

Latin America and the Caribbean

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The Civil Society consultation in Latin America and the Caribbean towards UNGASS 2016 was conducted by María Margarita Sánchez Villegas from RIOD and Pablo Cymerman from Intercambios Asociación Civil. For the development of the Regional report, various types of sources were taken into account: 1) The Global Civil Society UNGASS 2016 survey, responded by 243 organizations from the region; 2) Interviews with key stakeholders for each one of the proposed themes and representatives of key populations; 3) Studies and documents prepared by civil society in the region; 4) Review, contributions and comments of the report made by survey respondents; 5) Discussion and validation meeting held in Bogota on November 4-5 2015, in order to provide a critical reading of the draft report.



Participants in the validation meeting in Bogota on November 4-5 2015

Latin America has played an important role in the world debate towards achieving alternative and renewed approaches as regards drug policies. It has also promoted a critical view in response to the results and the negative impact derived from the current International Drug Control System, whose punitive approach was inspired by the conventions issued by the United Nations Organization since 1961. Civil society in the region has acquired a central and strategic role in the debates for the reform of drug policies.

Main challenges in the region suggest the need to consolidate real changes in the conventions, allowing States fully exercise their autonomy as regards drug policies adjusting to the individual realities of the countries of the region. Decriminalisation of practices involving highly vulnerable populations and public policies contributing to reducing violence, as well as the abolition of the militarisation of the agents of control of illicit drugs production and trafficking. Recognition of the traditional, medicinal and ancestral uses of plants declared illicit. Transparent and effective mechanisms that ensure the active participation of civil society, social agents, NGOs, drug users and cultivators, in decision-making processes, design, implementation and evaluation of actions of drug policies. Need to improve the horizontal cooperation among countries and cooperation with developing nations.

Action-orientated recommendations for the UNGASS roundtables:

Drugs and Health

- ✓ The policies must guarantee the comprehensive care of the people who use drugs, having social

development, inclusion and care of highly vulnerable groups, as their main core.

- ✓ Universal, selective and indicated prevention, health promotion, medical care, risk and harm reduction, treatment, and quality rehabilitation, based on the evidence, as well as respectable and real alternatives of social inclusion.
- ✓ Open debate on access to controlled medicines and the regulation of plants such as cannabis for medicinal use as well as the acknowledgement of coca leaf and poppies for therapeutic uses.
- ✓ The states should make efforts to reduce symbolic and physical violence in the media, health centres and in society in general, against the people who use drugs.

Drugs and Crime

- ✓ Decriminalisation of the possession and personal use of drugs, private growing of plants and especially the regulation of illicit markets in accordance with the needs and realities of their populations.
- ✓ Respect towards the *pro homine* principle must be the foundation of the drug policies for the region, trying to achieve with it a greater benefit for all human beings and acknowledging the norms that protect human rights before the ones indicated by other conventions, declarations or mandates.
- ✓ Civil society urges states to find alternatives to prison, regardless of drug courts or courts of treatment.
- ✓ It is vital to separate the personal use of drugs and all the conducts tending to this end from the penal and security fields.

Cross-cutting issues: drugs and human rights, youth, women, children and communities

- ✓ Civil society recommends that the States develop quality comprehensive care policies for the use of drugs and policies of sustainable development that guarantee better results and reduce the main sources of violence, harm and costs associated with drugs and their prohibition.

- ✓ It is essential to respect the right that every person who uses drugs has to choose when and what type of attention they want to receive.
- ✓ It is necessary to ensure access to preventive measures, accurate diagnosis, and treatment for HIV, TB and viral hepatitis to people who use drugs in the region.
- ✓ It is recommended to design and implement actions that seek the reduction of stigma and discrimination surrounding people who use drugs.

Cross-cutting issues: new challenges, threats and realities in preventing and addressing the world drug problem

- ✓ The credibility and legitimacy of the policies derived from the current International Drug Control System have seen themselves weakened. For this reason, the United Nations are urged to move forward towards a new paradigm based on renewed concepts, understanding, and diagnosis of the different manifestations of the phenomena.
- ✓ Democratic states should respect the right that people have to choose their lifestyles and actions freely and autonomously, including the use of drugs, without negative effects on the protection of the rights of third parties.
- ✓ The plans of action produced by the new conventions and treaties should take into account the structural, political and social causes of issues such as the use of drugs, production and trafficking, as well as associated violence and delinquency.
- ✓ The redistribution of resources that allow for the consolidation of new approaches and objectives of drug policies is necessary.
- ✓ The policies inspired by the new approaches will have to consider the collateral effects of their implementation at all times and define mechanisms for their measurement, monitoring, prevention and mitigation.
- ✓ The application of more humanitarian approaches in drug policies also requires a renovation and adjustment of the indicators by which their success or failure have been traditionally measured.

Alternative development

- ✓ Most of the civil society of Latin America and the Caribbean agrees on eliminating the term “alternative development” and moving to the concept “integral and sustainable development”.
- ✓ Civil society urges the States to define a position that moves towards the regularisation of the coca, poppy and cannabis crops; in order to decriminalise farm workers, indigenous people and afro-descendant cultivators.

- ✓ Creation of educational campaigns of broad scope along with their application in different environments so as to contribute to removing the stigma surrounding poppies, cannabis plants, and coca leaf, as well as the associated farming communities, producers, users and producing countries.
- ✓ Advance in the investigation and transfer of knowledge concerning the properties of the plants and exploring their virtues, as has been done internationally with cannabis; recognising the knowledge held by the original peoples of Latin America.