

GWI Advocacy Report – CND 67th Session - Side Events

Of the various side events that I attended I will report here on three that may be of particular interest:

- Addressing gender-based violence against women who use drugs
- Strengthening resilience in young people towards the misuse of drugs and alcohol
- Global Civil Society Inputs for the 2024 Midterm Review and beyond

1. ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WHO USE DRUGS – 19/3/24

Organized by the UNODC HIV/AIDS Section with the support of South Africa, the Group of Friends of HIV Prevention Among People who Use Drugs and People Living in Prison Settings, the WHO, UN-Women, the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS, the UNODC Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section, and the Women Harm Reduction International Network.

This side event aimed to raise awareness of the scope and scale of GBV experienced by women who use drugs, and the connection between GBV and the HIV epidemic among them. It emphasised how the adoption of a gender-responsive approach to drug use benefits women. It presented the results of a recent UNODC Briefing Paper on GBV against women and people of diverse gender identity who use drugs. This paper is well worth reading.

https://www.unodc.org/documents/hiv-aids/2023/2314425E_eBook.pdf

- In 2022, an estimated 39 million people globally lived with HIV, over 20 million are women and girls. The risk of acquiring HIV is 35 times higher among people who inject drugs than among those who do not.
- Of the world's estimated 296 million people who use drugs, 25–47 per cent are women, depending on the substance and region.
- There are well-documented associations between gender-based violence (GBV) and HIV among women who use drugs, sex workers, trans women and young women.
- Punitive laws and policies, harmful gender norms and stereotypes, gender inequalities, marginalization, over-incarceration and other barriers amplify the risk of HIV transmission among women, reduce their access to testing and treatment, and increase their risk of GBV.

Speakers emphasised that successful prevention of GBV requires political commitment, leadership and resource allocation. 10 recommendations for policy responses were presented. These include:

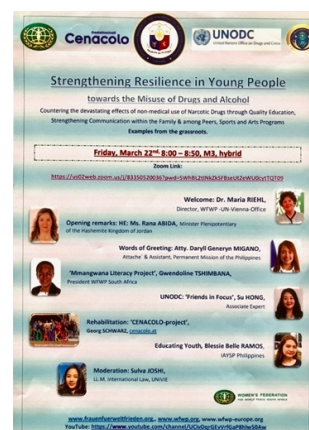
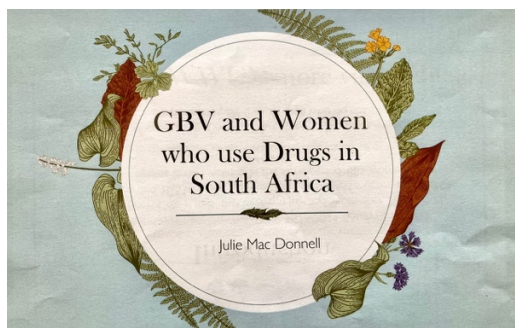
- Impose appropriate criminal penalties for GBV without regard for the drug-use status, sexual orientation, gender identity or sex work status of the person who experiences GBV.
- Support the formation and development of community-led networks of women who use drugs, and engage them meaningfully in local and national planning of GBV responses and policy development.

Other important points:

- Framing drug use as a 'personal failure' has many harmful and discriminatory effects for people who use drugs. For women, this 'failure' or stigma is magnified by gender norms and role inequities. Research and policy is predominantly male dominated.
- 'Trauma-informed care is crucial.' Good practice in GBV related services for women who use drugs includes meaningful community involvement; service integration, capacity strengthening, safety planning, mental health sensitivity, women only safe spaces, ensuring accountability for perpetrators of GBV. GBV professionals should be skilled at receiving survivors who use drugs with understanding and without judgment.

This side event highlighted many ways in which progress can be made on an issue that is often swept under the carpet but that would help a very large number of women worldwide. **There are at least 75 million women worldwide who use drugs.** Many of these are at enhanced risk of GBV. They should be helped. GWI members may like to inquire what is being done in their communities to help these women. The UNODC Briefing Paper (which this report quotes) is an excellent reference tool.

(For brevity in these comments, I have used 'women' rather than the full 'women and people of diverse gender identity and expression' used by the UNODC.)



The UNODC Report; the presentation from South Africa; the Flyer for the second side event

2. STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE IN YOUNG PEOPLE TOWARDS THE MISUSE OF DRUGS AND ALCOHOL - 22/3/24

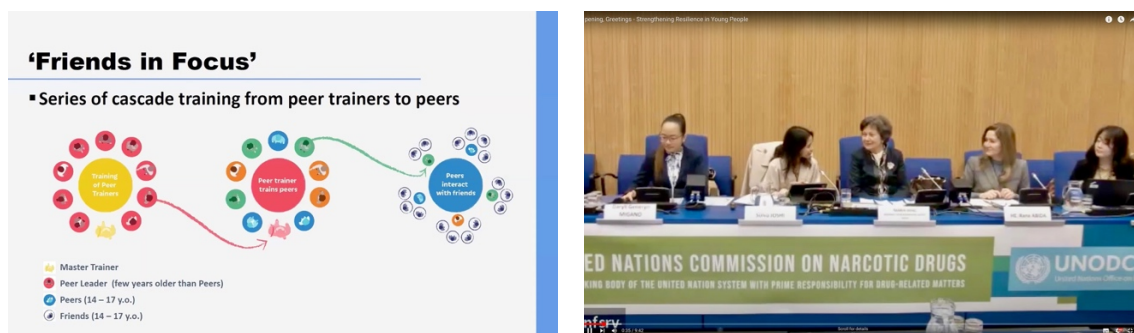
Organized by the Women's Federation for World Peace International with the support of the Philippines, the UNODC Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section, Gemeinschaft Cenacolo, the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace Philippines and the Women's Federation for World Peace

