

UNGASS 2016 Can Unite Us Against Illicit Drugs

*by Yury Fedotov**

Tackling the world drug problem is one of the most urgent and difficult tasks currently facing the international community. Illicit drugs pose interconnected challenges to peace, human rights, health, justice and sustainable development around the world. If we are to progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, which seek to promote peace and prosperity for all, we must place global action on illicit drugs high on the international agenda.

UNODC's strong partnerships in Latin America and the Caribbean have been invaluable in addressing these critical challenges. UNODC works closely with Member States and other regional partners to deliver a broad range of important projects covering alternative development, public health and access to treatment, container control, seizures and enhancement of criminal justice and law enforcement. Our collective efforts have been met with some successes; as just one example, alternative development programmes in Peru, Colombia and Bolivia have benefitted over 280,000 households previously reliant upon illicit crop cultivation.

Significant challenges, however, still remain. Coca cultivation remains persistent, while rising levels of cocaine consumption undermine public health. Central America and the Caribbean remain primary transit points for cocaine trafficking, and organised crime groups vie for power and territory creating violence that destabilizes communities, hampers development and places young people at risk. All of this is happening at a time when we are experiencing the spread of violent extremism, and the worrying nexus between organised crime and terrorism is emerging.

It is, therefore, crucial to recognize that no country, however powerful, can stand alone in countering these multi-faceted threats. Finding solutions to the world drug problem is a shared responsibility that all countries must undertake together. Acknowledging that the challenges are difficult and dangerous to face, UNODC commends the dedicated efforts of its committed partners in Latin America and the Caribbean. Working together, successes have been achieved, but much work remains to be done.

Coming at a critical time, the upcoming UNGASS in April will bring member states, UN bodies, civil society and international organisations together in a vibrant, inclusive discussion. The event will allow countries to assess challenges and agree solutions. UNODC, as the only UN entity with a comprehensive mandate covering both supply and demand

sides of the world drug problem, stands ready to assist its partners in Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union. In doing so, we are seeking to maximize the full potential of UNGASS 2016, and to promote a balanced approach to international drug policy that is evidence-based and scientific with a strong emphasis on public health, human rights and development.

The journey is a difficult one and many obstacles remain – but let us remind ourselves that we are strongest when we stand together in pursuit of a shared vision of peace, prosperity and development. UNGASS 2016 will offer us the opportunity to build a truly global network of partners in the fight against the world drug problem.

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This paper was prepared for the foreword of the EU-LAC Foundation’s Newsletter of March 2016 on the theme “The World Drug Problem”. This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the EU-LAC Foundation.