

TO: The OSF Global Board  
RE: A Shared Framework Proposal on *Fostering a New Era in Global Drug Policy*  
FR: The Drug Policy Shared Framework Working Group<sup>1</sup>  
DT: August 29, 2014

## **The Problem and Moment of Opportunity**

The United Nations has accepted the request from several Latin American countries to convene all member states for a UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs in 2016, the first since 1998. The UNGASS will follow a series of shifts in drug policy over the last several years, including the recommendations of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, the approval of marijuana regulation in Uruguay, a report from the Secretary General of the Organization of American States urging consideration of decriminalization, and marijuana regulation in the U.S. states of Colorado and Washington. The UNGASS offers a critical, timely opportunity to rearticulate the harms of the drug war approach, and to rally support for new policies that advance public health, human rights, and public safety.

## **Purpose of a Drug Policy Shared Framework**

While this shared framework aims to take advantage of the 2016 Special Session as a critical juncture to move the needle on global support for drug policy reform, action taken at the UNGASS is not intended to be an end goal, but rather a catalyst to build momentum with national governments and civil society allies that will continue beyond the Session. The resulting UN declaration may not include language that reflects a new consensus, but we do expect that the Session, when viewed in hindsight, will be seen as a turning point in drug policy internationally. Our overall goal, leading up to the Session and beyond, is for as many governments as possible to move towards a more flexible, progressive stance on drug policy by raising their level of commitment to alternative approaches including decriminalization, regulation, and harm reduction.

## **Shared Goals**

This shared framework seeks to achieve two goals by 2017:

1. **Increase the number of national government and UN champions:** Fracture the drug war consensus at the UN by increasing the number of governments willing to publically embrace a more flexible and progressive position, and by bringing other UN entities into the drug policy debates as equals of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).
  - a. Influence governments in Africa to join with Latin American countries, as well as governments in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to join with Western European countries in supporting decriminalization and harm reduction.

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<sup>1</sup> The Working Group consists of: Scott Bernstein, Patrick Gallahue, David Holiday, Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch, Maryanne Olson, Alissa Sadler, Jasmine Tyler, and Daniel Wolfe; with Johanna Chao Kreilick as Strategy Unit support

- b. Persuade the Secretary General and several UN agencies to take up drug policy within their mandates, ending the monopoly currently exercised by UNODC.
2. **Broaden civil society support in the reform movement:** Sharply expand the range of civil society allies who are shaping their national drug policies and calling for a new international consensus on regulation, decriminalization and harm reduction.
  - a. Bridge civil society leaders and groups with distinct outreach and mobilization potential to UNGASS debates through preparatory and corridor meetings and delegations (specifically religious leaders/faith organizations, formal and informal youth organizations, and military leaders/veteran organizations).
  - b. Raise public support in targeted countries through a coordinated communications campaign including new and traditional media, viral campaigns, and media partnerships to expand the reach of the reform message in specific countries

### **Initial Shared Framework Activities**

Charette participants suggested specific activities that would advance the purposes of this shared framework, the strongest of which are listed below. These initial activities include a series of South-South exchanges; engagement of religious leaders, faith-based organizations and police, military, and veteran groups; engagement of youth organizations; and identification of countries that might use the year following UNGASS to adopt new policies that move away from criminalization or toward a public health approach. These distinct efforts would be linked and enhanced by overarching communications support that would assist with messaging and public advocacy.

- **Organize and Support South-South Exchanges:** Through the shared framework, the Latin America Program, the Africa Regional Office, and the African Foundations would organize a series of in-country exchanges among cohorts of government and civil society leaders that could learn from each other and develop strategies for addressing the effects of failed drug policies in their countries. Exchange participants would also be exposed to existing alternative models and could be connected into broader international advocacy efforts with UN officials and bodies. Two different types of exchanges are described below:

West African leaders are just beginning to measure the impact of drug traffic through their region, and could benefit from seeing the effects in Latin America of the prohibitionist policies of the last several decades. Through four one-way country visits organized over the next twelve months, cohorts of West African government and civil society leaders would travel to and hear from Latin American leaders who have years of experience dealing with the effects of drug transit and failed control policies in their countries. The goal of these exchanges would be for West African leaders to come away with a greater understanding and urgency to act, having seen for themselves the effects of criminalization of drug use on Latin American communities, government, and systems of justice.

