

## UNGASS 2016 is fast approaching...Update on preparations

### Background to Framework for International Drugs Policy

The International Drug Control Framework is governed by a set of three UN conventions and is monitored and implemented through a number of bodies that govern the control of psychoactive substances worldwide.

The conventions include the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961, as amended by the 1972 Protocol), the Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971), and the Convention against the Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988).

The bodies include the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, which is the UN drug policy-making body, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), which monitors the implementation of the conventions the World Health Organization (WHO), mandated by the treaties to make recommendations about the scheduling of substances, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The United Nations (UN) is responsible for negotiating an international drug policy to which all member states sign up. The next UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS) was due to be held in 2019. However in September 2012, the presidents of Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico called on the UN to host an international conference on reform of drug policy and this led to the next global drug policy summit meeting being brought forward to 2016. This is now referred to as UNGASS 2016 and is taking place in New York from April 19-21.



### Position of Ireland and EU member states on UNGASS

Ireland's position as a member state of the EU is set out in the [EU Statement on UNGASS 2016](#) which was issued on March 14. The position of the EU and its Member States is that the three existing UN Drug Control Conventions, combined with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, provide an appropriate framework for the global response to the world drug problem.

The EU believes that there is sufficient scope and flexibility within the provisions of the UN Conventions to accommodate a wide range of approaches to drug policy in accordance with national and regional specificities. It also states that an essential principle for the EU and its Member States is the respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, solidarity, the rule of law and the right to health.

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“The EU is opposed to the use of measures of any kind that are not respectful of the human being and it welcomes that the international community recognizes that a public health approach focusing on the rights and needs of drug users has undeniable benefits.

There is a vast amount of evidence from many countries across the world showing the effectiveness of risk and harm reduction measures in protecting public health and reducing direct and indirect drug related deaths and we strongly recommend that States ensure their implementation.

The EU and its Member States would like to stress the participatory role of civil society and academia in all aspects of drug policy, in particular on public health issues. In that regard also the experience of drug users, clients of drug-related services, their organizations and families should be taken into account.

Member States should also ensure that sanctions under national law for all drug-related offences take into consideration both mitigating and aggravating factors and are proportionate to the severity of the offence. For persons who have committed minor, non violent drug related offences, alternatives to conviction and imprisonment should be considered.”



### **The international position on UNGASS**

The UNGASS on drugs comes at a time when there have been growing calls for drug policy reform across Latin America, in particular from the countries on which the drugs trade has had the most devastating impact. The Presidents of Colombia, Guatemala Mexico and Costa Rica, have **called for developing more effective responses** to drug trafficking based on public health, respect for human rights and harm reduction and they united in calling for an open and wide-ranging debate leading up to the 2016 UNGASS.

While the Latin American countries have led the call for a more radical approach to drug policy reform debate, the **final outcome document** for UNGASS issued by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs on March 22 is more cautious in that it reaffirms the three existing drug control conventions as the framework for international drugs policy. It reaffirms its determination to tackle the world drug problem and to actively promote a society free of drug abuse; it states that tangible progress has been achieved in some fields but that the world drug problem continues to present challenges to the health, safety and well-being of all humanity.

There are many positive aspects to the document but it appears the opportunity to open up a wide-ranging debate on drug policy reform may have been missed. More information and analysis from the **International Drug Policy Consortium**