

WFAD- a Voice for a Drug Free Society

Distinguished hosts and delegates, dear friends!

Today we live in a world of contrasts. In a world of abundance and scarcity, the world drug problem is no exception. On the one hand, we are flooded by prescription drugs especially in high-income countries and on the other hand, there is a lack of access to essential medications in low- and middle-income countries.

Furthermore, in some cases young people use drugs in order to add excitement to their lives not knowing what else to do and in others, poverty fuels drug use among those living in extreme conditions who as well do not know what else to do.

The costs of harm in terms of human lives, health, public safety, environment and GDP are disproportionate and already far too high for us to stand idly by and watch. Inaction may result in much higher levels of drug-related harm in the future.

There is no reason to wait or hesitate. Governments and civil society have effective and evidence-based measures at hand.

Growing scientific evidence provides insight into causes and consequences of drug use. We know the risk and protective factors leading to or discouraging people from drug use. We have sufficient knowledge about drug addiction, better understanding about what works in prevention and treatment as well as insights gained from the real-life experiments of cannabis legalization.

Given the harm drug use causes, tackling the world drug problem has been recognized as a priority of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Governments have committed to “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” by strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol in target 3.5.

It is obvious that in order to create a world where people can live in dignity, the root causes leading to drug use need to be

addressed and so many civil society organizations are already selflessly addressing.

But what Civil Society Organizations are as well doing is, that they are demanding and supporting their governments to implement comprehensive solutions.

But solutions that do not include the introduction of social programs, education and health services, involvement of communities and investing in people's safety and well-being are insufficient and won't see the expected results benefiting all people. We cannot afford ineffective solutions.

We need to act and we need to hold each other accountable. We need to celebrate the victories and advancements we make but we cannot stop making thorough analysis and closing our eyes from what is not working.

One of the most serious shortcomings in the response to the world drug problem over the past decade is the lack of adequate

treatment and recovery services. Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short of need. Just one in six people in the need of treatment actually receiving it. The severity of the treatment gap differs between regions. In Africa only 1 in 18 people with drug use disorder receives treatment. There are Civil Society Organizations that do the noble and very difficult job of filling the treatment gap but we all know that they are stretched and that the need must be answered by their governments.

Investment into alternative development remains an underused approach to drug supply reduction, although political support for alternative development is strong and widespread.

Addressing the world drug problem from a public health perspective is too often limited to the health of the individual instead of utilizing methods addressing causes and consequences in the broader population.

Access to essential pharmaceutical products is an important element in any national health strategy. Universal health coverage cannot be achieved and guaranteed without available,

affordable quality-assured health technologies. After so many years of discussion, WHO estimates that still 5.5 billion people (83% of the world's population) live in countries with low or non-existent access to controlled medicines for the treatment, for example, of moderate-to-severe pain.

Harsh law-enforcement, brutal police force, even violence and the militarization of the response to the world drug problem has not completely ceased and remains a serious problem in a number of countries.

Another concerning trend that is obviously on the rise is a “War **for** drugs”. We are witnessing a global, well-funded propaganda campaign to change peoples' perception of narcotic drugs. It is a war over politicians' minds, over media peoples' minds, over young peoples' minds, and over parents' minds. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clear that the ultimate goal of this propaganda war is to make narcotic drugs just as accepted worldwide, just as widely used, just as integrated in the culture as alcohol is today in Western societies

International and cross-border collaboration and coordination among governments and regions has been inadequate and has further contributed to stalled progress.

We have not learnt from the lessons in alcohol and tobacco regulation implementation. The implementation often fails due to the interference of the industries profiting from the freedom in trade of these substances. Experiences from many decades with alcohol and tobacco control show that there is no good reason to legalize other harmful substances that have lower prevalence, availability and public acceptance. Moreover, the new drug industries such as marijuana industry are bonding with alcohol and tobacco industry learning from the playbook of their successful “older brothers” in how to conduct lobby campaigns distorting effective narcotic drugs policies if they are in place. Civil Society is playing crucial role in revealing practices of these harmful industries that show no respect to the well-being of people if their profit should suffer.

Large-scale interventions that address the lack of services, infrastructure needs, drug-related violence, xenophobia, racism, poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, marginalization and social disintegration has largely been ignored in the response to drug problems. Here we again have several spearheading examples of Civil Society efforts to approach the problem in a comprehensive manner.

Another danger that is important to highlight is that the international conversation about the world drug problem is dominated by a Western agenda where the national backdrop is more affluent populations, well-developed health systems, social security services and reasonably good government structures and practices. In many countries in the global South conditions are very different from this. Weak health systems are already overstretched by the burden of the classical communicable diseases, and new non-communicable diseases like cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases put additional burdens on health services. With such a backdrop, already overstretched health systems do not provide the solutions necessary to tackle growing drug problems in the foreseeable future. The needs of

countries in the global South deserve more serious consideration. Prevention at the earliest possible stage is the only viable strategy.

Despite progress and a number of positive developments as presented in this report, the list of shortcomings, gaps and persistent problems in the response to the world drug problem remains too long. However, for each of these remaining issues, effective and evidence-based responses are available. There is no need to invent the wheel. But there is a great need to grab the steering wheel as the global community knows what to do.

Science shows what works. Guidelines and political commitments exist – and have been considerable achievements of the work in the past decade. What is critically missing is the political will to make good on promises, to mobilize political leadership to turn commitments into action and to implement evidence-based policies and programs.

If the countries themselves do not pay enough attention to these solutions, it is the Civil Society Organizations that back up the work and simultaneously demand governments to take care of the steering wheel.

