



H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly

H.E. Mr. Khaled Shamaa, Chair of the UNGASS Board

H.E. Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

August 25, 2016

Excellences:

As the 70th Session of the General Assembly draws to a close, on behalf of the Civil Society Task Force (CSTF), the official mechanism for the participation of civil society in the 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs ("UNGASS"), we are writing to you to share our collective thoughts on the UNGASS event itself in regard to civil society participation.

The UNGASS was attended by hundreds of members of the global civil society community, many of whom have been working to prepare since the session was first scheduled in 2013, and who travelled from around the world to attend the meeting. Deeply committed to working with Member States to improve policies around drugs, these organizations have been following the preparations from afar, attending preparatory meetings and events in New York, Vienna and Geneva, and working to provide constructive input to Member States throughout the process. The CSTF successfully managed to coordinate a meaningful and balanced participation of civil society members both from the grass root and policy level to secure NGO voices and expertise could be brought to Member States attention to further consideration.

We have been very pleased by the fact that the importance of civil society participation in UNGASS has been expressed on countless occasions during the UNGASS process by the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and perhaps most importantly, Member States. Some Member States funded civil society participation in the UNGASS process, in particular at the UNGASS in April, to ensure that civil society had the opportunity to prove once again that it stands as a competent and reliable partner.

Disappointingly however, the treatment of civil society at UNGASS event fell far short of reflecting these sentiments. With the present letter we want to express our extreme concern and disappointment about the difficulties experienced by members of civil society at the UNGASS meeting.

Despite their commitment and dedication, NGO delegates experienced challenges throughout the week of UNGASS, ranging from an inability to obtain passes for official UN sessions and side events (despite ECOSOC accreditation and/or pre-registration) to poor treatment by security officials and other UN personnel.



Prior to UNGASS, the CSTF had been working intensively with UNDESA and the Office on the President of the General Assembly to make arrangements for securing civil society participation in the event. We were confused and distressed when at the last minute much of what had been agreed was unilaterally changed, resulting in the information provided becoming inaccurate. Moreover, the UNDESA coordination during UNGASS was very poor; as a result many civil society representatives, including people who had traveled long distances, were unable to attend parts of the plenary session, round tables and side events held on UN premises.

We would like to highlight that in recent years we have had an excellent experience with the UN Headquarters in Vienna, where the UNODC Civil Society Team and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs Secretariat have been very supportive in facilitating NGO participation. We assumed wrongly that we would experience the same at New York Headquarters, which unfortunately was not the case.

In conclusion, we appreciate that your offices have, on an ongoing basis, advocated for civil society inclusion in the global efforts to address the World Drug Problem. We also understand that there are real challenges posed in promoting the principle of inclusion while simultaneously providing security for Heads of State attending high-level sessions.

However, such treatment of these dedicated members of civil society is unacceptable – the system is badly in need of improvement. We therefore call on all of you to renew your commitment to the principles of civil society engagement in UN processes; to seriously consider the systems in place to accomplish these goals, correcting them where needed; and to pass the importance of addressing these issues along to your successors.

As the Civil Society Task Force, we stand ready to learn from the UNGASS experience and to continue to strengthen the meaningful contribution of civil society in the field of drug policy. To that end, we would very much appreciate a meeting with the appropriate senior officers or team to discuss these issues after the 71st Session of the General Assembly is underway.

We are looking forward to continued and improved engagement and coordination with Member States and the United Nations system as we continue forward towards 2019.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E Hörnberg", written over a light blue horizontal line.

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