



INSTITUTO IGARAPÉ

a think and do tank

**Ana Paula Pellegrino, Igarapé Institute<sup>1</sup> – Civil Society Interventions at the 60<sup>th</sup> regular session of CICAD. Nassau, The Bahamas. November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016.**

I would first like to greet all delegates, observers and fellow civil society representatives and take the opportunity to thank all of you for the productive debates and exchanges over the past three days. Thank you especially to both the CICAD executive secretariat and the Bahamas for their excellent job hosting and preparing this meeting.

I also congratulate the Bahamas on assuming the presidency of CICAD and Mexico, the vice-presidency. I trust that under your leadership, CICAD will step up to the challenge of building on the legacy of the UNGASS 2016 process in the hemisphere and of maintaining our reputation as a hub for innovation in drug policy in the years leading up to 2019. We hope the region will once again take the forefront in pushing for UN-level reforms that make way for drug policies that leave behind the “War on Drugs” paradigm once and for all.

The fact is, UNGASS 2016 did not respond to all the challenges we face in our countries. Important gaps remain, ones we need to work on in the coming years.

The international drug control regime still does not recognize the full legitimacy of evidence-based policies like the decriminalization of possession for personal use and the implementation of harm reduction measures; measures already adopted by many of the countries here represented, along with other steps towards a more humane and efficient approach to the matter.<sup>2</sup>

The international drug control conventions still recommend the criminalization of drug users, and its overarching goal – achieving a “drug-free” or “drug-abuse free” world – espouses a paradigm incompatible with harm reduction measures. This approach has failed and changing it is key. The sustained interdiction of advancing in the debate on such policies at the

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<sup>1</sup> Based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the Igarapé Institute is a think-and-do tank that addresses challenges at the crossroads between development, security and justice. We use technology to create solutions and visualize data in order to further evidence-based policies geared towards reducing lethal violence. We are currently the office for the Americas of the Global Commission on Drug Policy.

<sup>2</sup> The UNGASS outcome document also does not advance in the abolition of the death penalty charges for drug-related crimes, nor does it recognize the need for exploring responsible regulation policies under strict evaluation measures. For more information, see GLOBAL COMMISSION ON DRUG POLICY. **Public Statement on UNGASS 2016**. Available at <<http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/FINALpublicstatementforGCDP.pdf>>.

international level should not be taken lightly. Together, American countries can have a strong voice in their favor.

Despite these shortcomings, the UNGASS outcome document does advance important measures. Their timely implementation is vital to alleviate the suffering of the thousands who could benefit. UN-member states have been extensively discussing how to do so in Vienna the past months, but this is not the only forum where these debates should happen. Regional, national and local conversations are also important instruments countries can take advantage of. The multiple dialogues on implementation that the government of Mexico is holding is one method others can learn from and adapt to their own context and needs.<sup>3</sup>

Proportionality in sentencing for non-violent offenders and broadening sustainable development initiatives in drug policy – as highlighted in para. 7(k)<sup>4</sup> of the joint commitment – are important issues on which our countries can expand upon.

National and local-level debates on the implementation of UNGASS recommendations can consider, for example, where budgets are allocated and which goals, metrics and indicators are chosen, and evaluate if they support an integrated and multidimensional approach to drug policy. This exercise can be repeated when implementing commitments and agreements made at all levels, be they international or regional; national or local. Changes in the way we approach drug policy verbally need to be translated into changes in our policies and actions. The time is ripe for such a change.

While we heard extensive acknowledgement of civil society participation throughout CICAD processes these past three days, we believe that this exchange should be expanded and further institutionalized. As my colleagues from Intercambios and IDPC/ACEID will expand upon shortly, yesterday's Dialogue was an important step towards doing so, and we hope to deepen and strengthen these official channels.<sup>5</sup>

The Intergovernmental Working Group created to discuss the evaluation mechanism of the newly adopted plan of action is a prime chance to do exactly this. Civil society has a lot to contribute. For example, we at Igarapé have already started to reflect on drug policy evaluation and indicators. We built a first proposal for new drug policy metrics,<sup>6</sup> an initiative we are now

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<sup>3</sup> These dialogues expand on the 10 points president Peña Nieto presented at the General Assembly in April. The series "*Hacia una nueva estrategia internacional de drogas: Instrumentación de las recomendaciones de UNGASS 2016*" started in September of this year and should go on until February 2017.

<sup>4</sup> "(k) Consider the development of sustainable urban development initiatives for those affected by illicit drug-related activities to foster public participation in crime prevention, community cohesion, protection and safety and to stimulate innovation, entrepreneurship and employment;" UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY. **A/RES/S-30/1**, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> IDPC recommendations include calling on members of civil society and representatives of affected communities to participate in CICAD panels, for example.

<sup>6</sup> MUGGAH, R. AGUIRRE, K. CARVALHO, I. S. Measurement Matters: Designing New Metrics for a Drug Policy that Works, **Igarapé Strategic Paper 12**. Jan, 2015. Available at <[https://igarape.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/AE-12-Measurement-mattes-07h-jan\\_.pdf](https://igarape.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/AE-12-Measurement-mattes-07h-jan_.pdf)>.

reviewing. As such, we are keen to cooperate with you on the topic as you progress in the working group.

Expanding sustainable development measures beyond crop substitution, chiefly into urban settings in order to prevent violence and offer second chances to our youth, are additional topic areas Igarapé can contribute to. As we have found in our research, lethal violence is on the rise across the region<sup>7</sup> and states should consider reviewing drug-related and other policies that contribute to this upwards trend as well as integrating violence prevention measures into their approaches – particularly if they are to achieve the SDG goals<sup>8</sup> by 2030. Evidence is key in addressing this challenge, but so is political will. We, civil society organizations, have the former, but we rely on you for the latter.

We also rely on you to keep the standards on evidence high when debating drug policy. Governments representatives have great responsibility over the data you decide to cite. Bad science is unfortunately still a reality and can muddle the evaluation and learning process around policy changes, like the regulation experiences underway in the region. Further debate on the quality of evidence as well as data gathering and sharing is needed at the regional level, and CICAD is in a privileged position to promote such initiatives. It is as simple as bringing in experts and their evidence, analyzing their sources and holding a principled debate – an initiative civil society can also greatly contribute to. We believe this is a healthy way to build constructive exchanges on drug policy that do not fall prey to myths, prejudices and exaggerations.

Including civil society – in addition to representatives of vulnerable groups and communities like women, youth and drug users – in the design, implementation and evaluation phases of drug policies, as highlighted in the UNGASS document, is an important step forwards towards more humane and efficient policies. On our side, we are up to the challenge, but robust initiatives to institutionalize civil society participation are still lacking at the regional level. CICAD should not shy away from once again setting the standard for other international forums, further integrating these voices in the debate.

Thank you for your attention and may we keep on working towards drug policies that promote safer and healthier communities.

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<sup>7</sup> IGARAPÉ INSTITUTE, **Homicide Monitor**, 2015. Available at <<http://homicide.igarape.org.br/>>.

<sup>8</sup> Particularly goals 11, on sustainable cities and communities; and 16, on peace, justice and strong institutions.