

**VIENNA AFTER CONSENSUS:
REPORT OF THE 68TH SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION
ON NARCOTIC DRUGS**

AUGUST 2025



Top 6 quotes from the 68th CND

‘Each Colombian understands and feels that the global drug problem casts a shadow over all of us. And this panel is an invitation, under the aegis of the conventions, to rethink, to revisit the principle of common and shared responsibility today, now.’

Laura Gil, Ambassador of Colombia to the UN in Vienna

‘Governments should have the honesty and bravery to say when an approach is not working. Policies focused only on prohibition have not solved our problems and have not helped us achieve the goal of the drug conventions, public health, and wellbeing.’

Representative of Uruguay

‘We are in crisis! We have been coming to this meeting as if everything was okay - we are not! Have we been ignoring the elephant in the room? Harm reduction clinics have been closed down; people have been denied services due to the severe funding cuts we are experiencing.’

Anton Basenko, Executive Director, International Network of People who Use Drugs

‘I wish I could say the United States is pleased to be here, but the truth is less sanguine. (...) Briefly

on America’s southern neighbour. Oh, Mexico. Yesterday there was a big party in the Zocalo. Lots of music, “*muchacha fiesta*”. Perhaps everyone was cheering the end of “*abrazos no balazos*”. But it seems too early to celebrate when women and children are being gunned down in places like Guanajuato.’

Representative of the USA

‘Instead of fundamentally addressing the issue of drug demand, the United States has been shifting blame and responsibility to other countries.’

Representative of the People’s Republic of China

‘The prohibitionist approach prioritised drug control over human rights, ignoring the cultural and medicinal value of the coca leaf. Reviewing the scheduling of the coca leaf is linked to the enjoyment of human rights for Indigenous Peoples. (...) In the review process, Indigenous voices must be included and human rights considerations must be fully integrated.’

Representative of Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights



The sun sets over the Vienna International Centre. Credit: Arild Knutsen

Executive summary

Tentative lessons from a CND after consensus

The 68th session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) was marked by two parallel and overlapping crises that exacerbated each other. First, the ongoing breakdown of the ‘Vienna spirit’ – the set of practices that created for decades an appearance of universal support for the global drug control regime. Second, the emergence of the new Trump administration, which came to power just before the CND. The USA immediately halted almost all funding to the United Nations (UN), which was already ensnared in a serious liquidity crisis, whilst challenging many of its norms and institutions. Both are historical developments whose impacts will unfold over the years. However, several tentative lessons can be drawn.

- **The end of consensus may transform the CND into a vibrant policy making body – if Member States are willing to seize this opportunity.** For decades, adherence to consensus kept the CND locked in a stagnant policy space, repeating old language and ignoring the failures of the existing system. But after a historical vote in 2024 on harm reduction, consensus finally collapsed in 2025, with all six resolutions adopted by a vote. Delegations that want to move the global conversation forward can now bring resolutions on topics that were previously blocked by a few Member States. Negotiations are likely to be more time-consuming, and resolutions may become fewer. But this may yet turn the CND into a vibrant multilateral body, with more diplomacy, debate, and evidence-based policy making.
- **No ‘safe’ or ‘technical’ topics will offer protection from polarisation.** This year, resolutions on conventional themes such as the prevention of drug use or the protection of law enforcement officers were hotly debated until the last moment and brought to a vote. There is no refuge from polarisation at the CND. In view of that, Member States may want to use their time and resources to address topics and language that move the

international discussion forward, rather than vainly attempting to play it safe.

- **The independent review panel presents a historical opportunity, but some countries may attempt to challenge its legitimacy.** In a historical development, the CND agreed to establish an independent expert panel to review the UN drug control machinery, with 30 votes in favour, 18 abstentions, and only 3 votes against. Colombia’s sustained diplomacy reassured other countries that it was not trying to impose its own policy views, but to address through the multilateral system a problem that has threatened its stability for decades. However, many countries would have preferred a weaker review mechanism, and will look at the process with circumspection. If they cannot control the process, repressive countries may play to these fears by portraying the panel as an attempt to usurp the role of the CND.
- **Colombia and its allies will have to work hard to preserve a global majority for reform.** The Colombian resolution was backed by a new global majority, with support from countries across all regions. Only Argentina, Russia, and the USA voted against. Such a coalition would have been unthinkable just a few months before. However, positions are likely to continue realigning in the coming years, often influenced by dynamics beyond the CND and drug policy debates. In this unstable landscape, Colombia and its allies will struggle to maintain the unity of the 60 country-strong coalition that called for a revision of the international drug control framework in 2024.
- **The second Trump administration will keep bringing to Vienna its reactionary culture wars.** The origin of this reactionary agenda must be found in US domestic politics and in the preferred tropes of the global far right. So far, the main targets have been the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, transgender persons, and the World Health Organization (WHO). As it is fitting with this ideology, the USA displayed an overall disrespectful tone, shamed its historical allies, and

was inflexible in negotiations. Threats, tariffs, and mockery left the USA isolated this time around, with Argentina as its only partner. But the Trump administration is unlikely to stop pushing this agenda across the UN.

- **It remains to be seen whether the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) and the CND will resist the temptation to accommodate the demands of the Trump administration.** The USA still holds huge political influence and budgetary leverage. At this CND session, it made clear that it would only fund UN activities that align with 'America first' principles. Statements by the UNODC and INCB on border control and interdiction seemed designed to appeal to Washington D.C. Furthermore, this year the USA still managed to water down resolutions, although it was always going to vote against them. Other Member States may want to reconsider their openness to negotiate with a country that is unwilling to make a deal.
- **Positions on harm reduction and human rights are evolving, but the UNODC remains biased towards the conservative end.** There are countries from different regions on both sides of each of these debates, and barriers are more porous than they used to be. However, the UNODC continues to be rigidly isolated from other UN entities in refusing to express support for harm reduction and to acknowledge the human rights costs of drug control. At the same time, the

UNODC has skirted the necessary neutrality by calling for a return to consensus – a hotly debated political issue in Vienna on which a UN entity should stay impartial.

- **As environment and Indigenous rights grow in importance, Vienna needs to break the silo with UN bodies on these matters.** This year featured the first-ever CND resolution on the environment, which included a specific recognition that drug policies themselves can have a harmful impact – also a first. Greater attention to Indigenous Peoples is also welcome, but this brings the risk of a lack of alignment between drug policy texts and already existing standards on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. To resolve this tension, there needs to be better engagement between the CND and already existing UN bodies integrating Indigenous peoples, as well as increased Indigenous participation in Vienna.
- **Civil society and community participation has been greatly impacted by funding cuts; this threatens the value of the CND as a global drug policy conference.** The reduction of international aid by the USA and other countries has had a devastating impact on harm reduction services across the world, putting at risk the life and health of people who use drugs. They have also decimated the presence of representatives of civil society and affected communities at this year's CND, particularly those coming from the Global South. This weakens the role of the CND as a global conference on drug policy.

Introduction: On Friday 14 March, a series of electrifying votes certified the end of consensus

Friday used to be the day to skip in Vienna. Not anymore. The room was packed when Ambassador Shambhu Kumaran of India opened the Plenary session in the morning. A year earlier, the first CND resolution vote in decades had been chaotic, with frantic last-minute attempts at compromise. This time around, Ambassador Kumaran recognised that ‘we have not been able to find consensus on any of the resolutions’, and the Commission moved straight to a vote. Nobody batted an eyelid.

If the votes were certain, the results were completely unknown. Delegates had been shaken by different crises during the week. The second Trump Administration had taken power less than two months earlier. As the CND unfolded, the USA was executing a complete break away from its long-time allies and undermining the multilateral system it had created and propelled for decades. The sudden withdrawal of US international aid brought devastation for services for people who use drugs worldwide, and threatened the sustainability of the United Nations itself.

The most crucial vote came last. Draft resolution L.6, tabled by Colombia, sought to establish an independent panel of experts to rethink the global drug control system. Although toned down by diplomatic necessity, the political intention was clear – to review and challenge a global system that has brought endless conflict, especially in Colombia. Many countries were reluctant. And the USA had submitted an amendment that would render the panel powerless as a tool for change.

WhatsApp and Signal chats were buzzing. Every little development was interpreted as a smoke signal, a clue into the final vote. But when the votes were counted, the US amendment was defeated by a large margin. The panel proposed by Colombia now had the support of a new, cross-regional coalition of countries (see figure 1). Many did not necessarily agree with Colombia on policy, but they were open to a new conversation. Only Argentina, Russia and the USA had voted against. The end of consensus revealed a new landscape in Vienna.

This is the 19th edition of a report series initiated in 2007 by IDPC and the Global Drug Policy Observatory

at Swansea University, at the initiative of Professor David Bewley-Taylor. As always, the aim of the report is to make sense of what happened at the CND through a careful and detailed consideration of everything said and done in Vienna. Professor Bewley-Taylor, who passed away in 2024¹ to the great loss of the drug policy community, believed that an act of thoughtful observation could bring clarity in a time of haste. We hope that this report meets his high standards.

‘It was far from an easy exercise, but we engaged in serious and responsible, good faith work exercising diplomacy in order to help build bridges, not to raise walls, promoting understanding and cooperation between Colombia and the nations represented here. (...) We need new and more effective means to implement a global system. Continuing with the same will not lead anywhere fruitful. We know that other countries face different challenges, but that all of us must help one another.’²

Laura Gil, Ambassador of Colombia

The crisis outside the drug control regime: The second Trump Administration

In recent years, the CND has taken place during major geopolitical shifts. The 2022 session started scarcely three weeks after Russia invaded Ukraine. This brought unprecedented tension to the Commission and resulted in the rupture of several practices that had defined the CND for decades – the famous ‘Vienna spirit.’³ Israel’s war on Gaza also left its mark on the session in 2024. In 2025, the Commission began two months into the second Trump presidency, and this was felt throughout the week. This section explores three ways in which this played out.

The USA challenges the multilateral system

As a global superpower, the USA has often ignored the multilateral system and broken international law. It soon became obvious that the second Trump Administration would take this one step further, seeking to negate the legitimacy of the UN and embracing the far-right trope that identifies it with a ‘new world order’ that threatens national sovereignty.

VIENNA CONSENSUS 'FLIES OUT OF THE CND'

After over three decades agreeing on everything, the intergovernmental body in charge of global drug policy cannot unanimously agree on anything. Calls for transformative change by Member States, UN agencies and civil society clashed with status quo and anti-rights powers.

Historic CND session concludes with flurry of votes that reveal global appetite for review and reform, despite marginal opposition led by the US.