This event focused on highlighting successful examples from around the world of **providing young people with the skills and resilience to prevent drug and alcohol misuse**. Panelists from the Philippines, South Africa, Jordan and Italy discussed various projects highlighting

the importance of education and awareness, the need to strengthen communication both within the family and among peers, and sports and arts programs.

Key Points highlighted:

- Emphasis on the **role of education, community engagement, and peer support programs** – to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to make healthy choices and resist peer pressure related to drug and alcohol use.
- Presentation of **evidence-based early prevention approaches**
- Discussion of the **need for holistic, youth-centered approaches** that address underlying risk factors, including adverse childhood experiences, trauma, and socio-economic disparities.



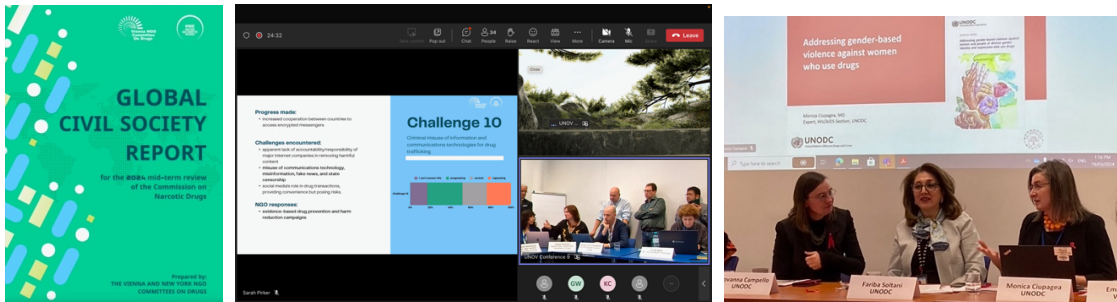
The 'Friends in Focus' initiative; the Panellists at the Side Event

A representative from the UNODC presented '**Friends in Focus - For youth, with youth**', a new UNODC initiative to educate and empower young people to be active in drug prevention, protecting not only their own health but also the well being of their peers. The initiative encourages young people to support their peers and develop the strength to become game changers for the better in their own societies. The idea driving the initiative is the belief that when provided with the right resources, training, and support, youth can contribute to a more positive environment for themselves, their families, and their peers, through meaningful participation at all levels of the prevention system. Active youth engagement is not only beneficial for the community or society; it also benefits the participating youths themselves through their own growth, learning, and self-realization.

Under the Friends in Focus initiative, young people undergo structured training. These '**Peer trainers**' are trained to deliver multiple sessions to a group of peers, who then have similar interactions with their friends. The cascade training sessions are interactive in nature, and 'help youths to recognize risk and protective factors to drug use, critically reflect on information about drugs from media, think about normative beliefs, support them in helping their friends, set goals, etc.'

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/prevention/youth-initiative/friends-in-focus.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uilFDuSiRno&list=PLMkrxc4IY3miY8TRM89uscwWk b6tIOcw&index=2>



The Global Civil Society Report; a screenshot from the VNGOC / NYNGOC session; some of the panel for side event on GBV

3. GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY INPUTS FOR THE 2024 MIDTERM REVIEW AND BEYOND – 18/3/24

Organized by the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs with the support of Australia, Portugal, Slovenia, the United States, the African Union Commission, the European Union, the UNODC Civil Society Unit, the Executive Secretariat of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States, the Africa Civil Society Forum on Drugs, the American Coalition on Drug Policies, the European Union Civil Society Forum on Drugs, Intercambios A.C. and the New York NGO Committee on Drugs.

This side event presented the Global Civil Society Report prepared for the Midterm Review by the Vienna and New York NGO Committees on Drugs. GWI is a member of the Vienna Committee ('VNGOC'). The report reflected the input of more than 200 NGOs from all global regions whose work focuses predominantly on health, education, and human rights approaches to drug related issues. The report discusses progress on 11 key challenges including the expanding and diversifying range of drugs and drug markets; record levels of drug abuse, illicit cultivation, production and trafficking; challenges posed by synthetic opioids; increase in drug related deaths; high transmission of HIV and other blood borne diseases; increasing links between drug trafficking, corruption and organised crime, etc.

The report makes many excellent recommendations and provides valuable insights for addressing drug related issues. It emphasises (and illustrates) the crucial role of civil society organizations in shaping effective and inclusive drug policies. All who are interested in the global drug problem may want to review it.

<https://vngoc.org/2024/02/global-civil-society-report-2024/>

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