatory basis, addressing socioeconomic issues through long-term comprehensive and sustainable development, and promoting the use of alternatives to conviction or punishment.

Moreover, the commitment to achieve ‘all aspirational goals’ leaves some flexibility for member states to focus future drug policy on the implementation of UNGASS recommendations as well as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs – which are mentioned in the UNGASS Outcome Document), offering interesting prospects for future civil society advocacy. And indeed, following the adoption of the Declaration at the Ministerial Segment, many progressive member states made a point of exclusively referring to UNGASS implementation going forward, with no reference made to either the 2009 or the 2019 high-level declarations.¹³



Ask 2: Meaningfully reflect the impacts of drug policies on health, human rights, development, peace and security

This remains one of the most critical failures of UN drug policy today, which was called out by the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in 2017: ‘It is vital that we examine the effectiveness of the war-on-drugs approach and *its consequences for human rights*’ (emphasis added).¹⁴ One of the key objectives of IDPC’s shadow report was to evaluate the consequences of drug control efforts against the broader objectives of the UN, namely to protect human rights, advance development and promote peace and security worldwide. The drug policy reform movement actively disseminated the findings of the shadow report at the UN, to national governments and in the media – placing the Ministerial Segment under the spotlight, and ensuring that member states could not deny the devastating failure of the past ten years of drug control to eliminate or curb the global drug market.

The prominence of the shadow report (cited by several member states during the negotiations) resulted in the long-overdue recognition, in a comprehensive paragraph of the ‘Stocktaking’

section of the Ministerial Declaration, of the ‘persistent and emerging challenges related to the world drug problem’. This followed a much shorter paragraph acknowledging the ‘tangible progress’ achieved to date (language that civil society had pushed hard to delete from the final text, without success). Nonetheless, perhaps for the first time in such a high-level document, the international community had finally recognised the serious shortcomings of their drug control efforts on the health and human rights front, describing them at length in the Declaration.

This stocktaking paragraph has turned out to be particularly significant for UN drug policy debates: only a few months after the Ministerial Segment, the CND Chair decided that the various challenges highlighted in the paragraph would form the basis of the CND’s multi-year work plan to evaluate progress made against agreed commitments between now and the mid-term review in 2024.¹⁵

Another major win towards Ask 2 was the adoption, by the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination, of the first ever ‘United Nations system common position supporting the implementation of the international drug control policy through effective inter-agency collaboration’.¹⁶ Agreed by the heads of 31 UN agencies, the Common Position promotes a progressive stance on drug policy grounded in evidence, human rights, health and development, with explicit references to harm reduction and decriminalisation. The stated objective of the Common Position is for the UN to ‘speak as one voice’ on drug policy issues – something that IDPC has been promoting for over a decade. To ensure the implementation of the Common Position, a Task Team was established under the leadership of the UNODC. The first contribution of the Task Team came in the form of a landmark report produced for the Ministerial Segment entitled ‘What we have learned over the last ten years: A summary of knowledge acquired and produced by the UN system on drug-related matters’ – which documents the impacts of drug control on the respective mandates of UN agencies focusing on HIV, access to medicines, human rights, gender, children, development, security, organised crime and more.¹⁷

Unfortunately, the Common Position and the Task Team’s report were given little visibility by the UNODC at the Ministerial Segment itself. However, these are key advocacy tools, and proof that the UN is moving in the right direction on the matter of systemwide coherence. This was reflected in the Ministerial Declaration itself, with commitments ‘to strengthen international and inter-agency cooperation’ and ‘enhance coherence within the United Nations system’. The strong and continued participation of UN agencies such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UNAIDS in CND debates was also positive in this regard.