I have shared with you our analysis of what has improved and what is stalling. But this kind of analysis is not enough if it is not supported by concrete steps to take. These are the solutions, where Civil Society plays a crucial role in implementation.

Civil Society contributes to reduction of drug use prevalence

The overarching goal of every country's drug policy should be to reduce the prevalence of drug use. This will lead to lower numbers of problematic drug users, as well as a reduction in numbers of adolescents who are exposed to drug use in their peer group. Civil Society Organizations creating alcohol and drug free environments, helping people out of their addiction, supporting people in recovery are changing for better and often saving people's lives.

Civil Society is often the only actor that invests its resources in prevention

Since drug use disorders involve such large human costs and place such a heavy burden upon society on so many levels, it is in every government's interest to invest in the prevention of drug use.

For every dollar spent on prevention, at least ten can be saved in future health, social and crime costs. The return on investment in prevention, besides the 1:10 yield, is the healthy and safe development of children and youth who can realize their full potential and become contributing members of their community and society.

Civil Society stands in front of the mobilization of communities

Effective prevention efforts are even more impactful when they are synergistic and implemented in a whole-of-community approach. Community mobilization should involve local authorities and public services, schools, police, parent groups, community-based organizations, sports clubs, religious groups, and neighborhood alliances to foster comprehensive approaches to problems affecting the community

Civil Society is often the only actor that offers affordable treatment, rehabilitation and harm reduction options

Treatment, harm reduction, rehabilitation and reintegration should be integrated and offer a wide variety of approaches to cater to different needs of the individual. The goal of treatment should be

to reverse the negative impact that persisting drug use disorders have on the individual and to help them achieve as full recovery from the disorder as possible in order to become a productive member of their society. Good quality, accessible and affordable treatment care packages for everyone are of utmost importance.

Civil Society plays a crucial role in reintegration of people with drug problems

Failing to reintegrate people in early recovery back into their communities' wastes resources. Recovery from drug use disorder requires support from family and the community, a place to live, education or job training, meaningful work, transportation, childcare, a social network, and meaningful leisure activities as well as relapse prevention. It is very important that Civil Society does not carry this burden on its own which is the case in many places. Treatment centers and local municipalities must coordinate reintegration from the very start of the treatment program.

Civil Society is often the only provider of support self-help groups for drug users and people in recovery

Across the globe, self-help groups and support group services for drug users prove to be a successful tool for overcoming drug use disorders and reintegration into society afterwards. Such groups and programs are thus a highly useful complement to more formal treatment services, and they provide much needed help in settings where few or no other options exist. Therefore, self-help groups should be available as a part of treatment and recovery services in all countries and the civil society providing this service should receive adequate support from the governments.

Civil Society is often there for youth who struggle with childhood trauma, family problems, abuse, school attendance, and other problems. In the form of early interventions teachers, health or social workers, as well as family and neighbors can make a difference in many children's lives.

There are many promising practices where the civil society organizations engage in reducing the world drug problem. Besides the service they themselves deliver; they as well restlessly

advocate for measures that are fundamental for achieving any success in our efforts such as:

Screening and brief interventions in order to identify those who struggle with various traumas and difficulties in life and maybe have already initiated drug use. Early identification and help unfold both harm reduction as well as prevention effects.

Social programs and alternative development need to complement drug policy programs and break the cycle of vulnerability. While waiting for governments, there is an array of civil society organizations that address homelessness, social deprivation, unemployment and exclusion from educational opportunities.

When I was preparing my speech, every time I was about to talk about what governments need to do, I realized, that there are civil society organizations already showing the way. This insight keeps me both proud and humble. Civil Society is leaving impact on all levels – in a small village in the hills of Thailand and in the corridors

of the United Nations. Through organizing summer camp for children, interesting and interactive workshops for students, safe havens for people with drug problems, helping hand for those who want to quit, guiding and assistance who wish to return to their families and regain their lives back and fearless advocacy towards local politicians or leaders in the UN.

Thanks to their sharp analysis, love for the people and communities, feeling of urgency and brave actions civil society is changing the world step by step everywhere.

I represent the World Federation Against Drugs, WFAD - A voice for a Drug Free World.

World Federation Against Drugs was founded in Sweden 2009.

WFAD is a multilateral community of non-governmental organizations and individuals.

The work is built on the principles of universal fellowship and basic human and democratic rights.

The aim of WFAD is to work for a drug-free world.

We have around 250 member organizations over the world, in all continents working with Prevention, Treatment and Recovery.

Using the tool of the Convention on the Rights of the Child but also with a focus on the Women's situation

Our Members are also doing Systematic Advocacy, looking into Harms to other and monitoring The Industry

On the Global level we are Supporting our Members – Regional Forums, USA, India, Singapore, East Africa and The Balkans

Even if we are criticized to have an utopian vision that can easily be dismissed in our world of fast solutions and pragmatism we strongly believe that at the times like these, we all need to unite around our idea of a world where people live free from the harm caused by drugs. We are the absolute majority, but I am worried that our voices are not being heard.

Instead, we hear loud and clear voices of those who wish to make drugs more present in our lives. We are hearing those who have already earned their life fortune on selling drugs saying that

everything will be fine while lives are lost, families broken, and hopes vanished. I am standing here and represent Civil Society, that speaks for the silent majority:

Children. Spouses. Parents. Grandparents. Colleagues. Friends.
Classmates. Teammates.

Innocent victims of violence. Innocent victims of neglect. Innocent victims of accidents.

Witnesses to suffering. Witnesses to loss.

The silent majority.

The majority that imagines a better world.

The majority that wishes to live free from drugs.

The majority that wishes to live free from problems caused by drugs.