Another type of exchange would be two-way country visits between government and civil society leaders of different south-south countries. For example, OSISA and their grantees are confronting a growing stimulant epidemic. At the charette, OSISA colleagues recognized how drug policy issues impact their existing strategies, and began discussions with Latin America Program and Public Health

colleagues about how grantees and government officials in South Africa could benefit from exchanges with Brazilian grantees working on stimulant harm reduction.

- **Broaden Active Support for Reform Among Civil Society Groups:** At the charette we identified three constituencies with special outreach and mobilization potential that are underrepresented or missing in the drug policy reform movement, specifically, religious leaders and faith-based organizations, youth groups, and military and veteran leaders and organizations. Our work with grantees and individuals from these groups has focused on issues other than drug policy reform, has occurred through separate disconnected engagements, or has taken place without a public profile in the UN or the national or international drug policy debate. In this shared framework, we would focus on working with specific leaders and groups to first understand the alliances and divisions within their constituencies, comprehend how they understand the drug policy issue in connection to their interests as well as the reasons why they have not yet engaged with the drug policy issue, and help connect interested leaders and possibly their members to each other and to local, national and UNGASS-related opportunities to voice support for drug policy reform.

*Religious Leaders and Faith-based Organizations:* Religious leaders are largely untapped in drug policy reform debates and could be a pivotal moral voice in calling for decriminalization and greater investment in health and harm reduction. There are a number of countries - Brazil, where we have supported a grantee to organize forums for evangelical leaders to debate criminalization, the Philippines where Catholic priests have started needle exchange programs, and Australia where the Protestant church hosts the country's first supervised injection facility - where we can identify faith leaders who could help champion harm reduction or alternatives to incarceration. OSI-DC staff also have strong relationships with US religious leaders, including 1,000 clergy that they rallied to sign on to a call against mandatory minimums. OSI-DC staff felt that we could work with these same religious leaders and possibly their faith communities to recruit them in drug policy reform efforts. Colleagues from the African foundations have also built trusted relationships with religious leaders from other work and believe these leaders would also be drug policy reform allies. At the charette, they mapped out a plan that includes a timetable for exploration and recruitment, information exchange, and media engagement.

*Youth Groups*<sup>2</sup>: The overall slogan for the 2016 UNGASS is “A Better Tomorrow for the World’s Youth.” We see a real opportunity to help prepare and bridge strong youth voices to UN civil society forums through delegation representation, speaking engagements and presentation opportunities. Currently, youth-led organizations involved in drug policy reform are underrepresented in meaningful roles in both the Vienna and New York Committees which will have a critical civil society role in the lead-up to UNGASS. Relatedly, we currently support several youth-led grantees that work directly on drug policy reform including UK’s *Release*, Poland-based *Youth Organizations for Drug Action in Europe (YODA)*, and *Espolea* and *ProDerechos* in Latin America. Some of the greatest strengths of these grantees are their advocacy and communications expertise, their models for effective social media campaigns, and their online resource centers that distill and frame high-level

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<sup>2</sup> While our existing youth partners have not experienced backlash in their current drug policy advocacy efforts, any efforts, particularly in new, politically or socially sensitive regions, would need to assess potential risks and backlash against youth groups, or those supporting their engagement in issues related to drugs, and include a carefully formulated contingency response. In some cases, we might opt not to openly support youth partners through direct grant funding, if the region is deemed too risky for engagement. Existing tools or those being developed at OSF to support grantee security (for example materials from Tactical Tech or a new manual on social media and security targeting youth activists in Sudan) might be adapted or provided to new actors.

issues and data in terms that youth and wider audiences can relate to. These established grantees could be especially helpful in reaching the wider youth reform audience (particularly informal non-NGO youth groups that are difficult for us to support) because they provide infrastructure and tools for participation including information products, skills, and a social media platform for engagement.

*Police, Military Leaders and Veteran Groups:* In a number of countries including Brazil, Kenya, the US and Ghana, foundations and grantee partners have initiated dialogues with police and the public on the need for alternatives to arrest for drug offenses. Up until now, these conversations have been local, disconnected, and without public profile at the UN or at times, or even in the country. At the charette, OSF Fellow Gregg Gonsalves and UN veteran insider Marco Perduca also discussed ways to engage military voices in support of reform through close connections with General Stanley McChrystal at Yale and other prominent leaders in the security sector. These are preliminary ideas that would need to be developed but could prove to be powerful new voices in the debate.

