

VERKLARING Staatssecretaris Van Rijn bij UNGASS in New York

Statement Koninkrijk der Nederlanden

Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the General Assembly Special Session on the world drug problem, your excellencies, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

It is an honour to address this Special Session of the General Assembly on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Holding the Presidency of the European Union, the Netherlands fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by European Commissioner Mimica on behalf of the European Union and its Member States yesterday.

I believe that this Special Session on the World Drug Problem is a unique opportunity to reflect on the goals and targets that we have committed to in 2009 and to take stock of the progress we have made to date. However we also have the responsibility to look ahead towards 2019 and 2030.

The lively debates and discussions between governments, civil society and communities over the past months, leading up to this very day, show how much interest there is in the world drug problem. It affects many and the consequences are severe. Those discussions and negotiations are reflected in the outcome document that was prepared in Vienna.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands appreciates the work of the UNGASS Board, that was tasked by the CND to prepare an outcome document, and welcomes the outcomes it presented. However, I would also like to call for realism. We need to recognize that huge differences remain: both in perspectives on how to address the current problems and how to face emerging challenges. This means that not all the emerging problems and not all the innovative solutions that are implemented at national and local level are well recognized or reflected in the outcome document. The 'on the ground' developments may be way ahead of us and of the discussions that we conduct here today.

Today, like every day, we will see the birth of more than 200.000 children into this world. 200.000 children that depend on us. I believe we have the obligation to let them grow up and develop themselves in safe and healthy environments without the threat of drugs and drug related crime affecting their well being. However, I also strongly believe that children that are not so fortunate, should at least have the opportunity to receive appropriate treatment and care, without prejudice and without disproportionate punishment.

Let us look forward and let me share with you the elements of drug policies that, we believe, are key to get to the result we want at the international and national level. Elements that the Netherlands and many other countries have already positive experience with and that we should take advantage of.

During recent years, global drug policy showed a steady transition towards a more balanced approach compared to a repressive approach that was dominant for decades. It is important to emphasize that it is not a matter of choosing between approaches but of combining them best and in the most effective way. There is no such thing as one-size-fits-all solution.

Each country should find a balanced approach that suits its specific local challenges and circumstances. This is entirely consistent with the international drug conventions as Mr. Sipp from the INCB has stated yesterday so very clear. The conventions provide States with the flexibility to adopt measures such as treatment and rehabilitation as an alternative to, or in addition to, criminal sanctions for offenders.

A balanced approach towards drug policies also means to discuss a wide ranging public health based approach. Focusing on the rights and needs of drug users is very effective: through evidence based prevention programmes less people will start using drugs, by developing new treatment programmes we are better capable to treat addictions and by providing risk and harm reduction interventions we are better able to prevent the spread of infectious diseases among users, but also to protect our general population. It is 2016 and it is time to recognize that risk and harm reduction measures are not only a proven effective way to prevent more HIV/Aids infections, but also to protect our societies. Let us embrace such interventions.

Therefore, I am very pleased that in the outcome document we strongly call for enhanced involvement of the World Health Organization in international drug policy. I am sincerely grateful to Dr. Chan, who spoke here yesterday and stressed the urgency of this issue and her commitment to a strengthened role of the WHO in the years to come. Her words make me confident that, with the help of the WHO and other UN institutions, today is the first step towards an ambitious agenda for 2019 where harm reduction, prevention and treatment are at the center of our attention.

At the same time we need to continue to pursue our efforts in tackling transnational organized crime and drug trafficking. We should focus on the implementation of effective law enforcement policies and cooperation to address production, manufacturing and trafficking of illicit drugs, including money laundering and corruption. Resources are limited, we need to spend them where they are most effective. Therefore, I believe that we should not focus too much on drug users and minor, non violent offences related to drug use. Organized crime is a much bigger threat.

Second, I would like to underline the importance of evidence based drug policy making. If we really want to live up to the ambition of having a sound evidence based approach on drug policy we need to move away from unrealistic and ideological ambitions. We need to continue, together, to build such an evidence base to keep improving our interventions. Sometimes interventions work, sometimes they don't. This is the way evidence is established: with trial and error, monitoring, evaluation and by sharing best practices. Let's learn from our successes and our failures!

I would like to underline that the death penalty, is not an evidence based intervention. The Netherlands opposes the application of the death penalty in all circumstances and without exception. The same clear signal was expressed yesterday by the EU, its member states and 28 other like minded countries, after the adoption of the outcome document.

It is crucial, when addressing the world drug problem, to apply the principle of proportionate sentencing for drug related offences. We need to prevent overcrowded prisons and all negative health consequences related to it. I would like to invite all state parties to consider alternative measures to conviction or punishment for drug-related, non-violent offences of a minor nature.

Finally, I welcome the emphasis placed on the outcomes of this UNGASS ensuring the availability and affordability of controlled medicines for medicinal and scientific purposes. This is a very urgent matter. Overly strict interpretation of the UN Conventions, complex import and export rules, and fear of addiction mean that some important medications are unavailable in hospitals in developing countries. This is unacceptable. I therefore call on all parties present here to live up to these words on paper and ensure quick and thorough implementation.

We look forward to an open and meaningful discussion towards 2019 and beyond.

I thank you.