L.6 Strengthening the global drug control framework: a path to effective implementation

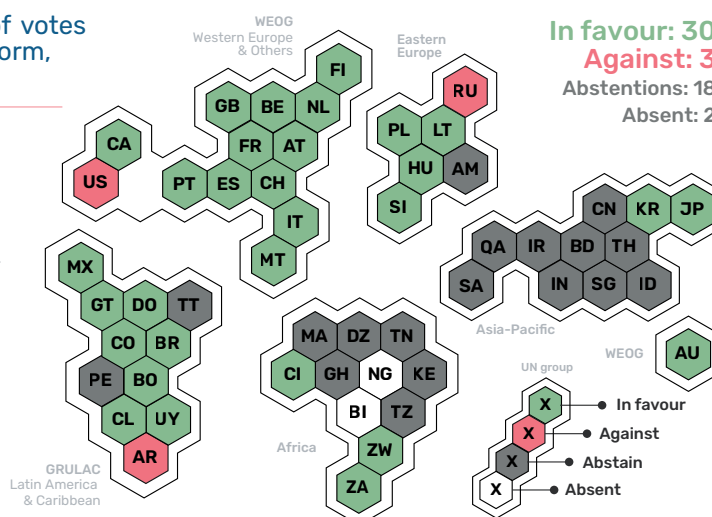
(L.6. Rev.1 – as amended by L.10)

Co-sponsored by: Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Côte D'Ivoire, Honduras, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Uruguay.

This ground-breaking resolution, led by Colombia, sets the basis for the first-ever independent review of global drug control.

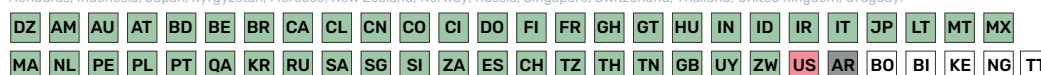
It provides for the creation of a panel of 19 experts to hold consultations and propose recommendations to align drug policies with all international obligations, including human rights.

Despite difficult negotiations, a cross-regional alliance successfully challenged US dominance, showing growing international support for drug policy reform.



L.2 (Rev.1) Promoting comprehensive, scientific evidence-based and multisectoral national systems of drug use prevention for children and adolescents

Co-sponsored by: Chile, European Union (on behalf of its Member States in CND: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain), Andorra, Armenia, Belarus, Brazil, Burkina Faso, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Egypt, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Singapore, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom, Uruguay.



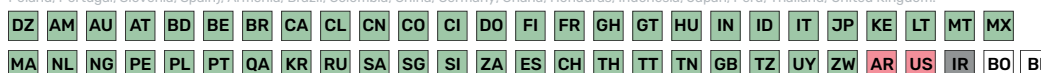
L.3 (Rev.1) Promoting research on scientific evidence-based interventions for the treatment and care of stimulant use disorders

Co-sponsored by: European Union (on behalf of its Member States in CND: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain), Armenia, Brazil, Colombia, China, Germany, Ghana, Honduras, Indonesia, Japan, Morocco, New Zealand, Niger, Norway, Peru, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom.



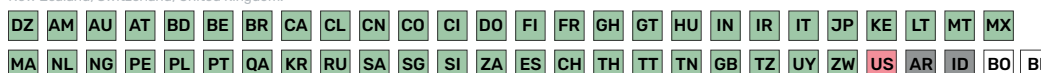
L.4 (Rev.1) Complementing the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development

Co-sponsored by: European Union (on behalf of its Member States in CND: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain), Armenia, Brazil, Colombia, China, Germany, Ghana, Honduras, Indonesia, Japan, Peru, Thailand, United Kingdom.



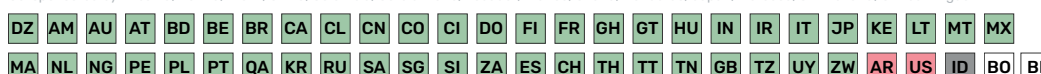
L.5 (Rev.1) Safety of officers in dismantling illicit synthetic drug laboratories, in particular those involving synthetic opioids

Co-sponsored by: European Union (on behalf of its Member States in CND: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain), Albania, Armenia, Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Ghana, Honduras, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Switzerland, United Kingdom.



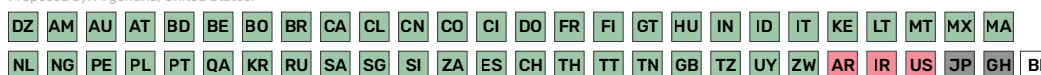
L.7 (Rev.1) Addressing the impacts of illicit drug-related activities on the environment

Co-sponsored by: Albania, Bolivia, Brazil, China, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, France, Ghana, Honduras, Japan, Morocco, Switzerland, United Kingdom.



Deletion of the Sustainable Development Goals from the provisional agenda of the 69th session of the CND

Proposed by: Argentina, United States.



Header title references the Russian delegate speaking at the Friday afternoon session of the Plenary: The Vienna spirit has flown out of the walls of this room and it is a great source of disappointment. Country ISO codes as follows: Algeria (DZ), Argentina (AR), Armenia (AM), Australia (AU), Austria (AT), Bangladesh (BD), Belgium (BE), Bolivia (BO), Brazil (BR), Burundi (BI), Canada (CA), Chile (CL), China (CN), Colombia (CO), Côte d'Ivoire (CI), Dominican Republic (DO), Finland (FI), France (FR), Ghana (GH), Guatemala (GT), Hungary (HU), India (IN), Indonesia (ID), Iran (IR), Italy (IT), Japan (JP), Kenya (KE), Lithuania (LT), Malta (MT), Mexico (MX), Morocco (MA), Netherlands (NL), Nigeria (NG), Peru (PE), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Qatar (QA), Republic of Korea (KR), Russian Federation (RU), Saudi Arabia (SA), Singapore (SG), Slovenia (SI), South Africa (ZA), Spain (ES), Switzerland (CH), Thailand (TH), Trinidad and Tobago (TT), Tunisia (TN), United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (GB), United Republic of Tanzania (TZ), United States of America (US), Uruguay (UY), Zimbabwe (ZW).



Credit: Juan Fernandez Ochoa

Given that the USA is the largest contributor to the UN budget and the most powerful country in the world, this puts the entire system at risk.

On his first day back in office, Trump signed Executive Order 14155, officially withdrawing the USA from the WHO.⁴ This move was driven by domestic politics and Trump's perception that the WHO favoured China during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ However, it had serious consequences in Vienna, where the WHO plays a key role under the international drug conventions, and global health is a central concern. Before the CND started, the USA also withdrew from the Paris Agreement⁶ and the Human Rights Council,⁷ quitted the board of the Climate Loss & Damage Fund,⁸ and sanctioned members of the International Criminal Court.⁹

At the same time, the Trump Administration imposed a 90-day halt on all foreign development assistance, including UN funding. Going forward, the Trump Administration will likely only fund the UN for politically aligned activities.¹⁰ The effects of these cuts were already visible at the CND: the evening Plenary session was removed from the agenda to reduce costs, and the Committee of the Whole (CoW) met in person rather than in hybrid format, and in English only.

It is yet unclear how the funding cuts will impact the UNODC and the INCB in the long term, but the question was in everybody's mind at the CND opening. The initial speech by UNODC Executive Director Ghada Waly was nothing but a fundraising pitch to the Trump Administration, justifying the work of the global drug control regime in terms of Trump priorities – border control and fighting synthetic drugs.

INCB President Jalal Toufiq took a similar approach. His opening intervention focused on the 'grave public health threat'¹¹ caused by synthetic drugs,

and provided a long list of interdiction operations in which the INCB had been involved, arguing that the Board 'can hardly get any more impactful than this' – a rather questionable assertion, given that such operations do not seem to make a dent on the proliferation of drug markets documented by the INCB and the UNODC themselves.¹² Coincidentally or not, Mr. Toufiq was also the first INCB President that failed to mention human rights in a CND opening statement in the last 5 years, at least. 'Our ability to support you is dependent upon sufficient resources', he concluded.

On its side, the USA laid out its three conditions for any future funding for Vienna: that the UN is accountable; that it looks for cost savings; and that any activity 'align[s] with US national interest and priorities by making America safer, stronger and more prosperous'. A key question for the future is whether the global drug control regime will be willing to contort itself until it serves this 'America First' premise.

'I must also be frank, we are facing severe funding problems with significant changes and cutbacks. (...) We face health and security challenges and a multi billion dollar criminal industry. We cannot deliver more with less, when the market has more tools and sophisticated methods. We cannot have the impact you need without resources. We need to invest in the security and health of communities by investing in important work you have mandated the CND to do. We have the power to charge the path forward based on shared goals and needs.'¹³

Ghada Waly, UNODC Executive Director



The end of the 'Vienna consensus' requires the full attention of all participants. Credit: Benjamin Tubiana-Rey

Box 1. The devastating impact of US funding cuts on people who use drugs

For a few months at the start of the Trump Administration, far-right activist Elon Musk wielded an extraordinary amount of power in the US Government through the infamous Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE. One of foremost achievements of the world's wealthiest man was to effectively dismantle the US' entire international aid in a few weeks before the start of the CND.

By March 2025, DOGE had closed USAID, furloughed over 90% of its staff, halted dozens of health and vaccine trials, and cancelled 83% of its programmes,¹⁴ including HIV prevention and treatment services. Funding for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) was also immediately halted. This is not a US-only trend, and other countries like the Netherlands and the UK have also announced important cuts to

global health aid, whilst the priorities of the EU have become increasingly securitised. As a result, UNAIDS predicts a surge of 2,000 new HIV infections daily and 6 million additional AIDS deaths by 2029.¹⁵

These cuts are likely to be catastrophic for people who use drugs, as many harm reduction and treatment services have historically relied on HIV/AIDS funding. Research released by the International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD) immediately before the CND¹⁶ revealed that critical harm reduction services were already being scaled back or shut down, organisations of people who use drugs had to close or drastically reduce services, and this led to heightened stigma, exclusion and criminalisation. At the same time, resources for national and international advocacy have been severely compromised.

The USA brings reactionary culture wars to the UN

The Trump Administration has brought a dramatic change to international politics by introducing far-right ideas and culture wars into diplomatic bodies like the CND. While this strategy backfired in 2025 and left the US isolated, it is unclear what the lasting effects will be.

This reactionary approach had two main targets: environmental policies, and gender. The Trump Administration is committed to opposing any mention of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as it views it as a 'globalist endeavour' and a tool for 'soft governance'. In doing so, the entire US Government is echoing conspiracy theories that identify the (until now rather unexciting) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with an attempt to 'enslave humanity'.¹⁷ At the same time, the US opposes using the word 'gender' in any UN text, arguing it should be replaced with 'biological sex'.

This opposition to the SDGs and gender inclusivity drove the US to force votes on every CND resolution – even those aligned with Trump priorities like preventing drug use or protecting law enforcement. Culture wars allow no compromise.

Only Argentina's Javier Milei reliably supported this approach.

