



Report

The Greek Non Governmental Organisations and the International Drug Policy debate

The Drugs issue will be subject to dialogue and negotiations at the 52nd Session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in March 2009. It will be an event of political importance, since the UN Member States in a special ministerial segment of this CND will evaluate their efforts to tackle the drugs problem in the past decade (1998-2008) and will decide on new guiding principles and actions in the future.

Several Greek NGOs active in the field of Drugs, participated in a meeting organized in Athens on 29 September 2008 by the Andreas G. Papandreou Foundation and discussed the declaration and the resolutions adopted by the International NGO Forum “Beyond 2008” which has been held in Vienna from 7-9 July 2008. The outcome of their discussion is the following report which will be send to the Greek government, the Hellenic Parliament, the political parties and civil society organisations.

The Greek NGOs:

1. Note with satisfaction that the UN through the UN International NGO Committee gave the opportunity to NGOs all over the world to express their opinions on Drug policy in 13 regional consultations and the International NGO Forum “Beyond 2008”. The declaration and the resolutions of the Forum will be submitted to the CND and the UN Member States. They include concrete proposals for policy improvement and propose to seek new ways for effective practices.
2. Call, in the spirit of the declaration and the resolution of the Forum “Beyond 2008, upon the Greek government, the Hellenic Parliament, the Civil Society Organisations and the mass media to support the open and free dialogue on drugs and to contribute in shaping the International framework and the basic principles and actions that have to be adopted in Vienna in March 2009 in order to achieve a more effective and consistent policy with full respect for human rights and protection of the health of citizens.
3. The Greek NGOs fully endorse the analysis of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in the World Drug Report 2008 that points out that the current Drug Control System set up and implemented by the International community in the past hundred years, despite the efforts to coordinate the actions in order to reduce the demand and supply of drugs has also had serious negative consequences. The report is referring to five (5) “unintended” negative consequences of the current Drug Control System:

- a. the creation of a huge, profitable and violent criminal market. There is too much crime, too much illegal money and too much corruption.
- b. there is too much attention for law enforcement and too little for public health. Too many people are in prison and few in treatment, harm reduction and social reintegration services.
- c. there is a geographic displacement of drug production and inability to reduce production despite the law enforcement efforts. The control of opium in China, displaced production in Thailand, Burma and Laos, successful reduction of opium production in these countries displaced enormous production of opium in Afghanistan.
- d. there is displacement of substances. Despite the control of some substances new drugs appear in the illegal market.
- e. the attitude towards users is one of exclusion, social marginalisation, stigmatisation and limited social support as well as inadequate therapeutic opportunities.

The NGO's propose to the Greek government to make a plea at the coming CND session for the need of reform and modernisation of the current legal framework in order to address the above mentioned negative consequences.

4. The future legal framework on drugs must be ruled by the principles of multilateral cooperation, shared responsibility of the states; be based not in ideological standpoints, but on evidence based practices that are proven to have positive results; to focus on the reduction of health harms and be implemented with full respect of human rights. The realisation of these principles in action plans is essential if we do not want to remain by rhetoric declarations.

5. In the spirit of the declaration and the resolutions of the International NGO Forum "Beyond 2008", the Greek NGO's propose the following concrete actions:

- a. The Greek Government must provide sufficient resources for the development, implementation and monitoring of programmes for harm reduction, treatment and social reintegration. A balance has to be achieved in the available resources between supply and demand reduction. The problem of drugs is primarily a public health issue and as such must be the central point of the policy addressing the drugs issue.
- b. Common standards and best practices must be established in order to assess the outcomes and the financing of the relevant state and non-state actors that provide services in the field of drugs.
- c. Establish monitoring with regard to indicators concerning the number of dependent users and evaluate the results of services and organisations working in the field of supply and demand reduction on the basis of statistical and qualitative outcomes. The state must provide sufficient financial resources for monitoring and related scientific research and for publication of the evaluations.
- d. The government and relevant bodies and organisations must be involved in the international discussion about the penitentiary system and its effect in the fight against drugs. The evaluation of the Greek penal law on drugs can contribute to this global discussion. The penalisation of users for the possession of drugs for personal use is practically no longer

applied in many countries, but it is also necessary to be removed from the international drug convention of 1988. The Greek government must support the proposal of the Forum "Beyond 2008" to call upon the INCB to undertake, in consultation with other relevant international bodies, a review of the application of criminal sanctions as a drug control measure.

e. Support youth initiatives and initiatives of parents, educators and relevant organisations, including sport associations, which contribute to prevention and information about the consequences of drug use and are based on international standards and best practices.

6. The Greek NGO's welcome the call of the International Forum "Beyond 2008" for the need of cooperation between the NGO's on the local, regional and national level in order to improve the quality of their activities and subscribe the proposals to increase transparency and accountability through the publication of annual reports including financial data.

The Greek NGO's expect to be actively involved through transparent and systematic mechanisms in the realisation and the evaluation of the drugs policy in Greece. They propose that the state encourages consultation with civil society and share the view of the executive director of UNODC that "drug issues are too important to be left to government alone"

Athens, 29 September 2008