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Inter-agency cooperation and coordination of efforts in addressing and countering the world drug problem

Statement submitted by the International Drug Policy Consortium, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* [E/CN.7/2020/1](#).

** Issued without formal editing.



Statement

The UN Common Position on drug policy: Consolidating system-wide coherence

Introduction

Achieving more UN system-wide coherence and alignment with the overarching Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework in the area of drug policy has been a particularly difficult challenge.¹ After many failed attempts at promoting more coherence and coordination among UN agencies on drug policy matters,² the 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs marked a turning point in history.

During the UNGASS preparatory process, the General Assembly provided all UN agencies with a clear mandate to engage in the discussion, deciding in Resolution 69/201 that the 2016 UNGASS ‘shall have an inclusive preparatory process that includes extensive substantive consultations, allowing organs, entities and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, relevant international and regional organizations, civil society and other relevant stakeholders to fully contribute to the process’.³ The UNGASS was an opportunity to widen the discussion and meaningfully include UN entities that approach the drugs issue from health, sustainable development, human rights, and peacebuilding perspectives, and to promote UN system-wide coherence with respect to global drug control strategies.

The UNGASS and its aftermath paved the way for this joint UN policy document on drug policy issues – the ‘UN system common position supporting the implementation of the international drug control policy through effective inter-agency collaboration’, adopted in November 2018 by the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). The Common Position, a much needed update of the previous UN system guidance that reflected the outcomes of the 1998 UNGASS, expresses the shared drug policy principles of all UN organisations and committing all UN agencies to speak with one voice on drug-related matters.⁴

The Common Position: A milestone to ensuring UN system-wide coherence

The Common Position is based on a strong mandate given by the General Assembly to the CEB and the Secretary-General to improve UN system-wide coherence, and incorporates many elements from the 2016 UNGASS, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and human rights instruments that have all been adopted by UN member states. Although not a binding document for member states, the Common Position is a powerful instrument to harmonise the voice and activities of all UN entities – and therefore represents a significant step towards improving UN system-wide coherence and can guide the global drug policy debate towards a more health, development and human rights-based approach.

It notably commits to ‘supporting Member States in developing and implementing truly balanced, comprehensive, integrated, evidence-based, human rights-based, development-oriented, and sustainable responses to the world drug problem, within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’. It supports ‘policies that put people, health and human rights at the centre’ and promotes ‘measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health consequences of drug abuse, by some referred to as harm reduction’, ‘sustainable livelihoods through adequately-sequenced, well-funded and long-term development-oriented drug policies in rural and urban areas affected by illicit drug activities’, and ‘alternatives to conviction and punishment in appropriate cases, including the decriminalization of drug possession for personal use’. It also calls ‘for changes in laws, policies and practices that threaten the health and human rights of people’ and ‘to cooperate to ensure human rights-based drug control and address impunity for serious human rights violations in the context of drug control efforts’. The CEB members also committed to stepping up their joint efforts to ‘provide Member States with a necessary evidence base to make informed

policy decisions and to better understand the risks and benefits of new approaches to drug control, including those relating to cannabis’.

Crucially, to ensure that the Common Position does not simply remain a piece of paper, a UN system coordination Task Team has been established to ensure that coherent efforts are undertaken to realise its commitments,⁵ and it will serve as an authoritative policy directive to UN Resident Coordinators for implementing drug-related programmes on the ground and assisting member states in policy development. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) was designated as the UN agency in charge of leading the Task Team’s activities ‘within the framework of the Secretary-General’s Executive Committee’.

Conclusions and recommendations

The UN Common Position and the Task Team are hard-won achievements that provide unprecedented authoritative guidance for UN entities and can help guide the current international drug control system into the 21st century and to overcome the siloed global drug policy approach that has prevailed until now. The Common Position also appears at a moment of structural changes in the UN system, enhancing the prospects for positive impacts not only on the global drug policy debate but also on the ground through the new UN Resident Coordinators system.

However, the success of the Common Position will require continued commitment from the UN Secretary-General and his office; due attention from the Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination, the Special Adviser on System-wide Implementation of CEB decisions and UN Resident Coordinators; and active engagement from the relevant UN agencies within the Task Team.

In addition, it will be critical for UN member states to:

- Welcome and promote the Common Position in the relevant governing bodies and support the work of the Task Team, including by providing financial support for its the work.
- Promote the inclusion of drug-related issues on the agenda of other UN forums, including the General Assembly, ECOSOC, the World Health Assembly and the Human Rights Council.
- Strongly encourage all relevant UN entities – including the UNODC – to actively promote the UN Common Position and engage in the Task Team, and to agree to a set of activities each year on which the UNODC would report back at the CND, including progress made in the implementation of the Common Position on the ground.

Supporting the statement: Transnational Institute (TNI)

Endnotes

¹ Jelsma, M. (December 2019), *UN Common Position on drug policy – Consolidating system-wide coherence* (International Drug Policy Consortium & Transnational Institute), <https://idpc.net/publications/2019/12/un-common-position-on-drug-policy-consolidating-system-wide-coherence>

² Ibid.

³ Available here: <https://undocs.org/A/RES/69/201>

⁴ Chief Executives Board for Coordination (18 January 2019), *Summary of deliberations, Second regular session of 2018, Manhasset, New York, 7 and 8 November 2018*, Annex 1, ‘UN system common position supporting the implementation of the international drug control policy through effective inter-agency collaboration’, CEB/2018/2, pp. 12-14, <https://www.unsystem.org/CEBPublicFiles/CEB-2018-2-SoD.pdf>

⁵ Current membership of the ‘UN system coordination Task Team on the Implementation of the UN System Common Position on drug-related matters’: UNODC, UNDP, OHCHR, UNAIDS, WHO, DPPA, UNESCO, UN Women, UNICEF, UN-Habitat, ECLAC, ILO, ICAO, IMO, UPU and UNU