'I thank Chile for the resolution. However, the final version contains references to subjects that my country wants to make its position clear. The word 'gender' appears in international treaties when it refers to two sexes: masculine and feminine. Gender has no other meaning for our delegation. And the Agenda 2030 includes elements that are not legally binding'.¹⁸

Gustavo Zlauvinen, Ambassador of Argentina

Other Member States rushed to support the 2030 Agenda. When Argentina and the USA tried to remove the existing CND agenda item on the SDGs, 47 out of 51 members of the CND voted against.¹⁹ When the issue was debated the previous year, a remarkably cross-regional group of countries took the floor to support the agenda item, including Algeria, Chile, South Africa and Switzerland, to name a few.²⁰ China also jumped to the defence of the SDGs, stating that 'China together with the other developing countries and member states of CND

actively supports them [the SDGs] and that they should be emphasised in the resolutions'. Several Global South countries (Colombia, Morocco, Niger, Paraguay, and Thailand, amongst others) also supported the SDGs in separate Plenary statements.

'This year the High-Level Political Forum has a focus on sustainable solutions and the goals to leave no one behind. This leaves us to wonder about the contributions of CND to this. Are we evidence based? Are they inclusive? Are we trying to leave no-one behind? Are we denying harm reduction measures when there are people in pain? Are we here to overcome these barriers? Are we contributing to peace building, placing people and the environment at its heart?'.²¹

Representative of Colombia, during the debate on the SDGs

The stakes for drug policy are significant. Gender, inclusion, respect for the environment and human dignity are in fact inseparable from drug policy – they shape laws, policies, and practices. The USA still holds incomparable power, and its reactionary agenda will resonate amongst many governments in both Global North and Global South. A strategy based on persuasion and seduction may prevail in the future where isolationism and insult failed in 2025. The UNODC and traditional US allies will be tempted to play along.

In 2025, the Finnish delegate identified this threat and set the country's red line very clearly: 'We are very committed to supporting the needs of LGBTIA persons'.²² The EU also noted that: 'We remain steadfast in our support of the 2030 agenda for SDGs and 17 SDGs. This includes gender equality'.²³

The USA breaks away from its traditional allies

In the weeks immediately before the CND, the Trump Administration took unprecedented steps to openly antagonise its long-standing allies on both sides of the North Atlantic. At the time of writing this report

– in June and July 2025 – these developments have been processed, digested, and softened by the frenetic news cycle of 2025. But on 10 March 2025, they were overwhelmingly felt by all delegates.

A few facts that now feel outdated, but that were then on everyone's mind. On 25 January 2025, Donald Trump had a fiery call with the Prime Minister of Denmark, in which he demanded that Greenland be handed over to the USA.²⁴ On 14 February, Vice President JD Vance accused European countries of suppressing free speech.²⁵ On 28 February – 10 days before the start of the CND – Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy stormed out of the oval office in front of TVs.²⁶ On 4 March – less than a week before the start of the CND – the then Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused the USA of seeking the 'total collapse' of the Canadian economy in its efforts to annex the country.²⁷

The general perception was that the USA was seeking a historical realignment, moving away from NATO countries and embracing Vladimir Putin.

This was spectacularly displayed in the rooms of the Vienna International Centre. The US delegation shook the CND with a breathtakingly arrogant opening statement²⁸ that broke the basic premise of the 'Vienna spirit' and diplomacy writ large by disrespecting other Member States, and blaming Canada, China and Mexico for the opioid overdose crisis. The generally mocking tone was strikingly similar to the online right's obsession with 'owning' its opponents, and seemed to indicate that the real audience for these words was in Washington D.C.

'Briefly on to America's southern neighbour. Oh, Mexico. Yesterday there was a big party in the Zocalo. Lots of music, "*mucha fiesta*". Perhaps everyone was cheering the end of "*abrazos no balazos*". But it seems too early to celebrate when women and children are being gunned down in places like Guanajuato'.²⁹

Cartwright Weiland, representative of the USA



US delegation delivers the opening statement at the CND. Credit: UN Web TV

This speech was followed with inflexible positions and a general unwillingness to negotiate throughout the week. 'The informals are brutal', confided an exhausted delegate of a long-standing US ally to the author of this report.

American arrogance provoked a realignment that did not necessarily play to the US' advantage. In a context where each Member State holds an equal vote, persuasion is more productive than insult. For instance, EU Member States hold a significant number of votes and follow a common position; weeks of threats from the USA forced them to stick together even where values are not necessarily aligned. Frontal attacks to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were not well received by Global South countries who otherwise hold fairly prohibitionist views.

China responded very strongly to the US accusation, noting that the USA was failing to look at the root causes of the overdose crisis. Mexico also replied angrily: 'Those who resort to unilateralism weaken multilateralism that guarantees human rights and protection'.³⁰ In contrast, Canada sought to avoid confrontation, just stating that its border control strategies were effective.

'What are the root causes of these disasters? What should be the responsible and effective way to address this? (...) Instead of fundamentally addressing the issue of drug demand, the United States has been shifting blame and responsibility to other countries, even using its own fentanyl problem as an excuse to impose tariffs on Chinese products exported to the U.S., which is far-fetched and unhelpful in truly solving the problem'.³¹

Representative of China, responding to US attacks

China is clearly trying to step into the vacuum left by the USA, offering itself as a reliable partner and a flexible counterpart. In the closing statement at the CND, it extended a hand to other delegations, arguing that 'During the negotiations, although China has its own ideas and proposals for some of the content, we are very flexible and proactive in participating in the drafting of the resolutions'.³² And at the opening it said that 'China respects the unique circumstances of different countries'.³³ It will be interesting to see how the international community takes this offer, as the US bullies and bombs its way into 2025.

Box 2. Geopolitical struggle at the 68th session of the CND

Geopolitics is never far from the deliberations of an intergovernmental body like the CND, even if it may be one ostensibly focused on drug policy. But conflict has had a more overt presence in Vienna since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which finally shattered some of the diplomatic practices that underpinned the Vienna consensus, such as the unwritten rule to criticising other Member States from the floor (although that practice had already been creaking under strain due to disagreement over the legal regulation of cannabis).

In 2025, references to geopolitical struggle continued to emerge throughout the session, although they did not take centre stage as in prior years³⁴. A few European countries (Finland, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, and the UK) still voiced support for Ukraine in their statements, but the practice is not as widespread as before, and it features a largely regional dynamic. Russia was

irked in particular by the British statement and responded rather bizarrely that ‘the conflict continues to this day and those responsible are the UK’.

Conflict in the Middle East was also present. Israel’s opening statement focused entirely on 7 October attacks, whereas Egypt urged the UN to ensure access to medicines in Palestine. The civil society organisation Skoun Lebanese Addiction Centre, intervening on behalf of Frontline AIDS brought the reality of war to the floor, and exposed its linkages to drug policy: ‘Lebanon has been facing compounded crises for years and is now grappling with the devastation of war. In times of crisis, the rights of people who use drugs are deprioritized or forgotten. (...) The European Web Survey on Drugs, conducted in Lebanon in the summer of 2024 found a rise in cannabis and cocaine use among individuals who have been affected physically or psychologically by the airstrikes’.³⁵

The crises within the drug control regime

The Colombian revolution

For years, this series has aimed to explore the discordance unfolding under the apparent unanimity of the Vienna consensus. Those disagreements were often expressed through debates on discrete issues that – whilst important in themselves – served as lighting rods for deeper disagreements, such as language on the UN System Common Position on drugs. But for the last two years, a new and extraordinary element has also emerged – the Colombian determination to openly challenge the global drug control regime.

Reforming the international drug control system is one of the priorities of the Petro Administration. Its National Drug Plan 2023-2033 commits Colombia to ‘lead an international diplomacy strategy for a paradigm shift in the approach to the drugs phenomenon’.³⁶ President Petro has repeatedly called for an end to the war on drugs at the UN General Assembly and advocated for the legal regulation of cocaine.



Colombian delegation discusses strategy just before the vote.
Credit: Steve Rolles

The position has been consistently voiced from the floor of the CND for three years in a row, culminating in the Colombia-led joint statement by 63 countries calling for a process to ‘review and reassess’ the global regime during the 2024 high-level segment at the CND.³⁷

In this session, Colombia systematically questioned key elements of the global drug control regime, such as:

- The value of investing in the UNODC (‘it’s time for us to transparently and with austerity evaluate this [financial] contribution’)³⁸

- The neutrality of reporting from the INCB ('we express surprise that the report is framed primarily as achievements when a realistic approach comparing successes and challenges is necessary for states to effectively decide on future actions')³⁹
- The commitment of the CND to a genuine development agenda
- The value of the entire drug policy regime: 'Unfortunately we continue to see how the international drug control system increasingly distances itself from its own objectives.'⁴⁰

'We have slowed development, financed terrorist groups, destroyed forests, communities, families and regions through violence. In the last decade we have not reduced supply. We have seen an increase. Colombia has the highest number of deaths from this war. We can't continue this debate. We have a common and shared responsibility. I propose we change direction.'⁴¹

Laura Sarabia, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia⁴²

CND Resolution 68/6. Strengthening the international drug control system: A path to effective implementation

CND Resolution 68/6, initially tabled as L.6, materialises Colombia's international diplomacy on drug-related matters. Its initial aim was to initiate reform of the global drug control regime. To achieve that aim, Colombia used a tested approach for sensitive topics – seeking the appointment of independent experts to review the matter and propose recommendations. This approach has been used internationally to review the UN intervention in Rwanda genocide (1999), to reform the UN development approach (2006), assess failures in peace operations (2015), and evaluate pandemic preparedness (2021).

Colombia initially requested the UN Secretary-General to initiate this process, but he requested the green light of the CND. Thus, from the outset Colombia's aim was not to convince the CND to adopt substantive language on the need to reform or review the global drug control regime, but merely to

get the CND's approval to initiate this independent review process.

Many countries with radically different drug policy views took a surprisingly cooperative approach. Singapore, a fierce proponent of punishment and repression, stated in the first round of negotiations at the CoW that 'we are unsure of the need of this resolution, but look forward to moving together'.⁴³ This is a huge credit to Colombia's diplomatic skills, and to the clarity and consistency of its position. It was obvious to everyone that Colombia did not seek to export its values and priorities to other countries, but to address a problem that blatantly impacts its security and territorial integrity by engaging the multilateral system. This was a request that other Member States could hardly ignore.

The position of conservative countries was not to block the entire resolution, but rather to make sure that the process would be kept under the control of the CND, and of Vienna-based institutions more generally. Thus, whilst the initial text of the resolution sought to allocate most of the power in the process to the Secretary-General in New York, Colombia had to compromise throughout the week. The concession can be seen if we compare the zero draft of L.6, the Rev1 submitted on Wednesday 12 March, and then the last-minute changes added through Colombia's own amendment L.10.

This analysis shows how the centre of power in the process shifted from New York (the Secretary-General) to Vienna (CND and UNODC). The number of experts designated by UN entities was reduced in every version of the text, starting with all of them (zero draft) to 10 out of 20 (Rev.1 tabled on Wednesday), to finally 9 out of 20 (L.10 tabled on Thursday). On top of that, the resolution included an unprecedented requirement for panel members to have 'a balanced representation of diverse policy approaches' to drugs. This seems designed to prevent the appointment of a majority of pro-reform panel members.

