

Now time for progress: Harm reduction from UNGASS to 2019

Harm Reduction International (HRI) is urging governments and UN agencies attending the CND intersessionals, called to discuss the implementation of the UNGASS on Drugs outcome document, to push for targets which will turn the outcomes into real progress on harm reduction and the human rights of people who use drugs.

Progress on harm reduction (Intersessional on demand reduction, prevention, treatment and other health-related issues – Monday 10 October 2016)

This year's UNGASS secured the strongest ever endorsement of harm reduction in a UN document on drugs. Paragraph 1 commits to "minimising the adverse public health and social consequences of drug abuse" and specifically mentions "medication assisted therapy", "injecting equipment programmes", "antiretroviral therapy" and "opioid receptor antagonists" for the treatment of overdose. In the Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS, UN member states again committed to scale up these interventions (paragraph 62d), noting the lack of progress in reducing HIV among people who use drugs, the insufficient coverage of harm reduction programmes and the impact of restrictive laws in hampering access to HIV services (paragraph 43).

Harm reduction champions should now push for progress targets aimed at:

- **Reducing transmission of and mortality related to HIV, Hepatitis and overdose among people who use drugs.**
- **Increasing coverage of and access to the four harm reduction interventions named in the UNGASS document.**
- **Redirecting funds from drug enforcement to harm reduction to fund this scale up.**
- **Securing a World Health Organisation definition of "medication assisted therapy".**
- **Removing restrictive laws, including those which criminalise people who use drugs.**

They should also call for an independent mechanism to track progress and gather other strategic information.

Progress on human rights (Intersessional on drugs and human rights, youth, children, women and communities – Tuesday 11 October 2016)

Both the UNGASS document and the Political Declaration on HIV urge states to provide harm reduction in prisons, while UNGASS paragraph 4 commits to "respecting, protecting and promoting all human rights". Paragraph 4(o) calls for "practical measures to uphold the prohibition of arbitrary arrest and detention and of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and to eliminate impunity".

At the CND intersessionals, harm reduction champions should push for progress targets aimed at:

- **Increasing harm reduction coverage in prisons.**
- **Ending arbitrary arrest and detention of people who use drugs, the death penalty for drug offences and other human rights violations carried out in the context of drug enforcement.**
- **Ensuring robust monitoring of drug enforcement practices by the Human Rights Council, the UN Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Reporting process.**

Progress in 2019: a harm reduction decade

In 2015 HRI launched a call for a new approach to drug use rooted in science, public health, human rights and dignity – for a harm reduction decade. At UNGASS, governments showed a new willingness to rethink their approach. The next Political Declaration on Drugs, in 2019, must go further and secure a decade of drug policy with harm reduction as a guiding principle.

- **Harm reduction champions must demand that the 2019 process takes the 2016 UNGASS outcome document chapters as its starting point, in place of the now outdated 2009 Political Declaration.**



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