Ask 3: Reflect the realities on the ground, both positive and negative... the ‘elephants in the room’

Here again, the global and Asia-focused shadow reports were instrumental to bringing the realities on the ground to the discussions in Vienna. The vibrant and well-coordinated civil society participation at the Ministerial Segment was also critical. Selected and coordinated by the Civil Society Task Force (CSTF), six civil society speakers from Colombia, Lebanon, Russia, Singapore, Slovakia and Nigeria were invited to make a statement at the Ministerial Segment’s roundtables – while the VNGOC spoke at the opening session of the Segment. Side events were also excellent opportunities for civil society to have their voice heard on critical health and human rights issues, and for affected groups to present their recommendations on the way forward.

Importantly, the realities from the ground were also raised by several member states themselves throughout the thematic and roundtable debates. For example, Canada highlighted the reasons behind the adoption of its legally regulated market for cannabis, Morocco emphasized the need to ‘depenalise, decriminalise and destigmatise’ people who use drugs, while Switzerland strongly condemned extrajudicial killings, the death penalty and acts of torture

and cruel punishment against people suspected of drug offences. However, some of these statements were met with strong condemnations from conservative member states – in particular Russia which criticised legalisation as ‘a straight road to Hell’ – instead of prompting meaningful debates on the way forward and how to manage any resulting tensions with the UN drug control and human rights treaties.

Furthermore, it is unfortunate that many of these discussions were not reflected in the Ministerial Declaration itself, which – as was the case in 2016 – does not reflect these realities in a forward-looking, progressive manner. In fact, most discussions on legal regulation during the negotiations consisted of derogatory language against those states that had gone beyond the scope of the treaties – language which was eventually neutralised. On the other side of the spectrum, human rights language was also significantly toned down to eventually simply reiterate agreed language from previous years. Once again, the issues of the death penalty, disproportionate sentences and over-incarceration failed to feature in the final text. Contrary to the UNGASS debates, there were no interpretative statements by member states after the adoption of the Declaration, but many raised these issues in their country statements throughout the Ministerial Segment.

Ask 4: End punitive approaches and put people and communities first

IDPC’s final ask called for an end to punitive measures against people who use drugs and subsistence farmers of drug-linked crops, as well as putting people and communities first – including through meaningful civil society involvement. The criminalisation of those most vulnerable in the illicit drug market has always been a red line for the IDPC network, and already featured prominently in our asks for the 2016 UNGASS.¹⁸

Despite some improvements, in 2019 the international community once again failed to fully acknowledge the real damage of criminalisation in the Ministerial Declaration. The only exception was the inclusion in the final text of the goal to

promote ‘alternative or additional measures with regard to conviction or punishment’, albeit with the usual diplomatic caveats and get-out clauses.

It was mainly left up to UN agencies and civil society to promote this ask at the Ministerial Segment. The UN System Coordination Task Team had concluded in its 2019 report that ‘Punitive drug policies continue to be used in some communities despite being ineffective in reducing drug trafficking or in addressing non-medical drug use and supply, and continue to undermine the human rights and well-being of persons who use drugs, as well as their families and communities’.¹⁹ The UN Common Position explicitly mentions decriminalisation as one of its key ‘Directions for action’.²⁰ The UNAIDS report ‘Health, rights and drugs: Harm reduction, decriminalization and zero discrimination for people who use drugs’ also includes a strong call for the removal of criminal sanctions against people who use drugs.²¹ The disproportionate impacts of punitive drug policies were also highlighted with powerful written statements by UN Special Procedures²² and in civil society interventions throughout the Ministerial Segment.

With regards to civil society involvement, NGOs were given the floor at the opening of the Segment, as well as in the roundtables (including on the panel), thanks to coordination from the CSTF. This included a powerful statement from Isabel Pereira, representing the Colombian NGO and IDPC member Dejusticia. Civil society was also involved in the preparatory CND intersessional meetings throughout the autumn of 2018. It is thanks to the vibrant and diverse contributions from civil society that the realities from the ground were directly brought to the discussions, permitting member states to reflect on the severe negative impacts of punitive measures on those most affected. Nevertheless, continued push back from conservative member states against any form of decriminalisation prevented further progress towards this ask in the formal proceedings. This was reflected in the reports from the roundtable discussions at the Ministerial Segment, where it was noted that ‘several other speakers call for the decriminalization of drug abuse, while others expressed concern’ over this policy option.²³