Despite these compromises, Colombia preserved several elements that were necessary to achieve its goals: the panel's total independence in determining its work methods and findings; no requirement for consensus decisions; and the inclusion within the scope of the review of obligations set in 'other relevant instruments' than the drug conventions (that is, international human rights law). A detailed analysis of the panel and IDPC's recommendations is available in our advocacy note 'Repairing the "machinery"'.⁴⁴

Critical issue	L.6 Zero Draft (Monday)	Final text as amended by L.10 (Friday)
Who establishes the panel?	UN Secretary-General (SG)	CND
Membership	Not specified, determined by SG	19 experts, 10 appointed by CND regional groups, 5 by the SG, 3 by INCB, 1 by WHO
Chairs	Not specified, determined by SG	2 Co-chairs, one nominated by the SG, the other by the CND
Aim	Review international drug control system within the framework of the conventions	Enhance the implementation of the obligations set in the drug conventions, other relevant instruments, and drug policy commitments
Criteria for selecting panel member	Not specified, determined by SG	Criteria provided by CND in resolution
Secretariat	Not specified, determined by SG	UNODC

Critical issue	L.10 (Colombia text)	L.9 (USA amendment)	Alternative resolution tabled by Russia
Who establishes the panel?	CND	UNODC	UNODC
Membership	19 experts, 10 appointed by CND, 3 by INCB, 1 by WHO	15 experts, all appointed by the CND	30 experts, 25 appointed by CND and 5 appointed by UNODC
Chairs	2 Co-chairs, one appointed by SG and one appointed by CND	None	2 Co-chairs, appointed by members of the panel
Aim	‘enhancing the implementation of the obligations set in the drug conventions, other relevant instruments, and drug policy commitments’	‘enhancing the effective implementation of the international drug control framework to address the most pressing challenges posed by drugs’	‘produce a clear, specific and actionable set of consensual recommendations in line with the three international drug control conventions as an input to the review of the progress in implementing existing drug policy commitments’
Criteria for selecting panel member	Criteria provided by resolution	At the discretion of the CND	At the discretion of the CND
Secretariat	UNODC	None	UNODC

Opposing countries sought to derail the process with alternative texts. On the first day of the CND, the Russian Federation circulated informally an entirely new resolution that would completely replace the Colombian draft. The text was never tabled, but it influenced the ultimate document. On Thursday, the USA tabled an amendment that would have significantly weakened the panel by converting it into a working group of experts appointed by the UNODC. This group would have been tasked with analysing 'drug threats' instead of reviewing drug policies.

L.9 was rejected with 12 votes in favour, 25 against, and 17 abstentions. In contrast, Colombia's resolution as amended by L.10 gathered the support of 30 countries, with 18 abstentions and only 3 negative votes - the unprecedented alliance of Argentina, Russia, and the USA. A group of nine CND members (China, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Japan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Tanzania) voted in favour of L.9 but did not vote against L.10. They represent a significant block of conservative countries that chose not to veto the initiative, but would have preferred a less ambitious text. They are likely to be a key constituency in the forthcoming review.

The extraordinary statement by the Ambassador from Ivory Coast immediately after the vote, expressing full support from a country that is not committed to substantive drug policy reform, offers a glimpse of genuine multilateralism at play – understanding that the global regime must accommodate, at least to a minimum, other countries' needs and demands.

'It is a pleasure for us to take the floor at this time, in order to congratulate Colombia and the other cosponsors of this draft which is now being adopted. We would like to align ourselves with the resolution and say that we subscribe to everything in it. And we welcome this good analysis of the situation. In terms of harm reduction we need to have a clearer vision and better analysis of the situation.'⁴⁵

Yacouba Cissé, Ambassador of Ivory Coast

Immediately after the vote, China and Egypt also took the floor to make clear that they will be watchful. They noted that the panel should stick to its mandate and provide recommendations that 'are acceptable by all parties', and that the outcome 'should be reached by consensus'.⁴⁶

The USA and its allies will be there to flame these concerns. After the adoption of the resolution, the US representative noted that 'A high-level examination led by panel members selected by the UN Secretary General, the INCB, and the WHO will unnecessarily shift the debate beyond Vienna introducing a more politicised process that will undermine the technical approach of this body, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs'.⁴⁷ Whilst describing the CND as a technical body is simply inaccurate, and the sentence overrepresents the power of the Secretary-General and WHO in the process, this statement gives us a taster of the narratives that will be used to paint the panel as a threat to the Vienna monopoly on drugs issues.



Questions around the Vienna International Centre. Credit: Arild Knutsen

Box 3. Process matters: Amendments, amendments of amendments, and the 24-hour deadline

As the CND moves away from consensus-based decision-making, there is a growing need for clarity around the procedures for submitting and voting on proposals and amendments.

On Friday morning, significant time was spent debating the order of votes on the Colombia resolution. Two competing amendments were on the table. The first, L.9, was submitted by the USA on Thursday and proposed substantive changes to the composition of the panel. Later that evening, Colombia submitted L.10, which sought to amend L.9 by largely reverting to the original language of L.6/Rev.1, with a single concession: the removal of one panel member designated by WHO, a gesture aimed at appeasing more conservative delegations.

Rule 64 of the ECOSOC Rules of Procedure states that when two amendments are submitted on the same proposal, the one “furthest removed in substance from the original” should be voted on first. The USA argued that L.9 should be voted on before L.10, since L.10 closely mirrored Colombia’s original text. Colombia, however, argued that Rule 64 did not apply, as L.10 was technically an amendment to L.9, not to the original proposal. The disagreement led to a drawn-out procedural debate, ultimately resolved by a plenary vote, which – for once – sided with the USA.

Colombia’s position was not fully explained, but it may have been driven by a worry that its last concession on the composition of the panel – granted after the USA had tabled L.9 – would not be considered if L.9 was voted first. It may be that it had in mind Rule 52 of the Rules of Procedure, which states that ‘Unless the commission decides other-wise, proposals and substantive amendments shall be discussed or put to the vote no earlier than twenty-four hours after copies have been circulated to all members’. This 24-hour deadline has weighted on delegations in both 2024 and 2025.

These concerns would have been assuaged if the CND agreed that it will be accepting on all cases revisions of texts proposed by the sponsoring Member States after the 24-hour deadline. That was the case for Poland’s resolution this year, which was submitted as a draft ‘post-Rev1’ dated 14 March 10:15, on the same morning the voting took place.⁴⁸ The practice of last-minute revisions is normal in other UN fora, including at the Human Rights Council, although in those cases the controlling rule of procedure is more flexible and gives the Chairperson the possibility to accept revisions at any stage.⁴⁹ A similar approach, if formally endorsed by the CND, would provide Member States with greater procedural clarity and reduce the likelihood of delays caused by disputes over timing.

Legal regulation

The legal regulation of drugs for non-medical and non-scientific purposes continues to be a key point of fracture within the global drug control regime. With over 440 million people living in jurisdictions where non-medical use of cannabis was legal as of July 2025,⁵⁰ legal regulation offers an alternative approach to managing the risks and pleasures of drug use – defying the entire ideological premise of the UN drug control regime. This would, in itself, merit attention at the CND. But there is another factor: countries like Russia use this issue to name and shame their traditional geopolitical adversaries for regulating cannabis and challenging the international drug conventions.

This time around, only a limited number of countries expressed concern over legal regulation in their individual statements, including Qatar, Nigeria and Peru. So did Italy, claiming that people who use drugs are suffering of a ‘loss of principles, of faith’, and are trying to ‘escape’ through a ‘distorted feeling of freedom’.⁵¹ Russia took a remarkably political line, framing legal regulation and human rights as twin enemies of the conventions ‘[our goals are] severely compromised by some states legalising drugs, or justifying measures according to the human rights agenda, or when measures to create a drug-free society are denied’.⁵²

As usual, countries that have moved to regulate cannabis largely skipped the issue. Malta offered a

clear example of this, as it declared its 'unwavering support for the international drug control framework'⁵³ whilst having regulated the distribution of cannabis through non-profit membership association in 2021. So did Germany and the USA.

Uruguay and Czechia stood out as the few countries that provided a defence of legal regulation. Uruguay explained that its current approach, which includes regulation, offers 'a comprehensive vision of drug policies with a human rights perspective, based on human rights and market regulation and control, with risk management and harm reduction, based on current evidence.'⁵⁴ Czechia proudly noted that 'we have recently adopted a new framework in which the regulatory based approach has been affected based on the level of harmfulness' rather than arbitrary scheduling – though that framework currently applies only to New Psychoactive Substances, which are not subject to international control.⁵⁵ The Netherlands defended very obliquely its own pilot programme, framing it in terms that appealed to the audience in Vienna: 'Our cannabis experiment, currently in its transitional phase, does not seek to promote cannabis use but rather aims at finding solutions through independent scientific monitoring of impacts on crime, disorder, and health.'⁵⁶

'A number of anti-trafficking measures reveal an excessively punitive approach that hands power to criminal gangs, contributes to violence, social and economic costs, loss of life, distortion, and other crime. (...) We need introspection about our actions – it is unsustainable to implement orthodox measures which are ineffective.'⁵⁷

Representative of Guatemala

As it has happened in prior years, Russia led a joint statement in support of 'zero tolerance' policies, which this year was joined by 43 countries.⁵⁸ The main target of the statement was harm reduction and its perceived links with legal regulation, as 'an approach focused on minimising harms implies tolerance with drug use and may lead to legalisation.'⁵⁹ Very interestingly, two countries which joined the Russia-led joint statement also voted in favour of Colombia's resolution – Côte d'Ivoire and Zimbabwe. Other discrepancies amongst these 43 countries appear – for instance, Nigeria and Tanzania signed the Russia-led statement whilst at the same time expressing explicit support for harm reduction in their individual statement.⁶⁰

Harm reduction

Harm reduction remains a point of conflict at the CND, although it is now included in the national drug strategies of at least 108 countries,⁶¹ supported by UN resolutions adopted at the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, and the CND, and strongly promoted by the UN System Common Position on drugs, and UN health and human rights entities. This year, a remarkably diverse and cross-regional set of Member States made the point of supporting harm reduction in their plenary statements, including Armenia, Austria, Brazil, Croatia, Greece, India, Malta, Nigeria, Portugal, Tanzania, Ukraine, and the EU.

'Harm reduction is also a fundamental pillar of our drug policies. Our policies are designed to address structural inequalities of drug policy ensuring that people who use drugs have access to health free from stigma and criminalization. We are creating a nation-wide harm reduction network rooted in public health and dignity.'⁶²

Marta Machado, National Secretary for Drug Policy, Brazil

Both the INCB and UNODC acknowledged the effectiveness of a limited set of harm reduction responses to injecting drug use, such as opioid agonist therapy (OAT) and needle and syringe programmes. However, they could not bring themselves to utter the term 'harm reduction', or to endorse its nature as a full-spectrum approach that applies to all forms of drug use. This once again highlights their reluctance to take positions that may irk a small number of Member States, although few individual statements at the Plenary explicitly attacked harm reduction – as far as we could see, only Peru and the Russian Federation.

