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The Beyond 2008 Forum on Illicit Drugs/Harmful Drug Use Civil Society Gives a Voice to Those Most Affected

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After three days of debate and discussion, the 300 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) delegates at the Beyond 2008 Forum concluded an historic and unique event by successfully achieving consensus on their contribution to the review of the 1998-2008 United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on Illicit Drugs. The consensus, in the form of a Declaration and three Resolutions, will now act as global calling card for NGOs to speak with a unified voice. The Declaration and Resolutions highlight what has been achieved by NGOs, identify opportunities on how governments and NGOs can work together in the future, and make specific policy recommendations.

The Beyond 2008 Forum, an initiative of the Vienna Non-Governmental Organizations Committee on Narcotic Drugs (VNGOC), in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), was held at the UN office in Vienna and is the culmination of two years of work that included thirteen consultations held in all nine regions of the world. The delegates have taken the myriad of ideas and proposals from the consultations and created a coherent and forward-looking series of recommendations for the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and UNODC.

"Considering this was the largest, most diverse, gathering of NGOs at UNODC, the level of professionalism, accountability and desire for consensus has been truly remarkable," said Michel Perron, Chair of the Beyond 2008 Steering Committee and CEO, Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. "It is clear that there are many different routes to be taken on this journey. But what is even clearer after these three days is that we all share a common destination. Our work here in Vienna has been diligent and will warrant serious consideration by the drug control agencies of the United Nations and Member States".

Three key themes have emerged from the deliberations:

Shared responsibility and accountability

Governments at all levels, need to leverage the experience, reach, professionalism and passion of NGOs. In the past five years NGOs have become more focused, disciplined, inter-connected and organized around how to take on this global problem. NGOs are well placed to contribute - but only if their experience, reach, impact and commitment is engaged. As Eva Tongue, Chairperson of the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs commented in her opening remarks "Money alone is not enough. Governments need to recognize that the fieldwork done by the NGOs is fundamental to success in all aspects of this matter."

Giving the most affected a voice.

This is an issue that has to be addressed at the human level. The Declaration and Resolutions represent many different voices - individuals, families, and communities - from around the globe. This voice needs to be heard because it brings a fundamental understanding on how to achieve demonstrable progress to reduce illicit/harmful drug use and its adverse health, social and economic consequences.

Beyond 2008 Forum has created a call for action. The Declaration and Resolutions are just the start. It is a commitment by all of the participants to build on what was achieved here in Vienna as they return to their work and engage with their governments.

The Declaration and Resolutions coming from the Beyond 2008 Forum have created a clear consensus from NGOs. In his closing remarks to delegates, Mr. Perron said: "As we go back to our communities and responsibilities let us go knowing that our commitment to consensus over the past three days has created the opportunity for civil society to have a substantive voice here in Vienna."

Background:

Building on 13 consultative meetings held in all regions of the world, Beyond 2008 represents an unprecedented and historic engagement of NGOs who work with those most affected by illicit drugs and seek their advice and recommendations on the future of global drug policy. The Beyond 2008 Forum represents the cumulative input of over 1,000 individual participants from more than 145 countries representing millions of members and constituents from across the globe. Selected participants came together in Vienna, Austria, to discuss and debate a global declaration and three resolutions on topics closely examined and discussed during the regional consultations. These will form the basis of forward looking recommendations that will be tabled at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) as they prepare for the 1998-2008 UNGASS review.

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