Isabel Pereira, Dejusticia, presenting at the roundtable on 'Safeguarding the future'

Next steps for civil society advocacy

The CND has now agreed a 10-year timeline running until 2029, and a five-year work plan leading up to the mid-term review in 2024,²⁴ to assess progress made in 'accelerating... the full implementation of' the international drug control commitments made in 2009, 2014, 2016 and 2019. According to the multi-year work plan, member states will meet each year in autumn at thematic intersessional meetings to review progress made against the challenges identified in the 'Stocktaking' section of the Ministerial Declaration (see Box 1). The next five years provide ample advocacy opportunities for civil society.

Box 1 Work plan for the thematic intersessional meetings, 2019-2024

2019: Expanding drug markets, drug trafficking and production, synthetic opioids and non-medical use of prescription drugs.

2020: Drug treatment, harm reduction, access to controlled medicines.

2021: Organised crime, money laundering, on-line drug markets.

2022: Policies which violate the international drug control conventions and/or the international human rights conventions.

2023: Review of all the above, to inform the mid-term review planned for 2024.

2024: Mid-term review of the implementation of all commitments.

Keeping up advocacy efforts at the UN in Vienna

• The post-2019 CND meetings

The political landscape in Vienna has drastically changed since the 2016 UNGASS. The number of likeminded member states in favour of reform is smaller and more divided than before, while the conservative front remains vocal and well-coordinated. As a result, the prohibitionist rhetoric continues to hold strong in Vienna, with Russia, China, Iran and others being joined by Colombia and the Philippines to condemn progressive moves related to more progressive policies. Throughout the Ministerial Segment, this meant that civil society played a pivotal role to keep progressive member states engaged and coordinated, while pushing back on the most problematic aspects brought forward by conservative governments. This role will continue to be critical in the post-2019 debates. Civil society will also need to build relationships with new delegates in Vienna, as changes in personnel in Permanent Missions will bring new negotiators to the table who may not have the historical legacy from the UNGASS and the Ministerial Segment. In addition, civil society will need to mobilise once again to bring community representatives to speak and share on-the-ground realities at the upcoming CND thematic intersessional meetings planned from 2019 to 2024 (see Box 1).²⁵

• Reviewing data collection tools on drug policy

The IDPC shadow report has shown that, in addition to a serious dearth of data from some regions (especially Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Oceania), the data currently being collected are generally inadequate to effectively measure



the impacts of drug control on improving health, protecting human rights, advancing development and promoting peace and security. Some efforts are ongoing to review the Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ) – the data collection tool which the UNODC sends out each year to member states to collect information on illicit drug markets.²⁶ However, this review is unlikely to drastically change the current focus on measuring the scale of the market. Faced with this reality, civil society will once again need to use its contacts, expertise and creativity to weigh in this debate and find alternative ways to bring the health, human rights and development dimensions to the discussion.

- **The WHO recommendations on cannabis scheduling**

The debates around the WHO recommendations to re-schedule cannabis²⁷ are a major source of tension in Vienna, raising many questions which lie at the very core of the international drug control regime for both progressive and conservative states. Civil society can play an educational and supportive role in a process that promises to be lengthy and difficult. NGOs should ensure that cannabis scheduling remains on the political agenda of the CND, with a date established for the vote to ensure that the process does not linger for many years to come.