There is nuance in the positions expressed by some countries that may be, at first, identified as conservative. Pakistan, for instance, explained that 'we believe social inequalities and disparities are key factors which drive people towards drug use';⁶³ it should be noted that Pakistan abolished the death penalty for drug offences in 2023. Bahrain also chose to 'highlight the program for alternative penalties and the program for open prisons—an achievement that offers individuals the opportunity to return to their families. (...) This marks a qualitative shift in Bahrain's criminal legislation.'⁶⁴ According to Malaysia, 'We have a commitment to expand

accessibility, comprehensive treatment and rehab for individuals struggling with drugs and prioritises rehabilitation over criminalisation.⁶⁵ While many of these policies will fall short of the urgently needed supportive approach, the fact that Member States chose to highlight them is a remarkable shift.

Indigenous self-determination and the coca leaf

The intersection between drug policy and the rights of Indigenous Peoples has taken a prominent place in recent CND sessions because of three convergent tendencies. First, an increasingly strong presence of Indigenous representatives in Vienna. Secondly, broader recognition of the direct tension between Indigenous Peoples' rights to their ancestral plants and medicines, and the drug control regime, largely triggered by Bolivia's request to review the international scheduling of the coca leaf. Lastly, increased attention to the environmental impacts of the world drug situation, which disproportionately harm Indigenous lands.

The coca leaf review was again high on the CND agenda, as the WHO's Expert Committee on Drug Dependence is expected to issue its findings and

present its recommendations to Member States at the Reconvened Session of the CND in December, with the CND voting on them in March 2026. Bolivia brought Vice-President David Choquehuanca to draw attention to this issue – again the highest-level representative of any Member State in Vienna. Colombia also spoke strongly: 'The current classification is based on an outdated analysis from 1950, lacking the scientific rigor we now require. That analysis treated coca leaf as equivalent to cocaine and made no distinction in its use for cultural and medical practices (...). The rights of Indigenous communities are important in this.'⁶⁶ Statements from Colombian civil society organisations and IDPC⁶⁷ also highlighted the need to foreground Indigenous Peoples' rights in the forthcoming review. Other Member States have stayed silent, waiting for the WHO to weigh in.

'In 2024, after 6 decades of injustice and prosecution, violation of rights and complicit science, Bolivia requested the WHO to carry out a scientific review of the coca leaf to bring to the light of day the scientific truth.'⁶⁸

**David Choquehuanca,
Vice President of Bolivia**



IDPC side event on harm reduction. Credit: Ann Fordham



OHCHR meets Indigenous representatives and allies at the margins of the CND. Credit: Steve Rolles

In recent years, the CND has sought to develop new language on Indigenous Peoples, particularly in the recurring resolution on alternative development. The intention is welcome, as it seeks to build recognition that drug policies impact Indigenous Peoples. However, some actors – including IDPC – are concerned that the language developed in Vienna does not take into account existing international standards concerning Indigenous Peoples’ rights, which have been developed elsewhere in the UN system, and may ultimately undermine them.

For instance, whilst this year’s alternative development resolution mentions the need to ‘empower and engage’ Indigenous Peoples, it falls short of recognising two core rights enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – the right to self-determination, and the right to free, prior, and informed consent over any policy or programme that impacts them. Neither is consistently applied in drug policy, but their recognition is urgently needed.

At the adoption of the resolutions on alternative development and environment, the Guatemalan delegate voiced with hard words his reservation regarding the introduction of references to ‘local communities’ along or subsuming Indigenous Peoples, which he noted ‘has no precedent’ and ‘no authority’.⁶⁹ (Guatemala is a penholder for the resolution on the rights of Indigenous Peoples at the Human Rights Council, and has been concerned about this language across different UN fora). Brazil acknowledged that ‘we still face great difficulty in

this commission to find good language that can satisfy all countries on the treatment given to Indigenous People’.⁷⁰

A factor that belies this problem is the ongoing disconnect between the CND and UN bodies that integrate Indigenous Peoples, particularly the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Breaking this silo should be a priority to ensure that the growing work of the CND on Indigenous issues is not counterproductive.

Drug policy language on Indigenous Peoples should be developed with their participation. However, such participation remains limited at the CND. In his Plenary statement, the delegate from the International Indigenous Alliance for Drug Policy called for the CND to remove barriers that impede full Indigenous participation, including ‘consultative status requirement, limited engagement platforms, language obstacles, and insufficient funding’.⁷¹

‘As the only Indigenous person speaking in the CND68 plenary, I see this as an urgent call to action. Systemic change, inclusion, and resources are essential for Indigenous voices to shape drug policy to meet our community’s needs’.⁷²

Scott Wilson, International Indigenous Drug Policy Alliance



Pedro Arenas from VISO MUTOP delivers IDPC's statement on the coca leaf review. Credit: Marie Nougier

Human rights

While international drug policy documents regularly commit to uphold human rights, the role and prominence of human rights in the global drug control regime remains an issue of contention.

At this session of the CND, support for human rights was cross-regional. For instance, the Philippines noted that the drug situation 'is primarily a health issue' and announced a commitment to 'review our national drug law under the principles of human rights and public health approach. This will be done in partnerships with communities in civil society'.⁷³ Zambia was also positive on human rights: 'Beyond policy for holistic drug prevention and treatment, we are taking a human rights-based approach including abolition of the death penalty'.⁷⁴

'Ghana underlines the importance of decolonization and restorative justice, urging former colonial powers to invest in local production of inequitable access to internationally controlled essential medicines as part of reparatory justice'.⁷⁵

Representative of Ghana

The value and legitimacy of the contributions of human rights experts and bodies to international drug policy debates continues to be an issue of conflict. Brazil noted that 'We call on this commission to strengthen coordination with other UN agencies ensuring that drug policies are integrated into human rights'.⁷⁶ Poland welcomed 'the work of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in adopting an effective approach to the drug problem';⁷⁷ and Czechia expressed support for the recent reports on harm reduction of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health.⁷⁸ Colombia criticised the 2024 World Drug Report for including a chapter on the right to health without any reference to the international standards developed in Geneva, particularly by OHCHR and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health.⁷⁹

On the other side, Egypt proclaimed the centrality of the CND and insisted that human rights issues should be raised in Geneva only. 'It is Important to respect specificity of Member States and in this vein the CND should discharge its mandate on drug control without overlap with human rights issues organised by other fora'.⁸⁰ Russia has also issued a veiled critical reference to OHCHR: 'I would like to emphasise that depoliticised international understanding should be the cornerstone of international cooperation on drugs. We welcome that our approach is shared by most organisations and UN agencies'.⁸¹

Box 4. UN entities continue to diverge on drug policy

Despite efforts to establish a coherent position on drug policy across UN entities⁸², statements throughout this CND session continued to display a striking divergence between key UN actors. The outlier is again the UNODC, with Ghada Waly's opening speech almost exclusively focusing on highlighting the violence and threats caused by drugs, and connecting drug policy with border security in a clear pitch to the Trump Administration. 'When drugs cross borders, only organised crime wins.'⁸³ She did not make a single reference to human rights or harm reduction.

The WHO struck a very different tone and turned the gaze at the harms of policies themselves, noting that 'people who use drugs face stigma, discrimination, criminalisation, and are denied access to services. At the same time, millions live without access to medicines for pain relief'.⁸⁴

The OHCHR continues to have a powerful presence in Vienna, with no less than three statements throughout the week. The chief of its Indigenous and Minority Rights section, travelling to the CND for the first time, focused on Indigenous Peoples rights and the coca leaf: 'The prohibitionist approach prioritized drug control over human rights, ignoring the cultural and medicinal value of the coca leaf. Reviewing the scheduling of the coca leaf is linked to the enjoyment of human rights for Indigenous Peoples.'⁸⁵ A second statement focused on the need for proportionality in criminal justice responses, including the death penalty for drug offences,⁸⁶ and a third focused on harm reduction and the need to eliminate racial discrimination.⁸⁷ The OHCHR also submitted its first-ever conference room paper at a CND⁸⁸ – in partnership with IDPC, Czechia, Switzerland, and Uruguay – and co-sponsored an unprecedented number of side events.

Spaces for consensus

Is the 'Vienna spirit' dead? The answer to this question is yes and no at the same time. Some diplomatic practices that underpinned the 'Vienna spirit' are now compromised, maybe for good. Consensus seems certainly over. But some parts of the CND – particularly those linked to the ideological reproduction of the system – continue to move forward as if the global drug control regime had never been questioned.

For somebody watching the CND Plenary without a trained eye, it would seem as if the 'war on drugs' is carrying on without a glitch. Most country statements differ little from prior years and continue to show remarkable alignment in content between regions and countries. Thus, in 2025, country after country expressed support for the principal role of the CND, the leadership of the UNODC, and the effectiveness of the conventions. A good example is Kenya declaring that 'there is no doubt that the framework [of the drug conventions] has been effective. Having been established through consensus, we must therefore anchor all our efforts on the established framework, seeking to improve the system'.⁸⁹

Scheduling decisions also showed a large degree of consensus. Six substances were put up for a scheduling

vote – four nitazenes (a synthetic opioid), hexahydrocannabinol or HHC (a synthetic cannabinoid), and carisoprodol (a muscular relaxant). All nitazenes were scheduled by unanimity, and HHC and carisoprodol only featured an abstention from the USA, which has placed both substances under domestic control. There was no space for a nuanced discussion on any of these substances, although in prior months Czechia had expressed doubts about the appropriateness of banning HHC, and abstained when the EU debated its common position on the issue.⁹⁰ Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria once again called for tramadol scheduling, as they have done in prior years.

With hardly any other wins to highlight, the UNODC was very positive about scheduling. 'Together the national and international responses have been successful, respectful of science, and complementarity of the conventions', followed by 'scheduling works'.⁹¹ The WHO, however, took a more sceptical view: 'In light of the transient nature of NPS amongst a large volume of new NPS, by the time a drug is placed under international control it may no longer be widely used and may be replaced by another substance in the same class or another substance altogether'.⁹² The USA is also aware of the shortcomings of the current system, but called for more efficiency in the system rather than a real questioning of scheduling



UN bodies attend a dialogue with civil society. Credit: Steve Rolles

practices: ‘We must implement rapid scheduling and class-wide scheduling laws.’⁹³ The Netherlands proudly explained that it has already approved a bill prohibiting categories of substances, entering into force in July 2025.⁹⁴ Only time can tell whether this approach can effectively curb drug markets in the Netherlands – although it is unlikely to do so.

