

Harm Reduction Australia

A Statement on UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs and the Australian National Drug Strategy

Australia is participating in the upcoming UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the world drug problem and at the same time is in the process of reviewing its National Drug Strategy. However, if all that is achieved in 2016 is an exorbitant travel bill for bureaucrats to travel to New York for UNGASS and hollow consultations around the country without any real or meaningful change in either the international treaties or our National Drug Strategy then it will be a shameful waste of money. It will also be yet another slap in the face for many people, families and communities across the country that are facing harm from drug use.

HRA is calling on the Australian Government to be transparent on:

1. The membership of the Australian delegation to the UNGASS;
2. Australia's position in the proposed discussions on the current treaties at UNGASS; and,
3. Whether it will support the need for a new direction embracing humane harm reduction approaches in both international and domestic strategies.

Across the world people are dying, contracting diseases and being criminalised and imprisoned at extraordinarily high levels for drug use. Silence or a failure to challenge the status quo will mean that Australia is reaffirming the much derided and rightly ridiculed 'A drug free world – we can do it' agreement of the 1998 UNGASS and condemning millions more to tragic and harmful consequences because they use drugs or have become dependent on drugs.

Australia was once a world leader in drug policy and addressing HIV and related diseases but over the years this has sadly diminished as our leaders have become politically fearful of evidence that highlights a need for change.

We must learn the lessons of history.

HRA is therefore also asking for current national governmental drug committees to be far more transparent in their deliberations and decision making, as well as expanding to include key civil society leaders in treatment, family support, services for young people, peak bodies and peer associations.

The oft repeated statements from government Ministers and senior officials that 'we cannot arrest our way out of this situation' are beginning to wear thin and must now be matched by genuine policy reforms.

Action not words will determine the truth of the Australian position and this can start in April in New York and in the renewal of Australia's National Drug Strategy later this year.

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