Recommendations for civil society advocacy

Stay informed:

- Keep up to date with the discussions in Vienna and learn more about your government positions at the UN. You can do so

by reading summaries of the CND sessions and intersessional meetings on the CND Blog. Our interactive maps on the CND Blog also show whether your country supports specific policies or programmes at the CND in their statements, for example decriminalisation, harm reduction, the abolition of the death penalty, gender-sensitive programmes, etc.²⁸ Finally, all CND intersessional meetings are webcast, enabling you to watch them as the discussions unfold in Vienna.²⁹

- Keep up to date with the latest global developments around the world and let your government know of specific reforms taking place in your region or around the world, by subscribing to the IDPC monthly Alert.³⁰

Join the official NGO engagement mechanisms with the UN in Vienna and New York:

- If you have not yet done so, become a member of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs (VNGOC) and of the New York NGO Committee on Drugs (NYNGOC) to receive the latest updates on UN meetings and opportunities to speak at future events on drugs.³¹
- When a call for speakers is released by the VNGOC, please consider applying if it is relevant to your lived experience or area of expertise, and also share it widely among your NGO contacts.

Engage in a discussion with your government:

- Request a pre-CND or pre-CND interses-

sional meeting between your NGO or a coalition of NGOs from your country and your government to discuss the positions they are planning to adopt at the event. If you are unsure about who to contact within your government, you can check past CND participants lists to see which government ministries/officials usually attend the sessions.³²

- Consider requesting a post-CND meeting between your NGO or coalition of NGOs from your country and your government to get feedback from the debates, and give your reflections on the positions taken by your government and how these might be improved.
- Consider requesting a specific meeting with your government to discuss the issues associated with the ARQ review and with the WHO cannabis scheduling recommendations, or include these items in the agenda of your next meeting with your government. Beforehand, make sure that you are familiar with the WHO recommendations³³ and their implications.³⁴ To learn more about the ARQ review process, contact us at contact@idpc.net.
- If you would like to discuss any of these ideas or strategies with the IDPC team or with IDPC members who are engaged in such activities, contact us at contact@idpc.net.

Stepping up advocacy work in other UN settings

The Ministerial Segment has demonstrated how slow and gradual progress on drug policy reform is in Vienna. But it also prompted a number of initiatives that are promising for taking drug policy debates outside of the Vienna silo. However, ensuring that the momentum created in 2016 and 2019 does not go to waste will require sustained civil society advocacy. The key challenge will be to make the UN Common Position as visible as possible at the national level, and in UN debates in Vienna, New York and Geneva, and to support the implementation role of the Task Team.³⁵ Featuring drug-related issues more prominently in the work of UN entities in Geneva and New York will be another priority for the coming years.

Recommendations for civil society advocacy

Promote the UN Common Position and support its implementation Task Team:

- When meeting with your government, highlight the UN Common Position and the role of the implementation Task Team as critical tools for the next 10 years of drug policy. If possible, make a specific request for your government to provide funding in support for the work of the Task Team, and to push the UNODC to truly engage as the leading agency for the Task Team.
- When making civil society statements related to drug policy issues in UN debates, mention the UN Common Position as a key document for consideration.

Promote drug policy reform in Geneva:

Various UN agencies, entities and mechanisms³⁶ have mandates that are relevant for drug policy issues:

- **The World Health Organization (WHO):** Apart from conducting a scientific review of substances and issuing recommendations on their scheduling, the WHO plays a key role in promoting health for all, including people who use drugs. However, the WHO has generally been timid in showing true leadership on drug policy issues. Here again, civil society can play a fundamental role in pushing the WHO to keep drug policy issues high on its political agenda. IDPC has recently released an advocacy note that lays out some key recommendations on this issue, which we encourage you to consult.³⁷
- **The Human Rights Council (HRC):**³⁸ Even when the HRC's agenda does not include a specific item on drugs issues, there are ample opportunities to highlight human rights issues associated with drug control at the Council.³⁹ You can do so by making a written statement⁴⁰ or an oral statement on a specific agenda item, or by organising a side event at the margins of the HRC.⁴¹
- **The Special Procedures:**⁴² Special Procedures regularly produce reports that have

a link with drug policy issues (e.g. preventing discriminations against women, rights of indigenous people, right to health, arbitrary detention, rights of the child, etc.), and generally issue calls for civil society inputs in preparation for these documents. Keep an eye out for those calls by subscribing to the OHCHR civil society weekly newsletter,⁴³ and consider submitting a contribution whenever a report is being produced that is relevant to the work of your NGO.⁴⁴ Whenever possible, consider submitting your contribution in collaboration with other NGOs in your country or region. To strengthen your contribution, you can refer to specific reports or statements previously released by Special Procedures on drug-related issues – these can be found by searching the Universal Human Rights Index.⁴⁵