Another element that reinforces consensus is the undeniable shift towards the securitisation of drug policy debates. This was underscored by an opening statement from the EU focused on drug-related violence and the threats of organised crime. Ecuador proudly laid out the benefits of its state of emergency linked to drugs, arguing that ‘We must act together to overthrow narco-terrorism.’⁹⁵ Canada’s position also shifted towards security and border and organised crime, largely caused by its desire to please Donald Trump: ‘Canada is also committed to ensuring its law and border enforcement. Canada announced a 1.3 million dollar border plan to increase border support to help detect and disrupt the trafficking of illegal drugs. Canada’s appointment of a fentanyl czar will help address this.’⁹⁶

The decimated but still forceful presence of civil society

With over 170 side events and the participation of hundreds of NGO delegates in person and online, the CND has become, in practice, a global drug policy conference, creating space for conversations and

connections that would not happen elsewhere. Critically, this is a space shared by policy makers, civil society, and affected communities, and the presence of the latter is indispensable to ensure that the impacts of drug policies are brought to the floor.

Regrettably, the immediate halt on international aid imposed by the Trump Administration has been particularly harmful for HIV/AIDS funding, which has for decades been the major source of financial support for drug policy advocates, particularly affected communities. This meant that the civil society representation at this year’s CND was dramatically smaller than usual. The cuts disproportionately impacted Global South delegates, with many advocates and experts from Africa, Asia, and Latin America cancelling their travel at the last minute, or having to fund travel out of their own pocket.

Even with these limitations, civil society continued to say the truths that others refuse to acknowledge out of political convenience, pointing to the aspects of the system that are not working and to the policy options that are often ignored by Member States.

On top of that, side events organised by civil society featured the cutting-edge drug policy discussions that are absent from spaces led by governments and Member States, but that can turn the CND a genuine space for intellectual debate and policy innovation. Some of the topics brought by the IDPC

membership this year included intersectionality and gender inequalities; the importance of structural and political determinants of health in both Global North and Global South; the need to shift focus towards stimulants, NPS, and forms of drug use other than injecting (which are still largely neglected in official documents on harm reduction); and the importance of acknowledging pleasure in drug use.

The International Network of People who Use Drugs and Harm Reduction International put the spotlight on the sorest wound – the disruption caused by the sudden US cuts to the HIV/AIDS response. A survey run by INPUD showed that 77% of respondents – including a majority of community organisations – had seen severe disruptions to programmes for people who use drugs, including to the provision and availability of OAT.⁹⁷ Harm Reduction International added that ‘The sudden withdrawal of this funding disrupts not only these programs but also global efforts to end AIDS by 2030. Mathematical modelling already predicts an immediate rise in HIV transmission and overdose deaths.’⁹⁸

Other civil society organisations, including Instituto RIA, pointed to the inability of the prohibitionist paradigm to deliver on its own vision of a drug-free society, and to the need to discuss and evaluate legal regulation and managed market approaches in an objective way: ‘a world without psychoactive plants and substances is neither possible nor

desirable.’⁹⁹ Linked to this, both IDPC¹⁰⁰ and a coalition of Colombian organisations¹⁰¹ called for the CND to support the reform initiative led by the Colombian government, noting that Vienna would become irrelevant if the system was not able to meaningfully engage with its own shortcomings.

‘We are also frustrated by this system’s immense resistance to renewal and its failure to respond to today’s realities, which demand that we do things differently if we want different results. This outright refusal to engage in the necessary debate not only hinders change but also risks rendering the Commission obsolete.’¹⁰²

**Isabel Pereira, Drugs Programme
Coordinator, Dejusticia**

‘The world is changing. The United Nations is at a crisis moment. Many norms, practices and long-standing consensuses that seemed unmovable in Vienna may not survive. The crisis stems from geopolitical change. But make no mistake – it also comes from the UN drug control system’s failure to live up to its own goals.’¹⁰³

**Gloria Lai, Regional Director Asia,
International Drug Policy Consortium**



Support. Don't Punish badges distributed at the CND. Credit: Benjamin Tubiana-Rey

The linkage between repressive drug policy and authoritarianism was highlighted by the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association. 'Restrictive laws—such as those targeting organisations through labels like “foreign agents” or “undesirable” and legislation criminalising “propaganda” related to sexuality or drug use—pose direct threats to the existence, safety, and effectiveness of these vital groups.'¹⁰⁴ The Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs (VNGOC) also expressed concern about the shrinking space for civil society engagement in international drug policy discussions. 'Recent shifts in funding priorities have led to reduced financial support for CSOs, weakening their capacity to deliver services and advocate for meaningful and evidence-based changes.'¹⁰⁵

Youth-led reform organisations have for a long time shown the most nuance and thoughtfulness in addressing sensitive drug policy matters – probably the result of the constant need to demonstrate relevance and legitimacy. This year, Youth RISE called for a 'full spectrum approach to harm reduction that recognises the role of social determinants in health outcomes of drug use', whilst also reminding everyone that 'prevention and harm reduction are complementary and not mutually exclusive responses to the world drug situation.'¹⁰⁶

The crisis releases the CND from consensus: Analysis of resolutions

The crises that weaken the 'Vienna consensus' have – paradoxically – the potential to improve the relevance, visibility, and impact of the CND, and to

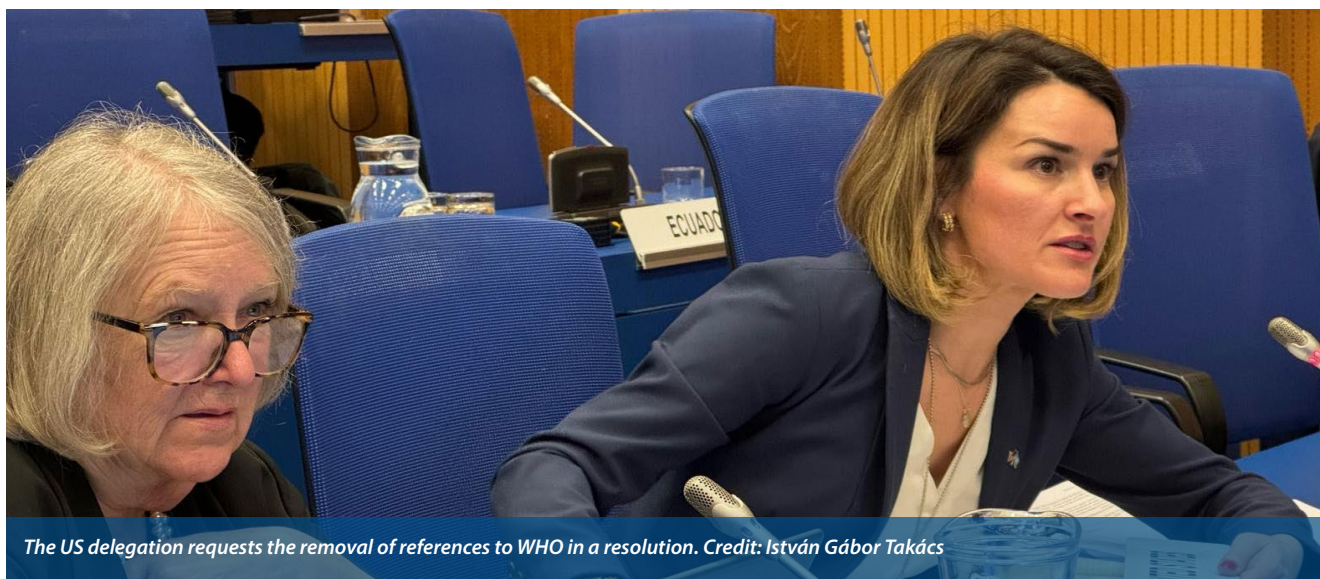
transform Vienna into a genuine space for drug debate and policymaking.

As the CND moves towards a new paradigm of decision-making by vote, resolutions may become tools for policy and normative entrepreneurship, rather than vessels for the empty repetition of previously agreed language. They may be able to respond to new realities and changing facts, adopting nuanced positions that evolve over time. Resolution 68/6 establishing the review panel has proved that controversial topics can be addressed in a productive manner, and that there is no need to present resolutions only on issues that are likely to gather consensus from the start.

Key issues discussed across all resolutions

The ideological approach of the USA to the CND meant that a small group of issues emerged once and again in negotiations across all resolutions. And those were the issues that ultimately led the USA to call for a vote, namely opposing references to the SDGs and to language on gender, as well as to any mentions of the WHO.

The USA also sought to remove references to any form of international standard or guidelines, including the International Standards on Drug Use Prevention, the International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders, and the UN Guiding Principles on Alternative Development. In general, it tried to water down references to UN entities everywhere possible. This seeks to negate legitimacy to any international initiative that is not led and controlled by Member States themselves. The USA



The US delegation requests the removal of references to WHO in a resolution. Credit: István Gábor Takács

also objected to any activity with extrabudgetary implications, leading to the mainstreaming of new language to address their concerns.

Throughout the week, the USA remained a very active participant in negotiations. The CoW proceedings reveal that this approach was quite successful. Through its leverage and clout, it managed to influence and water down resolutions it was never going to support. If the approach is the same at the next session, Member States may want to reassess their willingness to make concessions to a country that does not come to the table with any intention of making a deal.

‘We would like to delete the “WHO” and “United Nations” so that it reads (...).’¹⁰⁷

Representative of the USA

Resolution 68/1. Promoting comprehensive, scientific evidence-based and multisectoral national systems of drug use prevention for children and adolescents

Resolution 68/1, or L.2 as it was known during the CND, is the latest example of the drug use prevention agenda at the CND, a topic that gathers broad support across countries and regions. Since 2020, four resolutions have been adopted on prevention. Chile – the proponent of the resolution – reflected the view of many Member States by stating that ‘Prevention is the most effective tool that we have in order to reduce the risk of drug consumption among young people.’¹⁰⁸

Chile had seen this as a technical resolution that would generate little controversy. The focus was on setting up a framework to support and expand evidence-based prevention. The text did not go through major changes during the session, and the discussions at the CoW were scarce, with most debates taking place through informals. The final text retains welcome language recognising the ‘social, structural, and environmental determinants of health’, the need for an evidence-based approach that includes the evaluation of prevention interventions, and that prevention should address both ‘individual and environmental risk factors’. In a similar nuanced note, during the debate Australia noted

that ‘running “national campaigns” on the dangers of specific substances is counterproductive, as it raises their public profile.’¹⁰⁹

The final version includes several supportive references to the CHAMPS initiative – the UNODC’s flagship campaign to promote early-age prevention – which was likely a major driver for the resolution, despite credible concerns by civil society as to the budget, effectiveness, and human rights impacts of an initiative that has been developed without the participation of youth-led reform organisations.¹¹⁰ A reference to the civil society-led Oviedo Declaration in the draft resolution fell through.

Ultimately, the USA brought the resolution to a vote because it could not support five paragraphs that had references to sustainable development, to a gender perspective, and to the WHO. The next time there is a resolution on prevention, as it is bound to happen soon, we will see whether the proponents steer away from these concepts in order to gather the support of the US and its ideological partners, or remain committed to an inclusive approach to prevention.

