

Attention: International News and Assignment Editors

Canada promotes a greater role for civil society in international drug policy

OTTAWA, March 12, 2007—A greater role for civil society in global drug policy is the goal of a historic meeting hosted by the Vienna NGO Committee on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna this week, says Michel Perron, Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. Mr. Perron is the lead organizer on behalf of the Vienna NGO Committee of an international NGO forum planned for next year to coincide with a review of 10 years of progress by United Nations member states on controlling the production and use of drugs.

Representatives of 18 leading international NGOs are gathered in Vienna as part of the 50th UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) to formally announce plans for the "Beyond 2008" International NGO Forum, and a series of six regional consultations scheduled for later this year. The Forum and the consultations are expected to set the stage for greater involvement of civil society and NGOs in international drug policy. The CND, the political authority for the UN's drug control apparatus, last year formally endorsed a Canadian resolution to that effect.

The achievement of "significant and measurable results" in global drug control by 2008 was a goal set at a special session of the UN General Assembly in June 1998. Mr. Perron, Chair of the "Beyond 2008" Steering Committee, sees the upcoming target date as a unique opportunity for NGOs to highlight the valuable role of civil society in the drug field.

"It is essential that civil society come together to reflect on our experiences and to share the richness of our collective knowledge, practical expertise and policy insight on the impact of substance abuse in the world," Mr. Perron said. "Civil society does not speak with one voice, but it surely constitutes one of the most integral partners in improving the health and well-being of individuals across the globe. There are many points of consensus among us and it is our intention to mine those for the benefit of all."

"Beyond 2008" will focus its deliberations on three key objectives. The first is to highlight tangible NGO achievements in the field of drug control. Part of this process will involve compiling data on NGOs and civil society from a questionnaire that has now been posted online in all six official UN languages at www.vngoc.org.

The second objective is to review best practices related to collaborative mechanisms among NGOs, governments and UN agencies in various fields. The overall goal is to develop a model for ongoing collaboration that reaches beyond the UN's constituency of central governments and enhances dialogue and cooperation with civil society.

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The third objective is to review international drug Conventions, and to identify key principles within those agreements and how those principles and the language of the agreements affect the way drug policy is applied locally around the world from day to day. Recommendations will be made through the "Beyond 2008" forum that will serve as a guide for future deliberations on drug policy.

Leading up to the "Beyond 2008" Forum in spring 2008 will be a series of six regional consultations conducted by three lead civil society organizations in each region. The two-day consultation sessions will take place between September 2007 and February 2008 in Latin-America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, South Asia, South East Asia and the Pacific, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The collective input from the regional consultations and the online NGO questionnaire will be compiled, analyzed and reviewed at the "Beyond 2008" forum where 300 civil society representatives are expected to agree on key recommendations it will make to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs. A Memorandum of Understanding recently signed by UNODC and the Vienna NGO Committee acknowledges the key role of NGOs in effective drug control.

Beyond 2008 is made possible through the generous contributions of several funders, in particular the European Commission and the Government of the United Kingdom.

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About CCSA

CCSA is Canada's national addictions organization and is supported by Health Canada through Canada's Drug Strategy. CCSA has a legislated mandate to provide national leadership and evidence-informed analysis and advice to mobilize collaborative efforts to reduce alcohol and other drug related harms.

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