- **The Universal Periodic Review (UPR):**⁴⁶ This is a unique process which involves a regular review of human rights records of all member states of the UN. It is therefore a perfect opportunity for NGOs to highlight the blatant human rights violations derived from repressive drug control strategies. To find out when your country will be under review, check the UPR calendar.⁴⁷ Making a real impact through the UPR will require intensive and sustained civil society engagement – to find out more, read the Guide for NGO participation of the UPR,⁴⁸ and a specific report on how civil society can maximise the opportunities of the UPR to highlight the specific human rights violations faced by people who use drugs.⁴⁹
- **The human rights treaty bodies:** A number of civil society organisations have already engaged in advocacy with various human rights treaty bodies to highlight specific human rights concerns related to drug policy. This has been done, for instance, in relation to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (by NGOs like CELS, IDPC and IWRAW with meetings with Committee members and side events at CEDAW sessions), the Committee against Torture (by NGOs like Penal Reform International with the organisation of trainings to Committee members on specific issues of interest), or the Committee on Economic,

Social and Cultural Rights (by NGOs like Dejusticia which submits regular contributions to the Committee).⁵⁰ Each treaty body includes its own advocacy avenues and opportunities.⁵¹ Contact us at contact@idpc.net if you would like to get in touch with IDPC members engaged in this work.

Promote drug policy reform in New York:

The links between drugs, drug policy and development are wide-ranging and now better understood,⁵² but these discussions have not made it to the UN in New York. Perhaps the most relevant body to make this happen is the High Level Political Forum (HLPF),⁵³ held each year in July to track progress made by governments towards the achievement of the SDGs.⁵⁴ Prior to the event, UN member states are requested to make voluntary written contributions on their progress made towards specific SDGs that will be discussed at the yearly HLPF. Although many member states make regular contributions, none have yet highlighted drug-related issues. This is one of the major gaps where civil society can make a difference, by pushing member states to start reporting on progress made in this area of work:

- Check which SDGs will be considered for the coming year, and assess how these are related to specific drug policy issues.⁵⁵
- Check whether your government has ever made a contribution for the HLPF, and if so, which government departments were involved in drafting the contribution.⁵⁶
- Draft your own contribution ahead of the HLPF – either in the name of your NGO only, or in collaboration with other NGOs⁵⁷ – and send it to relevant government departments early enough to feed into your government's voluntary contribution.
- To ensure that drug policy issues are indeed on the government's agenda for the Forum, request a meeting with relevant government officials to discuss your submission and highlight the importance of reporting back on drug policy issues.
- Consider organising a side event at the HLPF on drugs and development issues.⁵⁸

Translating global commitments at national level

The 2019 Ministerial Declaration commits member states to the following goals⁵⁹ for the coming decade:

1. Prevent, significantly reduce and work towards the elimination of illicit crop cultivation, production, manufacture, trafficking and use of drugs (including synthetic drugs and NPS)
2. Prevent, significantly reduce and work towards the elimination of the diversion of and illicit trafficking in precursors, and drug-related money-laundering
3. Ensure access to and the availability of controlled medicines, and address existing barriers in this regard, including affordability
4. Strengthen effective, comprehensive, scientific evidence-based demand reduction initiatives covering prevention, early intervention, treatment, care, recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration measures on a non-discriminatory basis, as well as harm reduction measures
5. Address drug-related socioeconomic issues related to illicit crop cultivation and illicit drug production, manufacture and trafficking, including through the implementation of long-term comprehensive and sustained development-oriented and balanced drug control policies and programmes
6. Promote alternatives to conviction or punishment.