Resolution 68/2. Promoting research on scientific evidence-based interventions for the treatment and care of stimulant use disorders

Resolution 68/2 or L.3 was proposed by Norway and Thailand to promote more research in, and attention to, health and social interventions that address the specific nature and consequences of stimulant drug use.

Despite the growing importance and complexity of the topic, which calls for an ambitious approach, the resolution is missing some important elements. It is particularly disappointing that there is not a single reference to the need to secure access to alternatives to punishment for people who use stimulants, and that no effort was made to include an explicit reference to ‘harm reduction’ like the resolution on overdoses did last year, although the UN paraphrase ‘reducing the adverse public health and social consequence of drug use’ appears twice.

The resolution also fails to adopt a rights-centred approach, and remarkably the right to health is not mentioned once. A small group of countries (Czechia, Germany and Switzerland) sought to introduce

a recognition of the recent reports of OHCHR and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health, but they were not backed by other delegations. On a more positive note, the resolution calls for treatment that is voluntary, non-discriminatory, and non-stigmatising, and highlights several times the need for interventions to be part of a 'continuum of care'.

Unsurprisingly, the main points of contention came from the USA, which challenged all references to the 2030 Agenda, the WHO, and gender language – the resolution does in fact take a welcome gender perspective, highlighting the shortfall in access to health and care services for women and girls. The USA also insisted on rejecting the terminology 'drug use disorder' and instead tried to replace it with 'addiction', up until Thursday afternoon. Whilst 'drug use disorder' has been described as a stigmatising terminology in itself,¹¹¹ addiction's role in relation to drug use is highly controversial, and the word likely has a stronger stigmatising tone.

Resolution 68/3. Complementing the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development

Germany, Peru and Thailand continue the practice of tabling an annual resolution on alternative development, showing a sustained normative and diplomatic entrepreneurship that no other country has sought to imitate so far. This year, the aim of the resolution was to get the endorsement of the CND for a process to complement and update the UN Guiding Principles on Alternative Development, which will then be led by these three countries.

The recurring resolution on alternative development, complemented by expert meetings and the continued sharing of conference room papers, has allowed for the integration of new concepts and issues within the agenda of the CND. A clear example in this year's resolution was a paragraph that summarised the issues that have been incorporated to this file in recent years, including 'new challenges, including climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and challenges regarding food security, territorial approaches, public security, the displacement of people, and the empowerment and engagement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, as well as the empowerment of all women and girls'.

It is likely that the complement to the Guidelines on Alternative Development will explore some of

these concepts, showing the potential of this approach in bringing new issues to the table.

The USA came to the resolution expressing reservations, not only with regards to the Sustainable Development Goals, but against any language that included the word 'sustainable', even when it was completely unrelated to the 2030 Agenda or environmental impact. At a point the US delegate noted that it would need more clarity on what 'alternative development' meant, to which the Thai representative tersely replied, 'This is not new to the United States as they have been sponsors of these practices around the world'.¹¹²

Resolution 68/4. Safety of officers in dismantling illicit synthetic drug laboratories, in particular those involving synthetic opioids

The country holding the presidency of the EU normally submits a resolution to the CND on behalf of the group. The topic of this year's resolution is testimony to the obvious securitisation of EU drug policies, and to the bloc's lack of appetite for engaging the international community in forward-looking discussions.

Despite the safety of the topic, the resolution was still subject to considerable politisation and the text was substantively dismantled as result of tense negotiations that went into Friday morning. This shows the futility of the EU's efforts to avoid politisation and debate.

One of the main topics for discussion was a week-long debate between the USA and China on the scope of the resolution. Whilst the USA wanted to keep the focus on 'synthetic opioids' and even more specifically on fentanyl and nitazenes, China sought to broaden it to 'synthetic drugs', arguing that 'Synthetic opioids is an issue in some member states, whereas synthetic drugs are a global issue and this is a resolution for all the work'.¹¹³ The debate was largely political and had much to do with the United States' effort to shift the blame for the opioid overdose crisis on China. It is hard to tell who won the fray, but China may have achieved its ultimate goal, as the scope of the resolution was broader than opioids, and the very first paragraph lists a large range of synthetic drugs, including many mainly produced in Europe.

A second point of contention was a push back by a small number of countries, China and Russia most

of all, to include any reference to naloxone in the resolution, although agreed language on naloxone dates back from 2016¹¹⁴. The USA was, this time, helpful, opposing this frontally and arguing correctly that naloxone is the only antidote to overdoses and it would be simply irrational for it to not be part of the resolution. This position is not necessarily a leftover from the Biden Administration, as the statement of drug policy by the Trump Administration published in April 2025 includes as its first priority expanding access to naloxone.¹¹⁵

Iran also expressed disconformity with some parts of the resolution and stretched negotiations until Friday in the morning.¹¹⁶ The apparently minor nature of the language changes it sought to achieve up till the very end would indicate that their strategy may have been guided by political considerations rather than substantive policy concerns. At the end, it was of course the USA who called a vote on the resolution.

Resolution 68/5. Addressing the impacts of illicit drug-related activities on the environment

In the last three years, the impacts of the world drug situation on the environment have emerged as an important agenda at the CND. This is evidenced by dedicated chapters to this topic in four consecutive editions of the World Drug Report – from 2022 to 2025.

This was the first-ever CND resolution entirely dedicated to the environment – a remarkable development in itself. An important element in this year's text, which was strongly challenged by the USA, was a recognition of the UN General Assembly's resolution on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. While it may seem minor, framing any drug-related matter at the CND as a human rights issue is a significant change.

The resolution includes an explicit recognition that drug policies themselves can have an adverse impact on the environment and human health – another historical first. Member States are encouraged to prevent these impacts, particularly when it comes to the 'use of chemicals'. This is a clear reference to the spraying of crops with pesticides, which has been a matter of huge political and legal controversy in Colombia and elsewhere, and has serious and long-lasting human and environmental costs. It was precisely Colombia who advocated

strongly for this language, with the support of Germany. This is a substantive development that may open the door for the examination of the impact of drug policies themselves.

The sponsors of the resolution – Brazil, France, and Morocco – were not willing to dilute the text at the behest of a country that seemed to object to its premise, and hinted at the need for a vote from the start. At the very first discussion at the CoW, Brazil explained rather convolutedly that 'we are indeed seeking consensus. But, if we cannot agree even on the structural documents and language just from last year, there will be simply no time to reach consensus on what we need at this CND, leading to possibly having to choose *not* going for consensus'.¹¹⁷

Ultimately, this resolution has the strategic purpose of furthering the environmental agenda in Vienna. With it, the CND has decided to continue discussions on the impacts of drug-related activities on the environment in the context of the forthcoming review of all international drug policy commitments in 2029, and it invites the UNODC to produce research to be shared through the World Drug Report. No doubt we are going to see more of it soon.

Conclusion: After consensus, the CND may better serve communities around the world

After eleven votes in a single day, on Friday afternoon the Vienna consensus was in bad shape. Two different readings of the situation immediately emerged. On the one hand, the Russian Federation, Egypt, and UNODC Executive Director Ghada Waly lamented these votes – as did the EU, although in a softer tone. In contrast, many more delegations had rushed to express adherence to the 'Vienna spirit' after the vote last year. Ms. Waly in particular noted that 'the spirit of consensus is more important than ever', and implored Member States to reach common ground 'for the sake of the families and vulnerable communities facing the world drug problem'.¹¹⁸ On the opposite side, the CND Chair took a more sanguine view, noting that 'Debate is not just healthy but necessary for a vibrant multi-lateral system'.¹¹⁹

It seems obvious that Ambassador Kumaran is right. Families and vulnerable communities – to take the two constituencies mentioned by Ms. Waly – are hardly helped by exhibitions of agreement and consensus. They are supported by policies that respond

to their needs, respect their rights, and rely on evidence. Despite Ms. Waly's assertions, the UNODC's own reporting indicates that decades of fixation on the 'common ground' have delivered little results.

The huge effort behind the Colombian resolution proves that voting-based decision making does not mean *less* diplomacy, but more of it. Once acknowledged, disagreements and shortcomings cannot be resolved by imposing a specific set of values, but by creating a space to listen to, and understand, each other better. In other words, by building the 'vibrant multilateral system' favoured by Ambassador Kumaran. In a world where crisis and fragmentation are likely to accelerate every year, this looks like good exercise.

Acknowledgements

This report was drafted by Adria Cots Fernandez, Senior Advocacy and Research Associate at IDPC. The author wishes to thank the following experts for their careful review and comments on this analysis: Aditia Taslim (International Network of People Who Use Drugs), Isabel Pereira (Dejusticia), Jamie Bridge and Marie Nougier (IDPC), Ligia Parodi (European Network of People Who Use Drugs), Paula Aguirre (Elementa DDHH), Rebeca Marques Rocha and Teresa Castro (Youth RISE), Scott Wilson (International Indigenous Drug Policy Alliance) and Tatyana Sleiman (Skoun Lebanese Addictions Center).

Endnotes

- 1 International Drug Policy Consortium (Website), *In memoriam: Professor Dave Bewley-Taylor*, <https://idpc.net/blog/2024/11/in-memoriam-professor-dave-bewley-taylor> [Accessed: 28 July 2025]
- 2 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-friday-afternoon-session/>
- 3 International Drug Policy Consortium (2022), *The 65th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs: Report of proceedings*, <https://idpc.net/publications/2022/07/the-65th-session-of-the-commission-on-narcotic-drugs-report-of-proceedings>
- 4 Federal Register (Website), *Withdrawing the United States From the World Health Organization*, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/29/2025-01957/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-the-world-health-organization> [Accessed: 28 July 2025]
- 5 Paun, C. (28 January 2025), 'Trump's beef with the World Health Organization is personal', *Politico*, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/01/28/trump-personal-fight-with-world-health-organization-00200855>
- 6 White House (20 January 2025), *Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/putting-america-first-in-international-environmental-agreements/>