- **Build Country Champions and Link National and International Policy Reform Efforts:** The shared framework will identify a small number of countries in which providing additional support to already strong reform movements could provide a basis for 1) bringing new governments into the reform coalition leading up to and at UNGASS and/or 2) using the lead-up and year after UNGASS to help reform allies develop and advocate for new reform policies that move toward decriminalization or harm reduction.

A charette working group analyzed possible ‘country champions’ and began identifying a set of selection criteria that could be applied to select up to six countries in which to support additional grant-making and advocacy support. While two illustrative country examples are provided below, final country criteria and the selection itself would need to be completed in the next few weeks by a governance team.

*Colombia* is one country in which reform is taking a growing role in the national agenda. The Colombian government has recently voiced openness to certain national drug policy reforms, specifically for medical cannabis, which may make the government a leader on the domestic, regional, and international front. Santos’ re-election and the prominence of drug policy in the peace process provides an opportunity to advance this national momentum and make the most of the international attention that he is bringing to the issue. A shared framework effort in Colombia would increase the ability of our strong grantees to do more, enable us to assist grantees and government allies to develop messaging and communications strategies, and enable us to build public support by reaching new and informal youth movements and groups.

Another example is the *United Kingdom* where, in spite of the political uncertainties, OSF has a strong community of grantees that we feel are in a position to make significant advances in national advocacy to decriminalize minor possession offenses. These groups have forged high-level media partnerships, created political alliances that are actively advancing the issue toward the legislative agenda, and have effectively mobilized black and South Asian communities that are acutely affected by failed policies but have not been active advocates for reform prior to now.

To support the development of new country policy positions in Europe, the CEU Liaison Office and OSIFE put forward a project supported by Wolfgang Reinicke (Dean of CEU’s School of Public Policy) and CEU Professor Julia Buxton (drug policy expert) that would facilitate the development of specific policy positions by EU countries. Europe, where many progressive drug policies have been

implemented and tested, will be a particularly important voice at the UNGASS. In addition to national delegations, the EU is likely to put forward a consolidated position. Currently there is no mechanism that provides a forum for civil society and experts promoting decriminalization to meet with policy makers responsible for formulating the joint EU approach. Within this project, the CEU School of Public Policy and OSIFE would share costs and organize one gathering that could be instrumental in advocating for a progressive EU policy. The meeting would:

- a. Provide a forum for progressive European NGO leaders, scholars and experts to share knowledge, approaches and data with EU decision makers
  - b. Give EU policy makers space to explain the constraints they feel, the questions they have, and the range of what they think possible
  - c. Encourage the EU position at UNGASS toward a progressive direction.
- **Strategic Communications Support:** Some of the most notable shifts in drug policy reform in recent years have been with respect to public opinion. Internationally, polls show that there is general acknowledgment that the drug war has failed. Moreover, reporting on drugs has vastly improved in recent years, with major editorial boards strongly backing reform (e.g. The New York Times, The Economist and The Guardian.) Dedicated communications support would help our civil society and government allies sharpen their drug policy reform arguments to be as politically appropriate as possible within their local context, aligned with key audiences and decision makers at the UN, and gain purchase with the broader public.

OSF has good relationships with international media, but as the shared framework identifies target countries, OSF should create context-specific communications plans that use small grants and local expertise such as national or regional press consultants, public opinion researchers, event planners and/or web strategists. In select countries, public opinion research could be carried out to ensure that messages are strategically identified and deployed in the most efficient manner.

Communications or media consultants could be engaged to help grantees and allies formulate country and context-specific messaging and communications approaches including media outreach, events and actions and social media mobilization. The formation of one or two media partnerships could be explored similar to the Global Commission's partnership with Univision. Finally, an entrepreneurial small grants program could be used to scale up a campaign model we tested with Reserve Fund support this year. This was the "It's Time to Talk about Drugs" public education and mobilization campaign tied to June 26 (the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking) and piloted in 125 cities that resulted in more than 300 major news stories, creating a global trending topic on social media platforms. A shared framework would enable us to scale this approach to our broader effort and provide a platform for local leaders and communities to create and publicize their own events.