The 2019 Declaration also aims to accelerate ‘the full implementation of... all commitments, operational recommendations and aspirational goals set out’ in the 2009, 2014 and 2016 documents, meaning that member states should track progress against the implementation of all recommendations included in the UNGASS Outcome Document. The UN System Common Position also includes a number of recommendations that should be implemented by governments worldwide – many of these are aligned with the UNGASS Outcome Document.

Table 1 features some of the key issues that your government has committed to, with cross-references to the UNGASS Outcome Document, the 2019 Ministerial Declaration and the UN System Common Position. These can constitute a basis for your advocacy towards your government on how to fully implement their global commitments at national level.

Recommendations for civil society advocacy

Various steps can be undertaken to monitor progress and pressure your government into implementing these commitments, including:

- Documenting where your government stands on each of these commitments at national level, by sourcing key data and testimonies from the ground. You may decide to focus on specific commitments, rather than tracking progress against all of them – based on available resources and your organisation’s expertise.
- Consider ‘grading’ your government’s track record by allocating either a grade from 1 to 5, or using a traffic light system (green = good situation; orange = situation needs improvement; red = situation requires urgent attention). This could be reviewed each year ahead of the CND thematic intersessional meetings and be the subject of a yearly meeting with your government ahead of these UN sessions.
- Consider holding regular roundtable discussions between NGOs working on the ground and government officials from relevant ministries to discuss the UN commitments, the national situation, and how it could be improved.
- When highlighting the successes and failures of your government, remember to also highlight what can be done better, with specific recommendations for improvement, possibly using case study examples from other countries.
- Consider reaching out to your media contacts to highlight how your government is progressing or failing in implementing its global commitments on the ground.
- Whenever possible, consider working with other NGOs in your own country that work on, or have an interest in, drug policy issues, to put together your knowledge, resources, government and media contacts, and come to the debates as a coordinated force for change.
- Consider using the Support. Don’t Punish Global Day of Action as a hook to organise awareness raising events, seminars with your government, and other advocacy activities.⁶⁰

Table 1. Tracking progress against global commitments on drug policy

Tracking progress against the following commitments	Ref in UNGASS O.D.	Ref in 2019 Min. Decl.	Ref in UN Common Position
Promoting alternatives to conviction or punishment for drug use and possession for personal use, including decriminalisation	OP* 4.j	PP** 11	Directions for action: bullet points 11 and 12
Ensuring legal guarantees and due process safeguards in the criminal justice system, including timely access to legal aid and the right to a fair trial	OP 4.o	-	Directions for action: bullet point 11
Improving access to harm reduction interventions	OP 1.k, 1.m, 1.o	PP 11	Directions for action: bullet point 2
Improving access to evidence-based drug dependence treatment	OP 1.i, 4.c, 4.m	PP 11 Way forward: OP 1	Directions for action: bullet point 1
Improving access to prevention, treatment, care and support services in prison	OP 1.k	-	Directions for action: bullet point 3
Reducing stigma, preventing discriminations in healthcare settings	OP 1.d, 1.j, 1.k, 4.b, 4.g	PP 11	Shared principles: bullet point 3 Directions for action: bullet points 15, 16
Improving access to, and availability of, controlled medicines	Chapter 2	PP 11 Stocktaking: OP 3	Directions for action: bullet point 6
Developing gender-sensitive policies	PP 12, OP 4.b, 4.d, 4.g, 4.n	PP 9	-
Addressing the root problems/socio-economic causes of engagement in cultivation and trafficking	OP 5.v, 7.h, 7.j	PP 11	Shared principles: bullet point 4
Aligning drug control and development efforts	PP 10, 24, OP 7.g	PP 11, PP 14	Shared principles: PP 1, bullet points 1, 2, 3 Directions for action: bullet points 7, 10 Accountability and operationalisation: OP 1
Aligning drug control with human rights commitments	Chapter 4	PP 3, 5	Shared principles: bullet point 8 Directions for action: bullet points 4, 10, 12
Compiling, analysing and producing better data	PP 23, OP 1.h, 2.f, 3.c	Way forward: OP 9, 10	Directions for action: bullet point 18
Involving civil society in decision making processes on drugs	PP 19, OP 1.q, 7.l, 9	PP 13 Way forward: OP 7	Directions for action: bullet point 16