- 7 White House (4 February 2025), *Withdrawing the United States from and ending funding to certain United Nations Organizations and reviewing United States support to all international organizations*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-and-ending-funding-to-certain-united-nations-organizations-and-reviewing-united-states-support-to-all-international-organizations/>
- 8 Abnett, K. & Furness, V. (7 March 2025), 'United States quits board of UN climate damage fund, letter shows', *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/united-states-quits-board-un-climate-damage-fund-letter-shows-2025-03-07/>
- 9 White House (6 February 2025), *Imposing Sanctions on the International Criminal Court*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/imposing-sanctions-on-the-international-criminal-court/>
- 10 Baumann, M., Haug, S., Beisheim, M. (January 2025), 'Trump 2.0 and the United Nations: Implications for multilateral funding and leadership', *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/international/21817.pdf>
- 11 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/opening-of-the-68th-session-of-the-cnd/>
- 12 Cots Fernandez, A. (26 June 2025), 'Evidence that cannot be contained: The World Drug Report 2025 reveals the ongoing failure of the drug control regime', *IDPC Blog*, <https://idpc.net/blog/2025/06/evidence-that-cannot-be-contained-the-world-drug-report-2025-reveals-the-ongoing-failure-of-the>
- 13 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/opening-of-the-68th-session-of-the-cnd/>
- 14 Gedeon, J. (10 March 2025), 'Rubio says 83% of USAid programs terminated after six-week purge', *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/10/marco-rubio-usaid-funding>
- 15 McVeigh, T. (4 July 2025), 'UNAIDS chief 'shaken and disgusted' by US cuts that will mean millions more deaths', *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jul/04/us-aid-cuts-kill-millions-un-aids-head-winnie-byanyima>
- 16 International Network of People who Use Drugs (March 2025), *The human cost of policy shifts: The fallout of US foreign aid cuts on harm reduction programming and people who use drugs*, <https://inpu.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/The-Human-Cost-of-Policy-Shifts.pdf>
- 17 Full Fact (Website), *Agenda 2030 conspiracy just describes UN sustainability goals*, <https://fullfact.org/online/agenda-2030/> [Accessed: 28 July 2025]
- 18 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-friday-morning-session/>
- 19 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-friday-afternoon-session/>
- 20 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-thursday-afternoon-session/>
- 21 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-thursday-afternoon-session/>
- 22 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont/>
- 23 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-friday-afternoon-session/>
- 24 Yang, M. (28 January 2025), 'Trump again demands to buy Greenland in 'horrendous' call with Danish PM', *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/25/trump-greenland-denmark>
- 25 Wintour, P. (14 February 2025), 'JD Vance stuns Munich conference with blistering attack on Europe's leaders', *The*

- Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/14/jd-vance-stuns-munich-conference-with-blistering-attack-on-europes-leaders>
- 26 Smith, D. (28 February 2025), 'Diplomacy dies on live TV as Trump and Vance gang up to bully Ukraine leader', *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/28/trump-zelenskyy-shouting-match-oval-office>
- 27 Yousif, N., Denon, B., & FitzGerald, J. (4 March 2025), 'Trudeau hits out at 'dumb' tariffs as Trump warns of further hikes against Canada', *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c89ye749nxvo>
- 28 <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1o/k1oeik7rpd?kaltur-aStartTime=7702>
- 29 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont/>
- 30 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont-tuesday-morning/>
- 31 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont/>
- 32 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-friday-afternoon-session/>
- 33 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont/>
- 34 See, for instance: Bridge, J. (24 March 2022), 'Breaking the consensus: Russia clashes with other UN CND Member States', *IDPC Blog*, <https://idpc.net/blog/2022/03/the-limits-of-consensus-russia-clashes-with-un-cnd-member-states-over-working-group-nomination>
- 35 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-thursday-morning-2/>
- 36 Ministerio de Justicia de Colombia (2023), *Sembrando vida desterramos el narcotráfico: Política nacional de drogas 2023-2033*, https://www.minjusticia.gov.co/programas-co/ODC/Documents/Publicaciones/Politica%20Nacional%20de%20Drogas_English%20Oct%202023.pdf
- 37 Fordham, A. (17 March 2024), "'Starting here. Starting now". Pro-reform coalition led by Colombia calls time on failed drug war at UN high level drugs meeting', *IDPC Blog*, <https://idpc.net/blog/2024/03/starting-here-starting-now-pro-reform-coalition-led-by-colombia-calls-time-on-failed-drug-war-at>
- 38 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-afternoon-session/>
- 39 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-afternoon-session/>
- 40 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-wednesday-afternoon-session/>
- 41 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/opening-of-the-68th-session-of-the-cnd/>
- 42 Ms Sarabia resigned from her position on 3 July 2025
- 43 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/committee-of-the-whole-tuesday-morning-session/>
- 44 International Drug Policy Consortium (May 2025), *Repairing the "machinery": Recommendations and expectations for the independent review of international drug policy commitments*, <https://idpc.net/publications/2025/05/repairing-the-machinery-recommendations-and-expectations-for-the-independent-review-of>
- 45 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-friday-afternoon-session/>
- 46 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-friday-afternoon-session/>
- 47 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-friday-afternoon-session/>
- 48 <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k19/k190pysjwp?kaltur-aStartTime=7238>
- 49 See Rule 120 of the Rules of Procedure of Committees of the UN General Assembly, available at: <https://www.un.org/en/ga/about/ropga/index.shtml>
- 50 Calculation by IDPC, available upon request
- 51 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/opening-of-the-68th-session-of-the-cnd/>
- 52 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont/>
- 53 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/opening-of-the-68th-session-of-the-cnd/>
- 54 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/opening-of-the-68th-session-of-the-cnd/>
- 55 Mravčík, V. et al. (2024), 'Psychomodulatory substances: New legislative framework for control of psychoactive substances in Czechia', *International Journal of Drug Policy*, **133**, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39388916/>
- 56 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-afternoon-session/>
- 57 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-5-implementation-of-the-international-drug-control-treaties-continued-2/>
- 58 These countries are: People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, Republic of Angola, Kingdom of Bahrain, People's Republic of Bangladesh, Republic of Belarus, Burkina Faso, Negara Brunei Darussalam, Republic of Burundi, People's Republic of China, Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, Republic of Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Arab Republic of Egypt, Republic of India, Republic of Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Iraq, Republic of Kazakhstan, State of Kuwait, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Republic of Nicaragua, Republic of Niger, Sultanate of Oman, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, State of Palestine, State of Qatar, Russian Federation, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Republic of Singapore, Republic of the Sudan, Republic of Tajikistan, United Republic of Tanzania, Republic of Tunisia, Republic of Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, Republic of Uzbekistan, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, Republic of Yemen, Republic of Zimbabwe
- 59 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-wednesday-afternoon-session/>
- 60 See the statements of both countries here: <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont-tuesday-morning/>
- 61 Harm Reduction International (Website), *The Global State of Harm Reduction*, <https://hri.global/flagship-research/the-global-state-of-harm-reduction/> [Accessed: 28 July 2025]
- 62 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont/>
- 63 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/opening-of-the-68th-session-of-the-cnd/>
- 64 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont/>
- 65 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont/>
- 66 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-afternoon-session/>
- 67 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-afternoon-session/>
- 68 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/opening-of-the-68th-session-of-the-cnd/>
- 69 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-friday-morning-session/>
- 70 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-friday-morning-session/>
- 71 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-thursday-morning-2/>
- 72 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-thursday-morning-2/>
- 73 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-wednesday-afternoon-session/>
- 74 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-wednesday-afternoon-session/>

- 75 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-5-implementation-of-the-international-drug-control-treaties-continued-2/>
- 76 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont/>
- 77 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont/>
- 78 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont/>
- 79 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-afternoon-session/>
- 80 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont-tuesday-morning/>
- 81 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-wednesday-afternoon-session/>
- 82 United Nations (2018), *United Nations system Common Position supporting the implementation of the international drug policy through inter-agency collaboration*, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/un-common-position-drugs/index.html> [Accessed: 28 July 2025]
- 83 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/opening-of-the-68th-session-of-the-cnd/>
- 84 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/opening-of-the-68th-session-of-the-cnd/>
- 85 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont-tuesday-morning/>
- 86 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-thursday-morning-2/>
- 87 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-wednesday-afternoon-session/>
- 88 Commission on Narcotic Drugs (6 March 2025), *Conference room paper submitted by Czechia, Switzerland, Uruguay, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Drug Policy Consortium entitled "Human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem: Outcomes of the human rights discussion held at the 67th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs*, UN Doc E/CN.7/2025/CRP.11, https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_68/CRP/ECN72025_CRP11_e.pdf
- 89 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont-tuesday-morning/>
- 90 Council of the European Union (26 February 2025), COUNCIL DECISION on the position to be taken on behalf of the European Union in the sixty-eighth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs on the scheduling of substances under the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, as amended by the 1972 Protocol, and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971, CORDROGUE 20, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6158-2025-ADD-1/en/pdf>
- 91 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-afternoon-session/>
- 92 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-afternoon-session/>
- 93 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-afternoon-session/>
- 94 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-afternoon-session/>
- 95 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/opening-of-the-68th-session-of-the-cnd/>
- 96 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont/>
- 97 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-5-implementation-of-the-international-drug-control-treaties-continued-2/>
- 98 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-thursday-morning-2/>
- 99 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-thursday-morning-2/>
- 100 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-thursday-morning-2/>
- 101 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-5-implementation-of-the-international-drug-control-treaties-continued-2/>
- 102 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-5-implementation-of-the-international-drug-control-treaties-continued-2/>
- 103 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-thursday-morning-2/>
- 104 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-thursday-afternoon-session/>
- 105 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-thursday-afternoon-session/>
- 106 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-thursday-afternoon-session/>
- 107 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/committee-of-the-whole-monday-afternoon-session/>
- 108 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/item-3-general-debate-cont/>
- 109 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/committee-of-the-whole-monday-afternoon-session/>
- 110 For a more detailed analysis see: International Drug Policy Consortium (August 2025), *The 'Vienna Spirit' shatters: Report of the 67th session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs and its high-level segment*, <https://idpc.net/publications/2024/08/the-vienna-spirit-shatters-report-of-the-67th-session-of-the-un-commission-on-narcotic-drugs-and>, p. 6.
- 111 International Network of People who Use Drugs (March 2020), *Words matter! Language statement & reference guide*, <https://inpu.net/words-matter-language-statement-reference-guide/>
- 112 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/committee-of-the-whole-monday-afternoon-session/>
- 113 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/committee-of-the-whole-tuesday-morning-session/>
- 114 UN General Assembly (April 2016), *Outcome Document Of The 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session On The World Drug Problem*, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/postungass2016/outcome/V1603301-E.pdf> [Accessed: 28 July 2025]
- 115 White House (1 April 2025), *Statement of drug policy priorities*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-Trump-Administration-Drug-Policy-Priorities.pdf>
- 116 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/committee-of-the-whole-friday-morning-2/>
- 117 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/committee-of-the-whole-tuesday-morning-session/>, note that the original text has several transcription errors
- 118 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-friday-afternoon-session/>
- 119 <https://cndblog.org/2025/03/plenary-friday-afternoon-session/>

The International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC)

is a global network of NGOs that come together to promote drug policies that advance social justice and human rights. IDPC's mission is to amplify and strengthen a diverse global movement to repair the harms caused by punitive drug policies, and to promote just responses.

© International Drug Policy Consortium Publication 2025

Report design : Rudy Tun-Sánchez - rudo.tun@gmail.com

An unprecedented number of votes, an agreement to review the UN drug control system, and an unprecedented shift in global alliances in Vienna - in this report, IDPC makes sense of what happened at the 68th session of the CND through a careful and detailed consideration of everything said and done in Vienna.

Funded, in part, by:



**OPEN SOCIETY
FOUNDATIONS**



**ROBERT
CARR
FUND**

for civil society
networks