*OP: Operational paragraph **PP: Preambular paragraph

Expanding/consolidating the drug policy reform movement

Over the years, the civil society movement engaging in drug policy has expanded and diversified, and now include both NGOs focusing exclusively on drug-related issues, and others whose primary mandate centres on human rights, women's rights, the abolition of the death penalty, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, access to controlled medicines, development, etc. This has greatly contributed to the strength, creativity, professionalism and impacts of civil society at global and national level. In the face of populism, shrinking civil society space and a reduced number of like-minded states promoting reform, international solidarity among civil society is more important than ever before. Nevertheless, drug policy reform remains a relatively small movement, compared to other sectors such as the feminist movement, or NGOs working on children's rights, development, climate change or peace building. There is an urgent need for our community to make every possible effort to build synergies with other movements, especially where it is clear that problematic drug policies and approaches intersect with their advocacy agendas. This is important work to ensure the drug policy reform message continues to reach new audiences and influential actors.

Recommendations for civil society advocacy

- Make a list of large NGOs present in your country whose work may be relevant for

drug policy issues. Check whether any of them have touched upon any specific drug policy issues in the past.

- Organise informal one-on-one meetings with representatives from the most relevant NGOs to discuss possible joint projects or activities, or to simply initiate discussions on how drug policy is relevant to their mandate. Bear in mind that building these relationships can take time and effort. If you are involved in the Support. Don't Punish Global Day of Action, consider inviting them to your event, or even organising the event together.
- Consider attending and presenting at conferences where the primary topic is not drug policy, to bring the discussion to a new audience and kick off discussions with civil society representatives who are not working on, but could potentially be interested in, drug policy (e.g. the Latin American and Caribbean feminist gathering on justice;⁶¹ the Asia Pro Bono Conference;⁶² the World Congress on the Death Penalty;⁶³ the World Hepatitis Congress;⁶⁴ etc.)
- If your organisation holds national, regional or international conferences, consider inviting speakers or participants from other sectors to bring in new perspectives and engage them in the reform debate. Inviting speakers or participants from other sectors to bring in new perspectives and engage them in the reform debate.

Endnotes

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 43. To subscribe, visit: https://visitor.constantcontact.com/manage/optin?v=0015de0J6wWfJ5woeZbEcmRY9w-OzZjNO_6
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 60. Support. Don't Punish is a global advocacy campaign promoting drug policy reform. 26th June is the highlight of the campaign, with a Global Day of Action being organised by activists, advocates and affected groups worldwide under a common message. Small grants are provided by IDPC to local partners to support their local advocacy activities on that day. For more information on how to get involved, visit www.supportdontpunish.org or contact campaign@idpc.net
 61. <https://justiciasyfeminismos.org/>
 62. <https://www.probonoconference.org/>
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About this briefing paper

The 2019 Ministerial Segment was a critical moment for advocacy, to consolidate and build upon the progress made at the 2016 UNGASS. This advocacy note evaluates the key wins and challenges from the 2019 event, and offers recommendations on possible next steps for civil society advocacy.

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About IDPC

The International Drug Policy Consortium is a global network of non-government organisations that specialise in issues related to illegal drug production and use. The Consortium aims to promote objective and open debate on the effectiveness, direction and content of drug policies at national and international level, and supports evidence-based policies that are effective in reducing drug-related harm. It produces briefing papers, disseminates the reports of its member organisations, and offers expert advice to policy makers and officials around the world.

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